



Politicized Christian Discourses and Exclusionary Boundary-Making: The United States and South Korea in Comparative Perspective



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Research Problem

Politicized Christian discourses do more than express religious identity — they perform exclusionary boundary-making.

- **Who belongs?** They define legitimate national membership.
- **Who threatens?** They cast outsiders as moral/political dangers.
- **Where they intersect:** religion × nationalism × public legitimacy.

Why Compare?

On Comparison. Following Jonathan Z. Smith, comparison here is **scholarly redescription**, not neutral discovery. The two cases are placed side by side as a step toward explanation—tracing recurring mechanisms while preserving contextual differences—not as claimed equivalents. The U.S. case draws on the established category of Christian nationalism; the Korean case is treated more cautiously as a comparable politicized Christian discourse. This asymmetry is intentional: proceeding from a theoretically consolidated case toward a structurally comparable but conceptually less settled one makes the naming question itself part of what the comparison is designed to illuminate.

Key Concepts

- **Politicized Christian Discourse**
In this project, this refers to a **collectively held ideological formation**—comprising Christian symbols, moral frameworks, and political-theological claims—deployed to define national belonging and construct explicit boundaries between legitimate members and threatening outsiders, grounded in Christian identity claims.
- **Christian Nationalism (in the United States)**
An ideology that links national identity and public authority to Christianity. Specifically, it provides a justification for a nation to be fundamentally Christian. In the U.S. literature, it is often associated with the fusion of Christian, national, and racial boundaries.
- **Threat Perception**
The framing of social change, minorities, or political opponents as threats to moral, religious, or political order.
- **Legitimate Membership**
Claims about who truly belongs to the nation as a moral, religious, or political subject.
- **Exclusionary Boundary-Making**
Discursive practices separating “true members” from perceived outsiders and illegitimate opponents.

Materials and Method

This is an in-progress project.

It uses **comparative analysis of religious-political ideological formations, drawing on discourse evidence and survey-based attitudinal data** to examine politicized Christian discourses across two national contexts.

The discourse-analytic component draws on public rhetoric, organizational statements, movement texts, and media materials. Scholarly literature on U.S. Christian nationalism and South Korean far-right Protestant mobilization provides the theoretical grounding for case selection and interpretive framework.

Published estimates from BRS Wave VII (2025) and the CISJD 2025 survey provide contextual evidence within each survey’s own subgroup and measurement framework. Differences in populations, wording, and sampling preclude direct numerical comparison. Respondent-level analyses have not yet been conducted for this project. Using the available data, the next step is to examine whether attitudes concerning threat, Christian national identity, and pluralism co-occur within respondents, analyzing each survey separately and keeping conceptually overlapping items distinct.

Analytical Map

A Heuristic Model of Exclusionary Boundary-Making

A four-step heuristic model comparing how politicized Christian discourses in the United States and South Korea mobilize perceived crisis, defensive solidarity, threat construction, and claims to public authority. The model does not assume that the two cases are identical.



Figure 1. A preliminary heuristic model for organizing the comparative analysis. The four steps represent proposed analytical relationships, not an empirically established temporal or causal sequence. Cross-case contrasts are interpretive propositions, not estimates from the survey percentages.

Data Snapshot

Sources. BRS Wave VII (2025); CISJD, 2025 Survey on Protestant Perceptions of Major Social Issues.

Note. Percentages describe the named subgroups, not equivalent national populations. BRS political groups are not defined by Christian identity. Korean “far-right Protestants” follows the source’s seven-item classification, including social Darwinism. Rows organize related themes, not a shared scale: threat, religious incompatibility, and policy opposition remain distinct indicators.

Analytical Category	U.S. — BRS Wave VII	South Korea — CISJD
Threat Perception	Threat narratives among 2024 Trump voters: Great Replacement belief (54%); COVID government-control conspiracy (68%); belief in Democratic involvement in elite sex-trafficking rings (47%).	Security / ideological / victimhood narratives among far-right Protestants: North Korea as enemy (59.8%); China election-interference claim (55.7%); Christian reverse-discrimination narrative (49.1%).
Legitimate Membership	Christian nation/public authority: Christian nation declaration among Republicans (54%); president should defend Christian values among 2024 Trump voters (84%).	Christian nation/public legitimacy among far-right Protestants: Korea should become a “Christian nation” (55.6%).
Exclusionary Boundary-Making	Church-state privilege and out-group threat ranking: Opposition to strict church-state separation among Republicans (42%) and 2024 Trump voters (40%); among 2024 Trump voters, Democrats (32%), LGBT people (24%), Muslims (23%), and immigrants (22%) are the groups most often identified as “very much a threat” to American unity.	Resistance to pluralism and religious incompatibility boundaries: Opposition to anti-discrimination law among far-right Protestants (49.4%) and among respondents for whom religion is “very important” (59.2%); among far-right Protestants, Christian faith is viewed as difficult to reconcile with feminism (62%), communism/leftist ideology (65%), homosexuality/LGBTQ+ identities or rights (67%), and Islam (69%).

Expected Contribution

- Maps how threat, membership, and boundary-making are linked in each context.
- Traces shared axes—nationalism, ethnicity, anti-communism, anti-CCP rhetoric—without assuming equivalence.
- Uses the two cases’ differences to examine whether and how comparable mechanisms operate in context-specific ways.

Questions for Feedback

1. How should the South Korean case be named?
 - Politicized Christian discourse, far-right Protestantism, or Korean Christian nationalism in comparative perspective?
2. What kinds of evidence are needed for comparison?
3. How can the project analyze exclusionary discourse without reducing it to violent radicalization or merely labeling it as extremism?

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