

Norm Localization and Democratic Backlash: Taiwan Marriage-Equality Debates in 2017–2019

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ABSTRACT Taiwan's achievement in passing a marriage-equality law in 2019 and the democratic backlash against LGBTQ+ rights deserve scholarly attention in Asia and beyond. Specifically, Taiwan's road to marriage equality led to these empirical puzzles: What explains the conservative shift in Taiwan's public perceptions toward LGBTQ+ rights? How would the backlash against LGBTQ+ rights impact Taiwan's democracy? What does Taiwan's experience inform us about norm localization and LGBTQ+ politics in Asia and beyond?

The strategic framing of the Christian right—that is, the symbolic use of family and its localization of conservative values using Confucian norms—enabled them to couch their religious beliefs and facilitate collective action among different groups. This study offers a culture-based explanation of how the Christian right successfully established a single-issue coalition against LGBTQ+ rights. The article is organized as follows. First, it engages current literature on discourse analysis, norms contestation, and contentious politics. Second, the study proposes a two-part framework for understanding how the Christian right effectively constructs their conservative claims to gain public support. A comparative analysis of the discourse from the conservative and progressive sides sheds light on how their narratives shaped the marriage-equality debate. Third, it addresses how this counter-movement impacts Taiwan's democracy and human rights.

“To be political, to be in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.”

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*


“No one is born hating another person...if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.”

Nelson Mandela

In May 2019, Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage, and this legal recognition received worldwide attention. One year previously, Christian churches launched a campaign against marriage equality, and more than seven million voters approved their conservative agenda. In recent years,

media coverage from the West has highlighted Taiwan's diverse culture and liberal atmosphere contributing to this remarkable achievement for LGBTQ+ rights.¹ However, whereas most stories focused on “Taiwan's exceptionalism” and being the “first in Asia” to pass such a bill, they neglected to underscore how conservatives also can use democratic institutions in initiating their counter-movement agenda. Although recent public opinion polls revealed favorable views toward LGBTQ+ rights, the 2018 referendum showed that human rights activists have been overly optimistic about the support for marriage equality in Taiwan.

Taiwan's achievement in 2019 and the democratic backlash against LGBTQ+ rights deserve scholarly attention in Asia and beyond. Specifically, Taiwan's struggle toward marriage equality led to the following empirical puzzles: What explains the conservative

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shift in Taiwan's public perceptions toward LGBTQ+ rights? How would the backlash against LGBTQ+ rights impact Taiwan's democracy? What does Taiwan's experience inform us about norm localization and LGBTQ+ politics in Asia and beyond? The same-sex marriage law approved by Taiwan's legislature represents a compromise between the opposing sides because it leaves out many of the related issues, such as step-parent adoption, reproductive rights, and transnational marriage (Chang 2020). This study takes the middle ground between the essentialized and the structural explanations on Taiwan's LGBTQ+ rights debates, and it analyzes how Christian conservatives localized their claims to resonate with Taiwan's cultural contexts. The debates over marriage equality, like the progression of the human rights movements, have both universal themes and culturally specific variations in Taiwan. More important, understanding how much the local contexts matter in the LGBTQ+ movement allows policy makers and political scientists to consider how ideas are promoted and debates are structured.

Scholars of Asian politics, human rights, and sociology highlighted favorable conditions leading to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2019, including supportive public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ groups, an active civil society, and a liberal political environment (Ho 2019; Jeffreys and Wang 2018; Krumbein 2020). However, this structural explanation neglects the role of agency in constructing conservative narratives in Taiwan's countermovement opposing marriage equality. Selecting and elaborating on what types of discourse are on the table (and what are not) is one of the most important agenda items for both sides in Taiwan's marriage-equality debate because they seek to evoke moral values and political judgment by presenting something as good or evil and right or wrong.

This article explores the anti-LGBTQ+ campaign and the consequences of such a backlash on Taiwan's democracy. Specifically, it proposes a two-step process for examining the framing strategies adopted by the Christian right. First, the conservatives constructed a universalist argument on the family to bridge different religious groups. Second, they appropriated their illiberal ideas with Confucian values to gain support from the Taiwanese public. Taiwan's struggle for LGBTQ+ rights represents intense framing contests between norm advocates and opponents. However, the role of conservatives often is undertheorized in scholarly works on norms and international relations (IR). To gain a better understanding of the growing contestation of liberal norms in Asia, the framing strategies of anti-LGBTQ+ groups in Taiwan must be examined closely.

This article explores the anti-LGBTQ+ campaign and the consequences of such a backlash on Taiwan's democracy. Specifically, it proposes a two-step process for examining the framing strategies adopted by the Christian right.

The article is organized in three sections, as follows. First, it engages the current literature on discourse analysis, norms contestation, and contentious politics. Second, it proposes a two-part framework in understanding how the Christian right effectively constructs their conservative claims to gain public support. A comparative analysis of the discourse from the conservative and progressive sides sheds light on how their narratives shaped the marriage-equality debate. Third, it addresses how this countermovement impacts Taiwan's democracy and human rights.

NORM LOCALIZATION AND CONSERVATIVE NETWORKS

The diffusion of norms and political ideas has been a major theme of study for political scientists and policy analysts. Constructivism in IR theory provides a useful perspective for LGBTQ+ movements in Taiwan and beyond because it sheds light on the normative commitments of international human rights and the moral contestation within Asian political settings (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998; Sikkink 2014; Tannenwald 1999). Existing studies focus on the agency of norm entrepreneurs in facilitating international coordination; few have addressed the interaction of local actors and domestic politics (Bettiza and Dionigi 2015; Minami 2019; Tsutsui and Shin 2008; Zwingel 2012). In Taiwan, the conservative discourse often is opposed to marriage equality, implying that the promiscuous lifestyle of the LGBTQ+ community is not suitable for marriage or that their bitter memories of broken families and childhood trauma make them unsuitable for being good parents. Those claims were mostly not well thought out and could not stand up to rigorous scrutiny (Chiang 2019; Friedman and Chen 2021). Moreover, constructivists are prone to tell convincing narratives about how "good" norms prevail in both international and domestic settings, neglecting the "inconvenient truth" of how and why "bad norms" also are being established in certain countries (Kim 2009; Mariani and Verge 2023). In other words, selection bias on "good norms" has prevented IR scholars from investigating how the "bad norms" transform and diffuse throughout the world.

For many years, Taiwan has been at the forefront of Asia's LGBTQ+ rights movement, and the Taiwanese government also has allowed gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military. In 2017, Taipei hosted the biggest gay pride parade in East Asia to celebrate love, diversity, and equality.² On October 27, 2018, there were even more participants—an estimated 137,000 marchers—at Taipei's annual gay parade because of the upcoming referendum the following month.³ The result of the 2018 referendum on marriage equality certainly was frustrating for many progressives and liberals. Admittedly, the debate about same-sex marriage truly divided Taiwanese society; the majority of Taiwanese voters agreed to maintain the definition of "marriage" as between a man and a woman.

This study recognizes the agency role of local actors and considers their influences from international norms. Both non-governmental organizations and transnational networks of civil society have contributed to spearheading efforts in Taiwan's

same-sex-marriage campaign. Scholarly works on norm diffusion and policy discourse can shed light on crucial mechanisms. According to Acharya (2004, 2011), localization is the active construction (i.e., through discourse, framing, and grafting) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in a congruence of foreign norms and local ideas. It originally was developed to describe how Southeast Asian countries adopted foreign ideas (e.g., legitimacy and sovereignty) into their local traditions and practices. Acharya (2018) argued that "normative discourse which can be modified to fit local traditions is likely to spread better than

norm entrepreneurship which simply seeks to supplant local principles.”

Leading up to the 2018 referendum, Taiwan’s Christian churches actively launched a campaign against marriage equality, but they carefully structured their claims in accordance with existing local cultural beliefs. Although some Christian groups (e.g., the Christian right and evangelicals) ultimately may want to change Taiwan into a Christian country, the localization of conservative values is essentially an inward-looking process that involves making their ideas consistent with Taiwan’s Confucian beliefs.

This article builds on Acharya’s (2004) study of norm localization and examines the motivations and processes through which the localization of conservative values occurs in Taiwanese politics. More specifically, the localization took place when the Christian-led, anti-equality groups promoted their religious ideas as a framework to express local beliefs. The content and discourse were infused with Confucian teaching to reach a broader audience in Taiwan. The human rights movement is a valuable asset as a global discourse, and a more socially contextualized understanding of LGBTQ+ rights claims is as important. With the benefit of hindsight, the success of the Christian-led, anti-equality campaign hinged on the high acceptance of conservative values that were “built upon” rather than geared to supplant existing norms. Conservative ideas were constructed to fit Taiwanese ideas and presented as a “homegrown” movement in countering marriage equality.

The human rights movement is a valuable asset as a global discourse, and a more socially contextualized understanding of LGBTQ+ rights claims is as important.

Whereas more-democratic countries embraced LGBTQ+ rights, others (e.g., Russia, Hungary, and Uganda) strongly resisted such policies. The different responses toward gender norms led to political polarization in both international affairs and domestic debates (Kollman 2007; Symons and Altman 2015). Specifically, the LGBTQ+ advocates established close connections with human rights organizations worldwide and learned mobilization strategies from them (Encarnación 2014).

More recently, both qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrate a reciprocal relationship among rival transnational organizations. There is an increased sophistication of anti-LGBTQ+ networks that deployed similar strategies and instruments to the LGBTQ+ groups in achieving their conservative ends (Ayoub and Stoeckl 2024; Velasco 2023a). Members of these transnational organizations circulate the conservative discourse and use framing strategies to resonate with local audiences. Specifically, these pro- and anti-LGBTQ+ networks mutually engage and follow one another, despite regional variations. In this sense, Taiwan’s progressive legalization and democratic backlash against LGBTQ+ rights illustrate how domestic politics diverges in response to norm polarization, providing an opportunity to examine the interplay between global norms and local contexts.

This study offers an in-depth investigation into why and how Christian conservatives were able to mobilize the Taiwanese public for their discriminatory claims, and it contributes to the

analysis of norm contestation and social movements. More important, conservatives in Taiwan adopted the strategies and discourse of their liberal counterparts to reframe LGBTQ+ rights as existential threats to the family, religion, and well-being of future generations.

Illiberal actors have taken advantage of global society and are more integrated into transnational networks in promoting a backlash against LGBTQ+ rights (Velasco 2023b). In recent decades, Christian conservatives developed similar mobilization strategies from pro-LGBTQ+ groups, such as hosting international and regional conferences, supporting right-leaning politicians, and publishing academic works. Their coordination and efforts enabled the democratic backlash against LGBTQ+ rights in Taiwan and beyond.

In Taiwan, the Christian right with transnational connections can continue to engage illiberal norms and expand their discriminatory claims with Confucian beliefs. For example, churches in Hong Kong established a close connection with the World Congress of Family, and they adopted the rhetoric and mobilization strategies of the Christian right in the 1990s. Starting in the 2010s, Christian leaders in Taiwan developed networks and exchanges from those in Hong Kong (Huang 2017).

During the 2018 referendum, evangelical churches in Taiwan received generous funding from the United States for public gatherings and campaign lobbying. Michael Cole, a Taipei-based journalist and expert on China and Taiwan affairs, provided an in-depth investigation of the behind-the-scenes connection

between the conservative Christians in Taiwan and the extreme right in the United States.⁴ Specifically, the US-based Christian organization, MassResistance, is listed as one of the leading anti-gay groups, and it has an important role in the fight against the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan. In his previous reporting, Cole established clear links between the Bread of Life Church in Taiwan, which actively participated in opposing marriage equality, and International House of Prayer (IHOP), an anti-gay conservative church.⁵ The Alliance for the Happiness of Our Next Generation, a leading conservative group, raised USD \$3.24 million for this well-organized social movement against LGBTQ+ rights and marriage equality.⁶ Being well-endowed with financial support, its campaign materials were viewed on primetime news channels, billboards, and front pages of mainstream newspapers. To summarize, the anti-equality campaign was a Christian-led movement in nature, but the conservatives wanted to avoid being perceived as agents of foreign or Western influences. These groups made their conservative values more relevant in Taiwan’s society by adding local resonance.

Taiwan’s struggle for marriage equality represents a discursive battle over cultural values and a liberal lifestyle because both sides centered on the conceptual definitions of family, intimacy, and citizenship. The framing strategies, conducted by Christian conservatives, successfully revealed a global–local linkage between transnational and domestic actors, as well as how this backlash

impacts the landscape of Taiwan's democracy. This article highlights a two-step process for understanding norm localization, in which the conservatives in Taiwan developed sophisticated framing strategies from global Christian networks and strategically secularized their appeals toward the Taiwanese public. Namely, the conservatives first construct a universalist claim on the concept of family, creating broad-base support across different religious groups in Taiwan. The second step involves the localization of illiberal ideas, in which Christian conservatives promote their values by incorporating Confucian beliefs.

STRATEGIC FRAMING FROM THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Scholars of Asian politics have addressed the crucial role of discourse on human rights and policy initiatives (Chen-Dedman 2022; Jung 2024; Krumbein 2022). Specifically, results from survey experiments show that most citizens are easily swayed regarding the issues of LGBTQ+ rights and marriage equality, depending on how proponents and opponents choose to frame these issues (Rich, Dahmer, and Eliassen 2019). When framed in terms of a threat to traditional values, the support for same-sex marriage declines significantly.

This study proposes a culture-based explanation of how Christian conservatives in Taiwan were effective in forming a single-issue coalition against LGBTQ+ rights (Bob 2019). First, the Christian right in Taiwan made a universal claim on family and marriage in countering progressive views from LGBTQ+ groups. Although conservatives advocate family as a globally universal value across geographical boundaries and religious beliefs, this idea is not just a neutral term: one man, one woman, and their children (Stoeckl 2020). The "natural" family also implies clearly defined gender identities, responsibilities, and obligations within this framework. From their perspective, if LGBTQ+ people gain the right to marriage, it would undermine "traditional family" values and threaten the future of human beings for their inability to reproduce.⁷ Christian conservatives refrained from declaring their religious beliefs in public; instead, when talking to the Taiwanese public, they identified themselves as "concerned parents" or "public school teachers" that cared for the well-being of children.

Second, the Christian right localized their conservative claims by avoiding mention of biblical teachings and upholding traditional Chinese values. Confucian norms of filial piety (*xiao*) and collectivism lead to a more community-based preference that discourages explicit support for LGBTQ+ rights in Taiwan (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015). How the anti-LGBTQ+ rights activists framed marriage equality as undermining Taiwan's family and social structure and received overwhelming support in the 2018 referendum certainly is worth close examination concerning their narrative and mobilization strategy.

For example, they used social media to deliver a specific narrative, warning of the possible collapse of Taiwan's society and cherished values. Specifically, family was an especially persuasive symbol regarding Taiwan's traditional beliefs, which was a major reason for not allowing same-sex marriage under the Civil Code. Although their justification based on family, blood ties, and *xiao* was a false claim and discriminatory in nature, this family- or community-based framing gained resonance among the general public.

For example, a Taiwanese bishop could have applied the teachings of the Bible to denounce the legitimacy of LGBTQ+

rights; instead, he challenged the issue of marriage equality by evoking a Confucian-style narrative. He said:

Would you like to see the birthrate continue to decline due to same-sex marriage?...If your child or grandchild told you that he or she is homosexual and your family lineage would end with them, could you accept it?⁸

To be clear, the low birthrate in Taiwan can be attributed to other factors, including the rising cost of education, insufficient childcare support, and greater employment opportunities for women. Legalizing same-sex marriage certainly is not a factor, especially when same-sex couples can adopt or have their own children through a surrogate in the West. Being gay or lesbian does not mean that a couple cannot procreate or be good parents. However, this rhetorical style—fusing family, reproduction, and respect for elders and parents (*xiao*) into the anti-equality campaign—represents a unique way that the Christian right in Taiwan wins support in the equality battle. This conservative discourse might seem to be one of intolerance and bias; nevertheless, it elicits irrational "fear and anxiety" about same-sex marriage and the implementation of more education about gender and sexuality in elementary and high schools.⁹

Moreover, Zhang Ming-zhi, a representative of the "religion alliance" in Taiwan, applied the essence of Taoism—that is, the dynamics or interactions between yin and yang—in justifying the legitimacy and authenticity of marriage. Zhang claimed:

Tao is the function of yin and yang, and it can apply to the formation of the heaven and the earth, the gender difference between man and woman, and hence the very definition of marriage.¹⁰

As an official representative of all of the religious groups, Zhang could have adopted neutral language to counter the ideas of marriage equality. Instead, he used the "yin and yang" metaphor to imply that same-sex marriage (i.e., two men or two women) is against the law of nature. Although his interpretation of yin and yang risked an oversimplification of Taoism, the concept of yin and yang means more than a dichotomy or clear distinction of man/woman, right/wrong, or black/white. Zhang's statement quickly gained resonance among Taoist believers in Taiwan because he spoke their "language" to appeal for support.

Similarly, public statements from Taiwan's Minister of Justice, Chiu Tai-seen, represented another example of the alleged "negative impacts" of same-sex marriage on ritual practices. He said:

The extent of amendments required to legalize gay marriage is far more complicated than changing the marriage law....Some older family members asked me during the Lunar New Year holidays how we should address same-sex couples on ancestral tablets when they die. Should it be written as they were both deceased fathers (*xian kao*) or deceased mothers (*xian bi*)? Same-sex marriage would also impact traditional marriage practices, such as how gay couples should be addressed at wedding ceremonies, and whether the common terms of husband and wife would be still applicable.¹¹

It was not clear whether Chiu was affiliated with a Christian church or other conservative groups in Taiwan, but his statement revealed a similarity in evoking Confucian traditions to counter marriage equality. Specifically, Chiu's symbolic representation of "ancestor worship" was crystalized as a "typical case" of a larger issue (i.e., revising the definitions of marriage in the Civil Code).

These typical cases then confined the boundaries of the marriage-equality debate and later shaped the public's perception of same-sex marriage.

Chiu's controversial statements not only violated neutrality; they also revealed the framing strategy on community-based values. The discourse on Confucian beliefs, particularly one that can be dramatized as a disastrous policy change, easily led to greater public awareness. It may have suspended critical thinking in the Taiwanese people, but it often is a powerful framing strategy.

Admittedly, there were other religious groups in Taiwan's anti-equality side, including Taoists, Buddhists, and Yiguandaos, and these different groups may find themselves in opposition to the Christian right in Taiwan on a variety of other social issues. That is, these non-Christian religious leaders in Taiwan may risk losing their credentials and reputation, thereby appearing to be less authoritative than their Christian counterparts. Therefore, their decision to join the anti-equality side revealed how they still managed to gain relevance and target a larger audience. The strategic calculations among these conservative religious groups speak to the salience of the localization discourse: that is, the formality (i.e., conservative stances) remains intact but the narratives are infused with Confucian beliefs and practices. For example, the Chinese Confucian–Mencius Association is a civil rather than a religious organization that aims to promote ancient Chinese culture. It joined the conservative coalition during the 2018 referendum, and its active participation extended the influence of this group to Taiwanese people who do not have strong religious beliefs (Chen 2019; Chuang and Wang 2018). The framing of the conservative values united them around a common rhetorical device for preserving their existence (Stone 2022).

The fact that these religious groups and civil organizations were willing to join this Christian-led conservative movement is worth investigating because the process of localization through strategic framing is quite different from mimicking and persuasion from the existing literature on norm adoption and diffusion. Specifically, the anti-equality groups did not simply “learn” from Christian beliefs, and they did not completely rely on Christian priests and clergy to express their stances. The mechanism of persuasion did not occur in Taiwan's context either because the Christian right did not attempt to actively change Taiwan's community-based, Confucian-oriented beliefs. More important, the Christian right temporarily “bracketed” their beliefs to win the marriage-equality battle. Localization helped to resolve the tension between Christian and non-Christian groups so that Taoism and Buddhism still experienced some degree of legitimacy. “Family” became an important symbol for the anti-equality groups, and they crafted the narratives to engage a broader audience in Taiwan.

In summary, the Christian right effectively built a conservative coalition with other religious groups and civil organizations that would establish the legitimacy of their claims with the Taiwanese public. They skillfully reconceptualized their argument against LGBTQ+ rights based on both universal values (family) and particular claims (Confucian beliefs) (Lee 2016; Paternotte and Kuhar 2017).

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: HUMAN RIGHTS AS UNIVERSAL VALUES

The history of the LGBTQ+ movement is characterized by constant struggles against serious human rights violations, including

denying the right to life, the right to healthcare, and the right to create a family. Recent international norms and treaties provided an important route to establishing legal-rights movements throughout the world (Beetham 2014; Narayan 2006; O'Flaherty and Fisher 2008). For example, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) announced resolutions recognizing gay rights and condemning anti-LGBTQ+ violence and discrimination in 2011 and 2014.¹²

The LGBTQ+ rights activists in Taiwan have reasonable grounds to structure their arguments based on these positive trends. For example, the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (TAPCPR), a pro-equality group, revealed in a 2013 survey that 76% of respondents agreed that homosexuals should enjoy equal rights. This liberal view was especially salient among respondents between the ages of 20 and 29 with a university degree.¹³ The head of TAPCPR was confident that within a few years, the majority of Taiwanese people would change their beliefs and support same-sex marriage. Moreover, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage in May 2017, mandating that the Legislative Yuan amend the laws within two years to ensure the rights of same-sex couples. This landmark ruling greatly increased the confidence and morale among the pro-equality groups.¹⁴

As the anti-equality groups repeatedly stressed, they respected the basic rights of gay people and agreed that same-sex partnerships should be enacted in Taiwan. However, the subtext of this rhetoric implies a discriminatory bias that same-sex couples are not entitled to the sacred bonds of “marriage”—the conventional definition of which is a union between a man and a woman. In fact, their counterproposal of a “partnership” or “union” that attempts to recognize the rights of the LGBTQ+ community might lead to the reinforcement of existing discrimination—and even perpetuate new barriers to the true realization of equality. Asserting the human rights of LGBTQ+ people remains an uphill battle in Taiwan, and the travails of the 2018 referendum speak to the unfinished story of determining how best to promote marriage equality in liberal democracies.

In responding to “separate-but-equal” offers for same-sex partnerships, the arguments of the human rights activists were inspired by the Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States.¹⁵ They expected that the metaphor of the US Civil Rights Movement could serve as a compelling counterargument against the enactment of “same-sex partnerships” and that such discourse could inspire more-informed citizens in Taiwan to challenge the conservatives' claims. In their progressive agenda, marriage equality is the first step toward a more affirmative framework that gradually would encompass gender and sexuality rights for all minorities in Taiwan.

COUNTERMOVEMENT AND THE FUTURE OF TAIWAN'S DEMOCRACY

Whereas the existing literature highlights the positive factors that contributed to Taiwan's landmark achievement, fewer studies have addressed the reasons why Christian conservatives successfully executed a referendum of backlash against marriage equality. This study addresses the conditions under which the backlash built social movements in 2018 and how it affects Taiwan's democracy.

What happened from 2017 to 2019 demonstrates how a liberal democracy like Taiwan can experience a countermovement for

LGBTQ+ rights and a breakthrough for human rights as well (Velasco, Baral, and Tang 2024). Admittedly, there are certain limits for a democratic government based on majoritarian rule in protecting minority rights. By upholding traditional ways of life, conservative activists took advantage of democratic procedure in advancing their discriminatory claims and rolling back existing protections against a minority.

By upholding traditional ways of life, conservative activists took advantage of democratic procedure in advancing their discriminatory claims and rolling back existing protections against a minority.

With the perspective of hindsight, the 2018 anti-LGBTQ+ referendum was well funded and coordinated; however, this countermovement backfired, leading to the further emboldening of LGBTQ+ rights advocates (Bishin et al. 2016; O'Dwyer 2018). Although Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage in 2019, social activists and LGBTQ+ groups should not assume that other rights will be granted easily. What comes next after legal recognition of marriage equality raises crucial questions of social and cultural acceptance. The future prospects of LGBTQ+ rights remain uncertain because issues related to marriage equality (e.g., options for adoption, transnational marriage, and reproductive rights) are likely to be susceptible to similar framing strategies by the countermovement.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan's earlier success in the 2017 Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality made opponents recognize that they needed to engage the discursive battle over heteronormativity, equality, and citizenship, which resulted in an anti-LGBTQ+ countermovement in 2018. By establishing a connection among social movements, discourse analysis, and contentious politics, this study addresses Taiwan's struggle toward marriage equality and the backlash against LGBTQ+ rights. It introduces a two-part framework in understanding how the Christian right localizes their conservative claims. First, the activists moderated their religious beliefs by highlighting family for heterosexual couples as a universal appeal. Second, they secularized their campaign language, drawing on Confucian values shared across Taiwanese society.

The setback from the 2018 referendum showed that LGBTQ+ rights remained contentious because many Taiwanese voters were indifferent to these issues. Although Taiwanese people are sympathetic to LGBTQ+ groups, they do not necessarily support marriage equality and they are open to other options. More scholarly and policy attention is needed on how the framing of LGBTQ+ rights may impact the quality of democracy and public perceptions. Through in-depth case studies, future research should examine further how norm localization and translation operate in Asia and beyond.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR LGBTQ+ MOVEMENTS IN ASIA

The road to marriage equality remains a long and treacherous one in Asia, but the diffusion of liberal and conservative norms also implies possibilities and challenges. For example, Vietnam and South Korea—two countries that also are significantly influenced by Confucian beliefs—may experience the same types of debates

in their LGBTQ+ movements. In the 2018 referendum campaign in Taiwan, the debates over marriage equality and LGBTQ+ rights indicated where the line should be drawn between legitimate claims and distorted forms of influence. For other LGBTQ+ rights movements in Asia and beyond, how does the general public know whether the debates are based on rational deliberation or the political influence of the Christian right? What are the boundaries

of legitimate persuasion in a democracy? These are pressing issues that political scientists, social activists, and policy makers must address. The "Taiwan lesson" on strategic framing, coalition building, and localizing conservative values provides a possible roadmap for LGBTQ+ activists in Asia and beyond.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. See "In Historic Decision, Taiwanese Court Rules in Favor of Same-Sex Marriage," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2017; and "Taiwan Legislature Approves Asia's First Same-Sex Marriage Law," *New York Times*, May 17, 2019.
2. See "Tens of Thousands March in Taipei's LGBT Pride Parade," *Central News Agency*, October 28, 2017.
3. See "Taiwan's Gay Pride Parade Draws Thousands, as Votes on Same-Sex Marriage Near," *New York Times*, October 27, 2018.
4. See "U.S. Hate Group Mass Resistance Behind Anti-LGBT Activities in Taiwan," *Taiwan Sentinel*, January 2, 2017.
5. For Cole's detailed reports on Taiwan's conservative churches, IHOP, and their anti-gay agenda, see "The Perpetrator as Victim," *The Far-Eastern Sweet Potato*, December 18, 2013; and "Who Is Behind the Happiness of the Next Generation?," *The Far-Eastern Sweet Potato*, December 11, 2013.
6. See "A Great Divide: Inside the Battle to Stop Same-Sex Marriage in Taiwan," *CNN*, November 24, 2018.
7. See "Groups Oppose Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage," *Taipei Times*, May 10, 2017.
8. See "Editorial: Apocalyptic Same-Sex Claptrap," *Taipei Times*, September 21, 2013.
9. In addition to the marriage-equality debates, the conservative groups proposed a LGBTQ+—related referendum question, demanding to curb a more inclusive, gender-equality education in Taiwan's education system. They supported the removal of such gender-awareness content from school textbooks, which is seen—from their perspective—as a major factor in supporting LGBTQ+ rights among the Taiwanese people.
10. See "Anti-Marriage Equality Groups Responded to a Highly Controversial Bill: We Need to Be Calm and Negotiate, So That We Can Reach an Agreement," *Liberty Times*, December 26, 2016. (*Gaodu zhengyi fa an, fan tong hun tuan ti: leng jing xia lai, shi huan ze yuan.*)
11. See "Justice Minister: Current Marriage Laws Are Not Unconstitutional," *Taiwan News*, March 25, 2017.
12. The UNHRC monitors and continues to investigate discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.
13. The survey was conducted by the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica in 2013. For details, see "Over Half of Taiwanese Support Gay Marriage: Survey," *Taiwan News*, August 6, 2013.
14. Specifically, the legal interpretation states that "not allowing two persons of the same sex to create a permanent union of intimate and exclusive nature for the purpose of living a common life are in violation of both the people's freedom of marriage as protected by Article 22 and the people's right to equality as guaranteed by Article 7 of the Constitution." For the full text of the Constitutional Court ruling and newspaper coverage in English, see

"Constitutional Court Rules in Favor of Same-Sex Marriage," *Central News Agency*, May 24, 2017.

15. The pro-equality groups referred to the US Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*. Before *Brown's* legal appeal, state laws in the US South segregated every aspect of social life: schools, restaurants, hospitals, and shops. In challenging segregation, people risked losing their jobs and it could even be life-threatening. Therefore, it was a breakthrough for the Black Civil Rights Movement because the US Supreme Court rejected the "separate-but-equal" principle and issued its official endorsement of legal rights to integration. For a detailed description, see Stark (2001).

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