

Does Feminism Represent ‘Immigrant Women’?*

Examining the Political Representation of Feminist Protests in South Korea Using Protest Event Analysis

Kazuhiro Terashita[†]

Abstract

This paper identifies the political representation of the feminist movement in South Korea. Studies on political representation have shown that the representation interests of groups representing ‘women’ are biased. However, it is not clear to what extent more peripheral and intersectional people are represented. Therefore, this paper tries to estimate and descriptively examine the issues represented by the feminist movement in South Korea using protest event analysis by machine learning. The results show that, as expected, intersectional categories such as ‘immigrant women’ and ‘queer’ are less represented than other issues, but there are differences in the degree of representation even among peripheral categories. I also find evidence that feminists trade representation of ‘mainstream’ issues for non-representation of previously relatively represented issues. These results suggest that civil society, which is supposed to protect its inherently fragile position, may not be playing its role.

*This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 23KJ1150.

[†]Program-Specific Researcher, Kyoto University. Email: kazuhiroterashita@outlook.jp

Introduction

This paper examines the bias of representation in social groups by identifying the political representation of the feminist movement in South Korea. Feminist movements and other social movements are known to influence policy processes through advocacy and service delivery. In the first place, ideologically, civil society is expected to serve as a safety net to help those who are left out of the existing political and economic system by representing groups that are not represented by the government or the market. In other words, civil society organizations are required to represent not only those who are overrepresented by politics and the economy, but also minorities who are blocked from the economic and political system.

However, groups belonging to civil society do not necessarily represent minorities. Research has already shown that the interests reflected by groups that are supposed to represent minorities are both diverse and biased(English 2019, 2020; Shin 2020). If civil society organizations and social movements, which are supposed to protect certain interests of minorities in terms of ideology, do not represent minorities, politics and society will be formed for the greater number. On the other hand, if people who are blocked by politics and society are represented to some extent by groups such as social movements, relatively minority people may overcome the problem of collective action and influence policies. Therefore, examining the political representation of civil society leads to a consideration of the political position of minorities in the society.

In considering the above issues, previous research has focused on feminist groups. In particular, the interests represented by organizations representing “women” have been clarified (English 2019, 2020). In other words, by clarifying who exactly “women” are supposed to be in the largest minority group as the number of “women”, various aspects of representation in a category have been examined, and it has also led to the reflection of the feminist movement.

However, research to date has not necessarily focused on vulnerable minorities. For example, English (2019) has focused on race and marital status using the United States as a case, but it has not focused sufficiently on more intersectional categories and hierarchies because it uses the United States as a case. In other words, there is a problem in trying to find

general findings from cases in which intersectional categories are not necessarily vulnerable. Based on the philosophy of civil society, it should be examined whether civil society plays the role of representation in a society with vulnerable categories that should be more represented.

In this paper, I will examine the case of Korean feminism in order to overcome these challenges. In South Korea, the feminist movement, which has a history of several decades, has strongly appealed for the improvement of the social status of “women” and realized policies since democratization. Nevertheless, there are still social vulnerabilities in the “women” category, such as the stagnation of women’s participation in society and the huge wage gap. In addition, the number of immigrant women is increasing as they accept immigrants against the backdrop of the world’s top-class low birth rate society. On the other hand, immigrant women enter the country for economic and social reasons, such as marriage and employment, and face many difficulties such as violence, economic poverty, language and cultural barriers. Nevertheless, the government’s support is not sufficient and they are in the more vulnerable class within the “women” category.

Today, it also raises questions about LGBTQ+ as another vulnerable category. Feminist discourse has pointed to the so-called white feminism critique, in which non-white intersectionality is downplayed by white women([Schuller 2021](#); [Christoffersen and Emejulu 2023](#)). LGBTQ + is known to be more severely persecuted in South Korea, where some feminist movements take the position that they only recognize “biological” women([Lee 2023](#); [Yang and Lee 2022](#)). These circumstances show that South Korea is a society in which “women” not only find themselves in a vulnerable position, but also have circumstances that must be represented in their intersectionality. In short, the South Korean case is the best place to examine the ideological and practical divergences of civil society.

This paper uses machine learning-based protest event analysis to estimate the benefits represented by feminist movements in different regions. The results of the estimation reveal that while there is diversity in the benefits represented by feminist movements, there is a bias in the types of intersectionality. In particular, they focus on issues, but mention a small number of the category of immigrant women.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I will describe the analytical

point of view. Next, I will explain the analytical method of this paper. Furthermore, I will show the results of the analysis and clarify the political representation of the feminist movement in Korea. From the contents clarified at the end, I will describe the future development of the feminist political representation.

Theory and Perspective

This paper refers to the concept of political representation to capture who is represented in Korean feminism. The concept of political representation is divided into descriptive representation and substantive representation, and has been used to analyze groups, political parties, and politicians who represent specific groups or categories([Shin 2020](#)).

Among these, descriptive representation refers to the ratio of members, actors, represented by officers, members, politicians, etc. Taking political parties as an example, whether a majority of party members, candidates and party leaders are women is a criterion for meeting descriptive representation.

On the other hand, substantial representation is a concept that focuses on the interests and opinions of specific groups. For women and gender, the following two concepts are used as representative concepts ([Molyneux 1985](#); [Shin 2020](#)). First, practical interests, which refer to the fulfillment of needs arising from specific positions and responsibilities within stereotyped gender roles. Consumer networks, which emphasize the position of consumers and seek the interests of “mothers” as a consumer movement, are a typical example([Shin 2020](#)). Second, strategic gender interests, which advocate for the transformation of subordinate social relationships in which women are placed, apply to many feminist organizations.

Discussion associated with these concepts has revealed that the interests represented by women and gender associations and organizations are not uniform ([Celis et al. 2014](#)). [English \(2019\)](#), [English \(2020\)](#) reveals that the interests of women with relatively intersectional identities and single women are less likely to be expressed. In addition to the expression of interests based on such attributes, there is a diversity of interest in issues such as parents with children, women with careers, and support for sexual violence. It should also be noted that

“women” represented by specific groups such as political parties are not necessarily oriented toward gender equality(Shin 2020). In addition, the interests represented may differ depending on the time of year.

Based on the above discussion, this paper focuses on the following points from the perspective of political representation. First, what kind of “female” interests are represented? Previous studies argue that interests based on gender roles such as “housewife” and “mother” have also been represented(LeBlanc 1999). Bearing this point in mind, I will examine what kind of “female image” interests are claimed.

Second, there are differences in repertoire and timing. Social movements try to influence politics and society through their diverse repertoires. Differences in the forms in which their interests are expressed affect outcomes, such as the passage of policies. Differences in repertoire may also lead to differences in the interests represented, and groups representing particular professional categories may prefer particular tactics. For example, more institutional and moderate strategies, such as litigation and mass media dissemination, may emphasize women as “traditional images of women” such as “child-rearing” and “marriage” and as “victims” and “protectors,” while non-institutional and sometimes violent repertoires may make more “niche” claims. There are also groups, such as in the field of labor, that have traditionally adopted particular means such as strikes. In other words, it can be assumed that different tactics are adopted according to the interests represented.

It can also be assumed that certain interests are represented at certain times, as in #MeToo. Social movements can communicate messages about their own interests by working with other issue organizations to strategically represent and link specific issues, thus allowing certain interests to be “over-represented” when certain “movements” or “trends” occur.

Methodology

Data

I gathered online news from *The Women News*(여성신문) to classify by including protest event or not using machine learning method. *The Women's News* is a specialized news site that distributes news related to feminists in South Korea. In particular, it features many events related to “feminism” and “women’s organizations.” Since the assumed readers are South Korean feminists, it is expected that they report events that reflect more feminist interests. Although not all events in South Korea are distributed, it is possible to examine the “meaningful” political representation of the South Korean feminist movement by analyzing the events reported in *The Women's News*, considering that in many cases the movement is visible through the mass media.

Analysis

Protest Event Analysis

This paper uses protest event analysis to understand the feminist movement in South Korea. Protest event analysis refers to an analytical method that systematically collects and quantifies a large amount of information about political protests, mainly from newspaper articles. The quantified data enables us to understand the trend of protest events and conduct quantitative analysis using protest events as variables.

According to Ortiz et al. (2005), when using protest event analysis, it is necessary to clarify the definition and scope of protests in advance. In this paper, based on previous research, the format of the table is advocacy(Avner 2013; Kollman 1998). Based on the classification of the table, protest event analysis was conducted. Details are provided in the Online Appendix.

The protest event analysis is divided into three stages: collecting newspaper articles, classifying and coding newspaper articles, and evaluating the classified results. First, this paper collects newspaper articles related to women’s organizations and feminist movements.

Next is categorization and coding. Since not all of the articles collected above are related

to the feminist movement, it is necessary to classify only the necessary articles. The above work has traditionally been done manually, but in recent years, classification using machine learning has become the mainstream(Jenkins and Maher 2016; Lorenzini et al. 2022). Therefore, in this paper, I followed the previous research and automated newspaper article classification using machine learning. Specifically, I used newsmap, a semi-supervised learning model, to classify the repertoire of women's organizations reported in newspaper articles(Watanabe 2018).

Table 1: Seed Words Used in newsmap

Topic	Seed Words
Demo	시위, 행진
Rally	집회, 대회
Candol	촛불, 촛불시위, 촛불집회
Picket	피켓
Petition	서명
Fundraising	모금
Strike	파업, 총파업, 스트라이크
Boycott	보이콧, 불매, 불매운동
Attack_violence	공격, 충돌, 분쟁, 폭동
Ceremony	세레모니
Symposium	심포지엄
Seminar	세미나
Dramaturgical_demonstration	콘서트, 연극, 공연
Symbolic_display	디스플레이, 전시회, 전시
Press_conference	기자회견, 회견
Lawsuit	소송, 제소, 법정, 법원

Political Representation

This paper captures the political representation of the feminist movement by estimating the topics of the articles. Specifically, I use Seeded LDA (Lu et al. 2011; Watanabe and Baturu 2023), a semi-supervised learning model. Seeded LDA is superior to topic models, which are unsupervised learning models, in estimating topics according to seed words predetermined by the analyst. The classification labels and seed words are shown in the table. More details are provided in the Online Appendix.

Table 2: Seed Words Used in Seeded LDA

Topic	Seed Words
Women_rights	인권, 양성평등, 성평등, 성차별, 차별
Safety	성폭력, 성범죄, 성매매, 성희롱, 폭력, 피해자
Marrige_birth	결혼, 출산, 임신, 미혼모, 출생, 이혼
Childcare	보육, 어린이, 어린이집, 육아, 아동, 아이
Medical_health	건강, 의료, 병원
Education	학교, 교육, 학생
Young	청소년, 청년, 젊은, 일자리
Labor	노동, 임금, 실업
Disabled	장애인, 휠체어, 장애
Old_age	노약자, 노인, 돌봄, 고독사
Immigrant	다문화, 외국인, 이주, 이주민, 결혼이주, 국제교류
Queer	성소수자, 퀴어, 동성애자, 동성애, 성전환, 트랜스, 트랜스젠더

Results

Descriptive Trends of Political Representation

Figure 1 shows the estimated political representation of the feminist movement. Surprisingly, the results of the estimation show that less than 30% of the total can be classified into other categories that cannot be classified by the categories shown in the existing research. These are the results of classifying the issues into more detailed categories, for example, movements that specialize in the “comfort women” issue, which is a wartime issue of the Japanese military. However, 70% of the total can be classified by the categories assumed in this paper, and the overall results of the estimation are not distorted.

A close examination of the results reveals that while “Safety” and “Education” occupy the majority of the topics, “Immigration” and “Queer” occupy a relatively low percentage of the issues, as expected. However, there are also differences among the cross-linking categories. The “Immigration” issue accounts for only 0.8% of the total, while the “Queer” issue accounts for 7% of the total. This indicates that there are significant differences in the degree of representation among the cross-linking issues.

Tactics and Political Representation

I move on to a more detailed examination. First, the relationship with tactics. Do tactics change according to the category they represent? Figure 2 shows the number of protests for each representative category and tactic. This figure clearly shows that different tactics are used between categories. For example, the “Safety” category, which allows for some level of judicial struggle in the context of sexual crimes, uses a lot of litigation tactics, while the “Education” category has a high percentage of “Demo_Rally” because it requires more social appeal rather than judicial resolution.

What is interesting in the context of intersectionality is that the “Queer” category, which includes the Parade, has a large repertoire exposed in the open air. It can be inferred that it is a movement that finds meaning in appealing its existence. On the other hand, it is

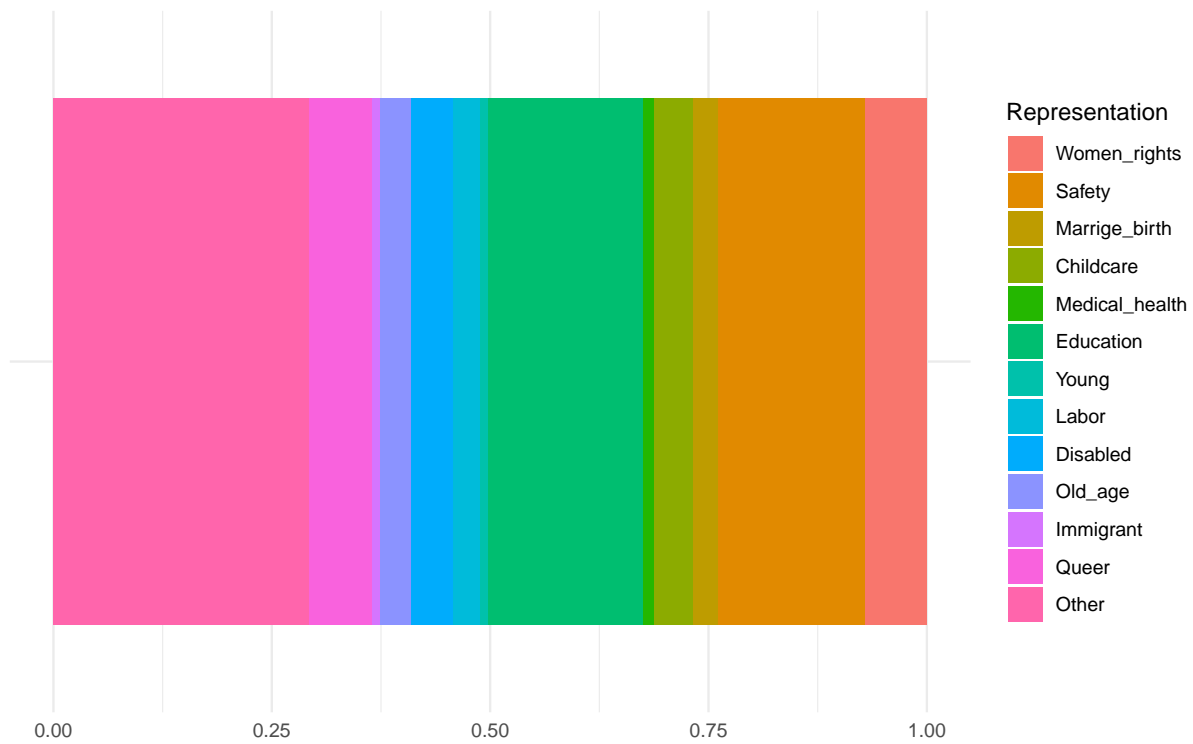


Figure 1: Political Representation in Korean Feminist Movement

worth noting that the proportion and number of “Attack_Boycott” are larger than those of other categories. As is the case in other countries, in South Korea, the “Queer” category is hostile to other right-wing organizations and sometimes develops into conflict. This can be said to be a sign that conflict cannot be avoided because it is a relatively minority category. Similarly, the “Disabled” category reflects persecution accompanied by physical conflict.

However, not all intersectionality categories involve conflict. Figure 2 shows that there is little conflict in the “Immigrant” category. Intersectionality, once represented by protests, is involved in conflict, but there is no need for conflict in a category that is no longer represented.

Surprisingly, there have been few clashes on other “women’s” issues. Movements for “women” that were once described as radical have become less necessary to adopt radical actions as they become more successful and institutionalized. This may be a barrier for mainstream movements representing “women” when defending minorities.

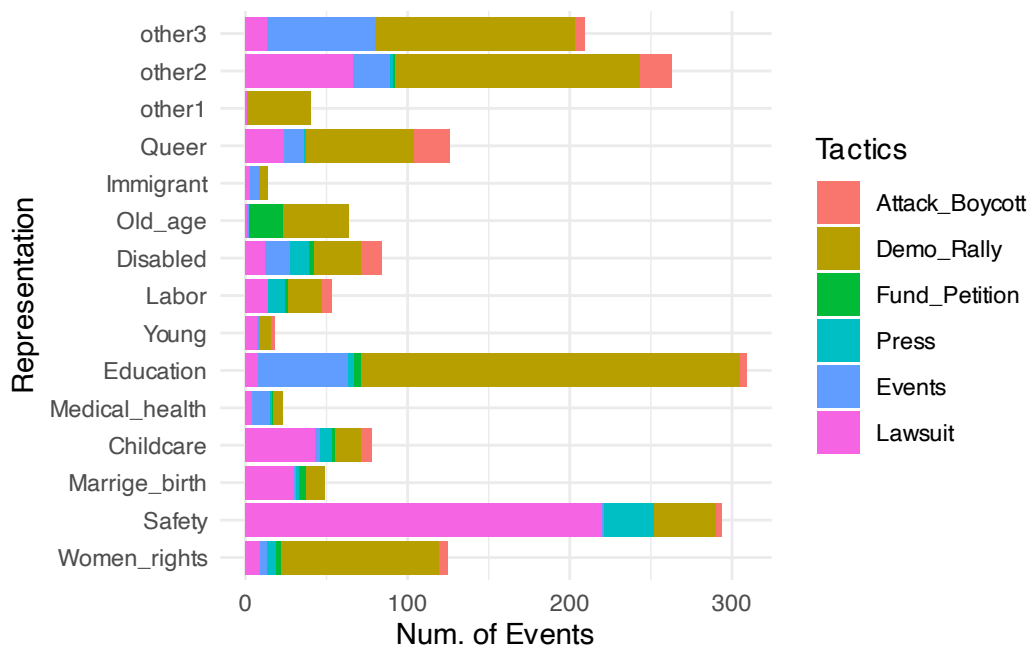


Figure 2: Tactics and Political Representation in Korean Feminist Movement

Time Trends and the Impact of #MeToo

Finally, I examine the impact of the #MeToo movement in South Korea from 2018 to 2020. Figure 3 shows the time-series changes in the number of protests by representative category. The figure clearly shows that the issue of “safety” or violence was raised from 2018 to 2020. This supports the existence of the #MeToo movement not only in terms of symbolic incidents but also in terms of the number of protest events.

What is particularly interesting, however, is that it seems to be pushing down other protest trends over the years. To examine this point in more detail, I will refer to Figure 4, which shows the percentage of issues for each year. It shows that “safety” issues have been taken up by a large percentage since 2018 until 2024. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the higher percentage of “safety” issues has led to a decrease in the percentage of protests, especially in the cross-related categories. This indicates that the more “majority” category is represented in the reported protest events, which may lead to the loss of the representation of peripheral categories. It is clear that the percentage and number of events related to “” have declined significantly. As a result of the #MeToo movement becoming a “fad” within

the feminist movement, the cross-related categories, which have been represented to a large extent, are no longer represented.

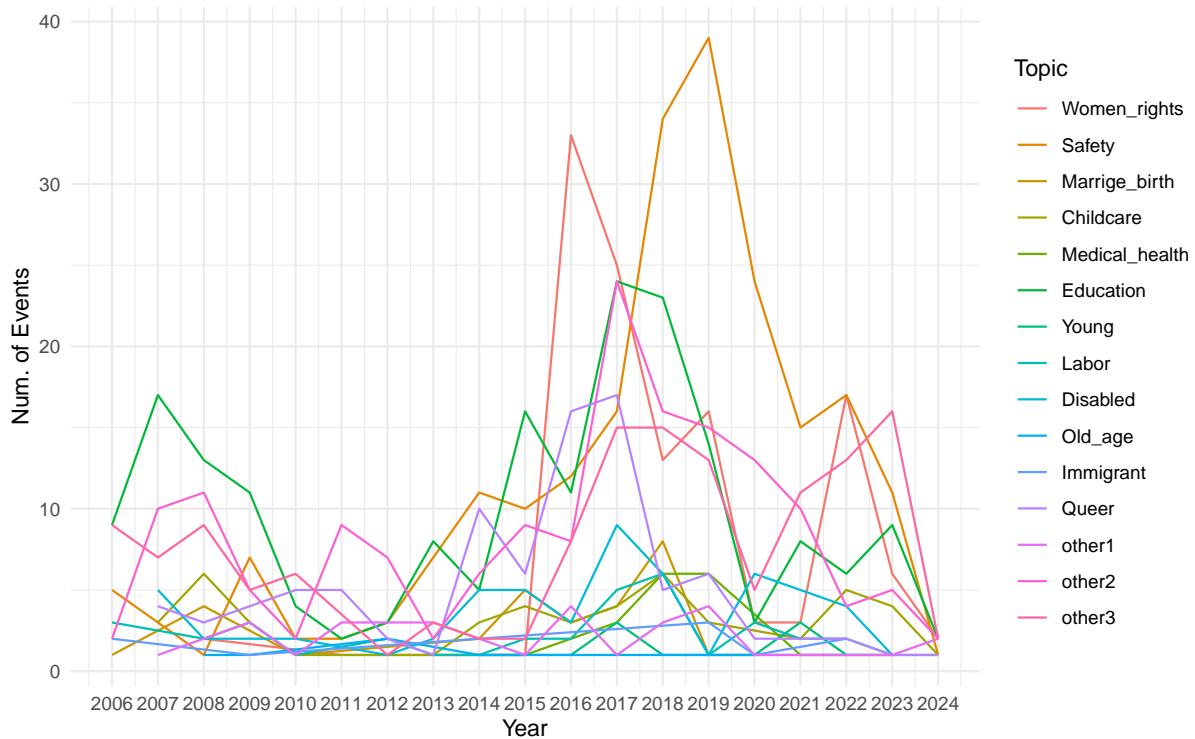


Figure 3: Time Trends of Korean Feminist Movements(2006-2024)

Discussion and Conclusion

What does this analysis show? First, the marginal but growing category of “immigrant women” is underrepresented in the feminist movement. The question “Who represents’ immigrant women?” is not only for feminists. It should be noted, however, that civil society may not be representative of the intersectional population, even though it is expected to represent the marginal category and serve as a safety net.

On the other hand, the category was found to be relatively more representative than the other intersectionality categories. This shows that the feminist movement is strategically manipulating the issues it deals with, regardless of the population ratio. Of course, the issue is an important issue not only in Korea but also in all societies, and it is natural for feminists

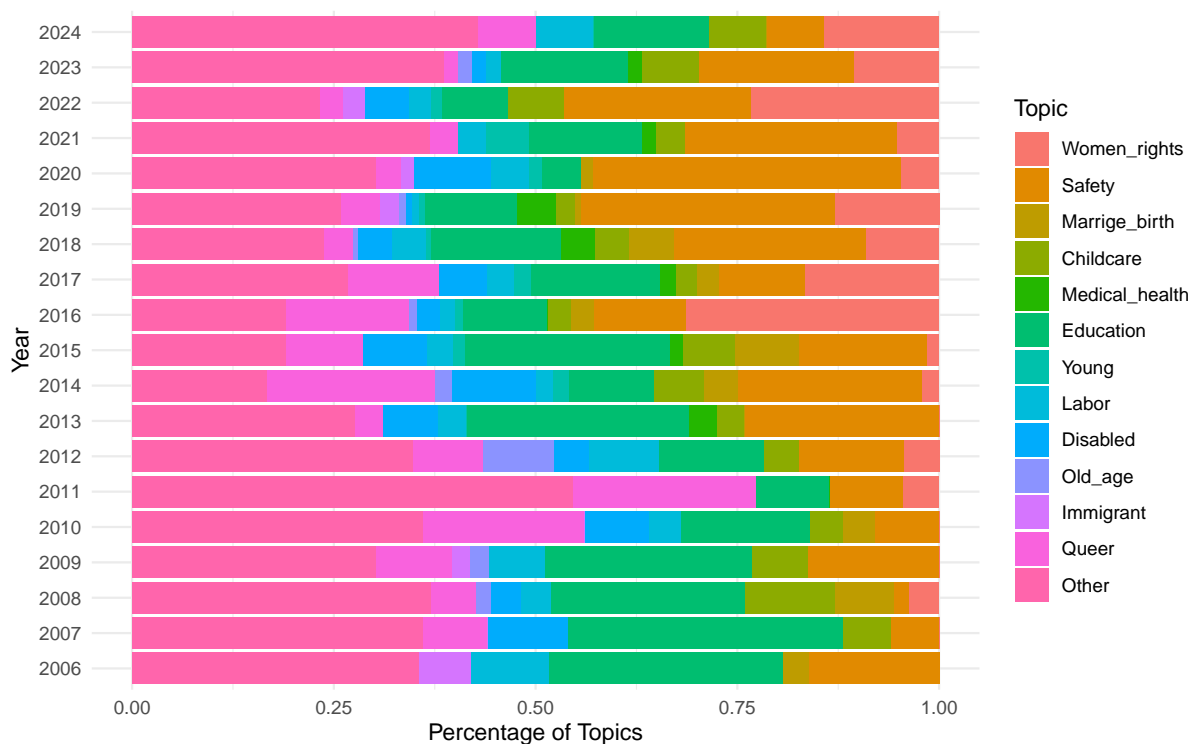


Figure 4: Percentage of Feminist Movement Topics by Year

to take up the issue. However, the choice to represent certain intersectionality and not others may cause friction inside and outside the feminist movement. It is also possible that there will be differences in the “intersectionality” adopted depending on the time.

Indeed, our analysis reveals that the #MeToo movement has resulted in significant changes in the feminist movement’s coverage of issues. In particular, it reveals that the “” issue, which was represented to some extent before the #MeToo movement, has become relatively unrepresented, while the “Safety” issue has become overrepresented. This shows that the more peripheral categories have a lower priority than the other “main” categories, and are very easily unrepresented.

Of course, the analysis in this paper has some problems. It uses a single Korean news site, and it is necessary to examine the representativeness and accuracy. In addition, there is room for improvement in the analytical method. In addition, there is room for examining causal relationships not only in descriptive analysis but also in more advanced methods.

Nevertheless, this paper makes a significant contribution to the political representation

of the feminist movement. In particular, it clarifies who feminists represent in groups with many categories and intersectionality from the perspective of tactics and time series. Among these, it points out that while feminists strategically represent specific categories even in peripheral categories, they may most easily become less representative when there is a boom like #MeToo. The results of this analysis overlap with the findings of previous theoretical studies that have “exploited” intersectionality, despite being called “feminist” and its noble ideology. Many theoretical studies have targeted “white” feminism, but this paper shows that the same thing occurs in South Korean society, where “white” is not the majority.

It should also be pointed out that the same thing may be happening in civil society as a whole. For example, it is conceivable that not only feminists but also immigrant organizations do not represent “women.” As the analysis of this paper reveals, even civil society, which is supposed to protect its inherently fragile position, tends to abandon the existence of intersectionality. How many civil society organizations are aware of this? The question of “Does Feminism Represent ‘Immigrant Women’?” in this paper should be asked not only by feminists but also by civil society as a whole.

Appendix

The Appendix and handouts for the day will be available until July 15th at the following URL.

URL: <https://github.com/namiterashita/ISTR2024>

References

- Avner, Marcia. 2013. *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations, Second Edition: Shaping Public Policy at the State and Local Level*. Fieldstone Alliance.
- Celis, Karen, Sarah Childs, Johanna Kantola, and Mona Lena Krook. 2014. “Constituting women’s interests through representative claims.” *Politics and Gender* 10 (2): 149–74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X14000026>.
- Christoffersen, Ashlee, and Akwugo Emejulu. 2023. “‘Diversity Within’: The Problems with

- ‘Intersectional’ White Feminism in Practice.” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 30 (2): 630–53. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxac044>.
- English, Ashley. 2019. “She Who Shall Not Be Named: The Women That Women’s Organizations Do (and Do Not) Represent in the Rulemaking Process.” *Politics & Gender* 15 (03): 572–98. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000375>.
- . 2020. “Where Are All the Single Ladies? Marital Status and Women’s Organizations’ Rule-making Campaigns.” *Politics & Gender* 16 (2): 581–607. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X1900028X>.
- Jenkins, J. Craig, and Thomas V. Maher. 2016. “What Should We Do about Source Selection in Event Data? Challenges, Progress, and Possible Solutions.” *International Journal of Sociology* 46 (1): 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2016.1130419>.
- Kollman, Ken. 1998. *Outside lobbying : public opinion and interest group strategies*. Princeton University Press. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA38383325>.
- LeBlanc, Robin M. 1999. *Bicycle citizens : the political world of the Japanese housewife*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lee, Sang Bin. 2023. “Radical feminist translations and strategies: A South Korean case.” *Translation Studies* 16 (1): 101–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2022.2147582>.
- Lorenzini, Jasmine, Hanspeter Kriesi, Peter Makarov, and Bruno Wüest. 2022. “Protest Event Analysis: Developing a Semiautomated NLP Approach.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 66 (5): 555–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642211021650>.
- Lu, Bin, Myle Ott, Claire Cardie, and Benjamin K Tsou. 2011. “Multi-Aspect Sentiment Analysis with Topic Models.” In *Proceedings of the 2011 IEEE 11th International Conference on Data Mining Workshops*, 81–88. ICDMW ’11. USA: IEEE Computer Society.
- Molyneux, Maxine. 1985. “Mobilisation without emancipation? Women’s interests, state and revolution in Nicaragua.” *Critical Social Policy* 4 (10): 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026101838400401004>.
- Ortiz, David, Daniel Myers, Eugene Walls, and Maria-Elena Diaz. 2005. “Where Do We Stand with Newspaper Data?” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 10 (3): 397–419. <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.10.3.8360r760k3277t42>.

- Schuller, Kyla. 2021. *The trouble with white women : a counterhistory of feminism*. First edit. New York, NY SE -: Bold Type Books New York, NY. <https://doi.org/LK> - <https://world-cat.org/title/1237351034>.
- Shin, Ki-Young. 2020. "An Alternative Form of Women's Political Representation: Netto , a Proactive Women's Party in Japan." *Politics & Gender* 16 (1): 78–98. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X19000606>.
- Watanabe, Kohei. 2018. "Newsmap: A semi-supervised approach to geographical news classification." *Digital Journalism* 6 (3): 294–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1293487>.
- Watanabe, Kohei, and Alexander Baturo. 2023. "Seeded Sequential LDA: A Semi-Supervised Algorithm for Topic-Specific Analysis of Sentences." *Social Science Computer Review* 0 (0): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08944393231178605>.
- Yang, Sunyoung, and Kathy Lee. 2022. "The intertextuality and interdiscursivity of 'mirroring' in South Korean cyberfeminist posts." *Discourse and Society* 33 (5): 671–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221096028>.