Polarized embrace: South Korean media coverage of human rights, 1990–2016

Jeong-Woo Koo, and Jaesung Choi

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Polarized embrace: South Korean media coverage of human rights, 1990–2016

Jeong-Woo Koo and Jaesung Choi

Sungkyunkwan University

ABSTRACT

Past studies of human rights discourse have centralized civil and political rights over other types of rights, and have thus yielded a biased understanding of how human rights have evolved. This scholarship has also neglected the role of the political slant of reporting agencies in framing topics and issues covering human rights. This study offers new theoretical and analytical solutions to such limits by analyzing a newly compiled data corpus comprising 101,689 South Korean newspaper articles—both right- and left-leaning—referencing the term "human rights." The analysis of the data led us to reach three conclusions. First, South Korean media coverage demonstrates that human rights as a cultural symbol expanded tremendously in the country during the 1990s and 2000s. Second, there was an incredible degree of shift among multiple categories and topics of human rights during 26 years of that period. Initially, civil and political rights dominated, but then gradually receded as economic, social, cultural, and social minority rights moved to the forefront. Third, we found substantial variation in categories and topics of attention between conservative and progressive news sources; that is, progressive news sources allocated substantially more discussion to diverse categories and topics than their conservative counterparts. These core findings lend support to imagery of a polarized embrace in which human rights are diffused yet in a highly polarized manner.

Introduction

Human rights discourse or information has received considerable attention in social science for the last few decades (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Gordon and Berkovitch 2007; Cole 2010; Fariss 2014). Scholars have devoted keen attention to monitoring reports, such as the US State Department's annual Country Reports, as well as human rights reporting in mass media (Ovsiovitch 1993; Bagozzi and Berliner 2016). This scholarly engagement has made great strides in depicting and deciphering the evolution of human rights. Past studies, however, have centralized a particular set of rights (i.e., civil and political rights), rather than treat the multifaceted concept holistically and synthetically. Scholarly works using such informative tools consequently have yielded a biased understanding of how human rights have evolved. Furthermore, past research has devoted scant attention to the role of the political slant of reporting agencies in selecting and framing topics and issues that cover human rights. Against this backdrop, this study

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offers new theoretical and analytical solutions to such limits and seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how human rights discourse evolves.

We constructed a framework useful in categorizing and/or systematizing the spectrum of human rights and analyzed a newly compiled data corpus comprising 101,689 South Korean newspaper articles—both right- and left-leaning—referencing the term "human rights." South Korea spearheaded a remarkable globalization drive during the 1990s by joining the United Nations in 1990 and becoming a Member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1997. The recognition of South Korea's global standing as a responsible national society required the country to demonstrate reasonable records of or willingness for human rights protection and promotion. In response, several government-sponsored human rights institutions—an ombudsman office (1994), a human rights commission (2001), and a truth and reconciliation commission (2005)—were adopted alongside corresponding legislations (Koo and Ramirez 2009). It was also the time when numerous human rights NGOs grew in number, monitoring as well as working with these official watchdogs and pressuring government to incorporate faithfully global human rights norms.

Consequently, the country shifted from a mediocre country with a tainted human rights profile to a country with a record closely paralleling those in the West (Koo 2017). This shift was perceived as particularly remarkable given that ideological competition with communist North Korea led South Korean citizens to prioritize national security over human rights, including the right to freedom of expression. Consider also the tactics used by the South Korean developmental state to repress labor rights, especially the right to assembly, in the course of accelerating economic development (Koo 2001). To address the unexpected but unequivocal rise of human rights norms and practices in South Korea, we focus on the country's media coverage as a case offering key insight into the trajectory and evolution of human rights.

Inspired by the Universal Index of Human Rights (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012), we created four categorizations of human rights that encompass eight topics, and analyzed them through 92 topical words found in South Korean media sources. Cooccurrence between the term "human rights" and these topical words—for example, a pair of human rights and education—substantiates these distinct categories of rights, as well as offering clues as to how the focus of human rights discussion changes. We test the utility of this conceptual framework against an unusual dataset collected for the first time by the authors through web scraping. With this predetermined framework, we pursue a deductive strategy, rather than an inductive tactic (Baggozi and Berliner 2016), which is an alternative approach we take in ongoing work using topic modeling. We collected data that encompass both conservative and progressive news sources: *Choson* and *Joongang,* on one hand, and *Hankyoreh* and *Kyungkyang,* on the other.

The analysis of these unusual data led us to reach several primary conclusions. First, South Korean media coverage demonstrates that human rights as a cultural symbol expanded tremendously in the country, consistent with the global expansion of human rights that occurred worldwide during the 1990s and 2000s. Second, there was an incredible degree of shift among multiple categories and topics of human rights during 26 years of that period. Initially, civil and political rights dominated, but they gradually receded as economic, social, cultural, and social minority rights moved to the forefront. Third, we found substantial variation in categories and topics of attention between conservative and progressive news sources. Progressive news sources allocated substantially more discussion to diverse categories and topics than their conservative counterparts, especially to civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we explore the evolution of human rights information and how topics and issues are disseminated and adopted by various human rights actors. Next, we discuss media reporting on human rights and inherent biases in human rights monitoring

tools. Then, we move to a discussion of a new framework that would reflect a more universal and balanced conception of human rights. Finally, we present our methodology and our core findings and discuss how our work can shed light on the current debate on the global diffusion of human rights.

Human rights information

In recent years, scholars of human rights have directed attention to the production and dissemination of human rights information and how topics and issues are adopted in informative documents. Human rights monitoring reports, such as Amnesty International's human rights reports or the US State Department's country reports, have received significant attention because they are perceived as comprising crucial information about human rights abuses globally. The perception that these monitoring reports could serve as a foundation for mobilizing resources, and that human rights actors could thus play crucial roles in naming and shaming countries, further increased this scholarly attention. For example, a recent emphasis in the study of monitoring reports focuses on how issues or topics are adopted and what consequences they generate in impact assessments, in terms of how much respect for human rights exists in individual countries each year (Bagozzi and Berliner 2016; Park, Murdie, and Davis forthcoming).

One important line of research focuses on the success and failure of norm adoption and the underlying conditions in which certain normative issues are more accepted than other issues (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Meyer 2010; Carpenter 2014). The manner in which norms are diffused is closely associated with the role of norm entrepreneurs and organizational conditions and tactics, as well as the global environment in which cultural flows and actors are embedded. Local actors promoting human rights constantly engage in issue generation by considering local needs and sympathizing with local cultural understanding. Advocacy groups or organizations select and adopt issues that fit their primary agendas and make it more likely that a campaign leads to success. Consequently, certain human rights issues receive more attention than others, and human rights monitoring reports squarely focus on and dramatize selected issues or topics.

The other relevant line of research focuses on the changing nature of human rights information and its unintended consequence of leading to an underestimation of the extent to which human rights are respected globally. Clark and Sikkink (2013) embarked on this unique approach, linking informational changes to a changing standard of accountability. They argued that increased access to abuse sites and expanding ideas of what constitutes human rights, along with an increase in coverage of rights, collectively contribute to increased accountability and incomparability of human rights information across time and space. Further developing this novel argument, Fariss (2014) considered this changing accountability and reexamined the level of protection of human rights through analysis of human rights monitoring reports, thus providing a competing claim that human rights have indeed improved.

The most recent trend in research explicitly addresses how issue or topic discussions change. Using highly sophisticated statistical modeling, scholars in this line of research focus on how discussion of human rights issues evolves and how allocation of attention to human rights topics shifts over time and space (Bagozzi and Berliner 2016). Although remaining exploratory, this research also addresses compounding factors associated with shifts in allocation of attention to human rights. Transforming monitoring reports into a large data corpus, one key study alludes to the possibility of a nexus between topical changes and level of human rights protection in each country (Fariss et al. 2015). Taking advantage of recent advancements in big data and machine learning, scholars have sought to provide a better-informed understanding of the evolution of human rights discourse in general and advocacy in particular.

Media reporting of human rights

Human rights reporting in the media has also received scholarly attention since the 1990s. Treating media as influential sources of human rights information, media scholars have analyzed how quantities as well as qualities of media coverage of human rights have changed, primarily focusing on Western media. More specifically, scholars have focused on the number of stories about international human rights, changes in types of human rights, and the extent to which media devotes adequate share of attention to rights-abusive countries (Ovisiovitch 1993; Cole 2010). Quantitatively oriented scholars have engaged in hypothesis testing in regard to an "information paradox" hypothesis—that is, by producing new information, activists can give the impression that human rights situations are getting worse, when in reality it only appears that way because people know more about them (Sikkink and Keck 1998). These different empirical studies are unified in that they recognize the media's ability to document human rights abuses, disseminate information, shape public opinion, influence public policy, and actively constitute social reality. On a positive note, media have the power to facilitate action that rectifies unjust social practices (Gordon and Berkovitch 2007).

For example, Geyer and Shapiro (1988) analyzed *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *CBS Evening News* and observed that human rights violations received a significant boost in these media outlets during the early presidency of Jimmy Carter, but later waned. Ovisiovitch (1993) followed this pioneering research path by analyzing human rights coverage in *The New York Times*, *Time*, and the *CBS Evening News* from 1978 to 1987, and concluded there was generally scant coverage of human rights during this time. This observation was echoed by Caliendo, Gibney, and Payne (1999), who noted a sharp reduction in the number of human rights stories from 1985 to 1995. Gordon and Berkovitch (2007) found similar results in their study of human rights discourse in Israel, where they concluded that, although human rights language had an earlier boost in a major Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, this discourse stopped expanding in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Scholars who continued in this research tradition in the 2000s devoted particular attention to factors associated with the North American media's coverage of international human rights, engaging in a cross-national analysis of allocation of attention to each rights-abusive country. Cole (2010) and Ramos, Ron, and Thoms (2007) concurred that coverage of human rights is not tainted by a human rights information paradox and observed that the Northern media are sensitive to the real patterns of human rights abuses. Neither newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, nor magazines, such as *The Economist* and *Newsweek,* displayed disturbing patterns of coverage devoting negligible attention to countries with tainted human rights records.

Our analysis of Korean print media has been mostly inspired by an early study by Ovisivitch (1993) as well as a recent study by Gordon and Berkovitch (2007), both of whom devoted careful attention to changes of issues or topics of media coverage. Their treatment of print media echoes the methods of pioneering political scientists who, equipped with sophisticated analytic techniques, approached human rights monitoring documents and deciphered the composition of rights topics and their evolution. Our effort was also propelled by the need to observe how human rights discourse is adopted and diffused in domestic settings, with a special emphasis on internal–internal diffusion processes (Gordon and Berkovitch 2007).

The analysis of human rights discourse—either the study of human rights informative change through human rights reports or that of media coverage of human rights—has made significant strides in documenting and explaining the evolution of human rights and discussing implications for human rights improvement. Yet this important trend of human rights scholarship is limited in two important respects. First, it centralizes only one category of human rights and, as such, provides a skewed depiction of how human rights evolve. Most scholarly studies are united in that human rights are almost always aligned with civil liberties and legal justice, rather than with

205 economic and social opportunities. The first generation of human rights is almost always pre-
206 ferred to the second generation of human rights. Second, literature—especially studies on human
207 rights media—provides minimal effort in explaining variations between print media with different
208 political or ideological perspectives. Little is known about how firmly entrenched journalistic
209 norms or political beliefs influence reporters' perceptions of, and responses to, human rights. We
210 elaborate on these points in the next section.

Two biases

214 Despite the claim that human rights are indivisible, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have
215 focused almost exclusively on civil and political rights, setting aside economic, social, and cultural
216 rights. For example, the US State Department's annual reports as well as Amnesty International's
217 reports, two authoritative sources for human rights information, focus on personal integrity rights
218 and fundamental civil liberties as well as government corruption and accountability. Those sour-
219 ces, however, are largely silent about how economic, social, and cultural rights are respected in
220 each country or society. Economic, social, and demographic issues received attention in monitor-
221 ing reports, especially in the 1980s, but the section on such issues was eventually phased out and,
222 consequently, discussion of the second generation of human rights declined dramatically (Bagozzi
223 and Berliner 2016). The only discernable topic derived from economic, social, and cultural rights
224 concerns labor rights, yet weight assigned to this category also declined dramatically from the
225 1990s, and consequently the spectrum of human rights has remained largely parochial.
226   The preference in human rights monitoring documents toward the first generation of rights
227 subsequently led to similar bias on scholarly studies that rely on the two pillars of human rights
228 reports. The Political Terror Scale (PTS) indices and the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) indexes—
229 two standards-based indicators measuring the extent to which a country respects personal integ-
230 rity rights—base their coding on the content of country reports published annually by the US
231 State Department as well as by Amnesty International. As a result, conceptions of human rights
232 in this line of research with use of PTS or CIRI data are narrowly construed, and human rights
233 recognized as a particular set of rights pervade in human rights scholarship (Poe and Tate 1994;
234 Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005; Murdie and Davis 2012). Studies addressing topics related to
235 economic and social rights have remained scarce or marginal, reflecting political and cultural
236 biases of a Western understanding of human rights (Welling 2008). Compounding matters, schol-
237 arly efforts to systematically investigate advancements in economic, social, and cultural rights
238 have been often hampered by a lack of adequate indicators (Koo, Kong, and Chung 2012).
239   The other bias or limit of previous investigations of human rights discourse stems from a neg-
240 lect of the salience of political slants of relevant agencies portraying how human rights evolve.
241 Yet political leanings influence perception of and responses to, for example, climate change as
242 well as human rights issues. The possibility that human rights are understood differently along-
243 side political perspectives has received some attention from scholars studying individual percep-
244 tions of and attitudes toward human rights, but it has not been adequately considered in
245 examining discursive development of human rights. In addition, the study of individual orienta-
246 tion of human rights attests that political liberals demonstrate higher levels of knowledge, aware-
247 ness, support, and behavior than political conservatives. They are more sensitive to lack of
248 government responsibility and failure to respect fundamental civil rights of persons in compari-
249 son to their conservative counterparts. Political liberals are more likely to support labor and wel-
250 fare rights and educational opportunities, often requiring a substantial redistribution of
251 accumulated wealth and resources. Research suggests that citizens' political biases play a role in
252 determining the level of support for crucial human rights public policies (Dotson, Jacobson, Kaid,
253 and Carlton 2012).

Given the intrinsic intersection between public opinion and media coverage, individuals' political biases may be also translated into media or journalistic norms and political origins, yet most studies of media coverage of human rights rarely account for the ideologically contested feature of rights and the likelihood that this feature squarely shapes how human rights are framed and justified. Media frame stories by recounting them from a certain perspective and by selecting and amplifying certain aspects or topics of subjects under consideration (Dotson et al. 2012). This framing is often propelled by media's political leanings, and this bias is more pronounced in covering economic, social, and environmental issues that are highly contested and debated. Variation in individuals' political perceptions may justify and impact ideological differences in media coverage or *vice versa*. It is with this mind that political norms of media shape media coverage of human rights and, more specifically, discussion of topics and issues substantiating human rights as a major guiding moral value. Scrutinizing media's portrayal of human rights, and how this depiction varies between liberal and conservative media, is imperative to provide a more balanced and nuanced understanding of human rights evolution.

Conceptualization of human rights: Moving beyond the current limits

With these biases or limits of past studies in mind, we seek to create and use a new framework that considers the multifaceted nature of rights and thus reflects a more universal and balanced conception of human rights. We derive this framework from ongoing efforts of the United Nations (UN) to harmonize and reconcile different perceptions of human rights despite existence of significant levels of dissonance over human rights among different nations and cultures. These efforts were subsequently substantiated by initiatives to categorize and measure spectrums of rights and thus to better monitor and evaluate implementation of human rights ideals. Use of categorization and measurements is perceived as facilitating a more concrete and effective communication among various stakeholders, making it easier to monitor and follow rights issues and outcomes in many parts of the globe (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012). What lies at the core of these new initiatives to broaden and substantiate human rights is the perception that better coordination and a more effective quantification propels more effective implementation of human rights norms (Wood and Gibney 2010).

UN human rights agencies, since the first decade of the twenty-first century, have embarked on projects to define, categorize, measure, and index human rights, and they based these endeavors on publications and reports issued by three key pillars of the UN human rights protection system: The Treaty Bodies, the Special Procedures, and the Universal Periodic Review. The UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a guide to measurement and implementation of human rights that discussed key theoretical and methodological consideration regarding meanings and boundaries of human rights. The committee on the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights directed attention to the need to substantiate, measure, and disseminate indicators of the extent to which country respects the second generation of human rights.

OHCHR made particular efforts to catalog and index key concerns and recommendations expressed by the three pillars of the UN human rights protection system. The Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI), for example, offers easy access to comprehensive information on human rights practices globally, and as such provides a more universal definition of human rights, carves out legitimate boundaries, and supplies a wide range of categories of rights. The index permits users to obtain a global and less-biased perspective of national and regional human rights development and thus has great potential to guide policymakers, practitioners, and scholars toward a fuller and more ideal conception of human rights.

OHCHR's efforts of human rights conception and categorization are anchored in three pillars of the UN's human rights protection system demonstrating proper functioning of a feedback loop

between nation-states and the UN. Consider, for example, processes by which treaty bodies collect, review, and respond to state and NGO reports in issuing Concluding Observations, a set of concerns and recommendations tailor-made for each national society (Koo et al. 2012). It is not a coincidence that categories and subcategories of the UHRI have broadened to incorporate feedback from local constituencies. These processes are consistent with the observation that human rights have been ceaselessly defined and redefined throughout history (Iriye, Goedde, and Hitchcock 2012) and are legitimated by the need for a more sustainable and embracing space for human rights as "locally owned and interpreted principles for political action" (Hopgood 2013: 9).

Table 1 summarizes the structure of the human rights framework used for our analysis. It is composed of four broad categories: civil and political rights (Category 1); economic, social, and cultural rights (Category 2); minority rights (Category 3); and implementation mechanisms (Category 4). Each category is composed of two corresponding topics, each of which subsequently includes words representing particular issues or aspects of each topic. Together, the structure may be expressed as a three-digit categorization with an upper category, a topic at the middle level, and an issue at the word level. The first three categories correspond to the first and second generations of human rights, as well as rights associated with disadvantaged populations, whereas Category 4 concerns institutional mechanisms that protect and promote these three substantive dimensions of human rights. Category 1 includes integrity and liberties (Topic 1) as well as justice and participation (Topic 2), whereas Category 2 naturally embraces economic and social rights (Topic 3), on one hand, and education, culture, and environments (Topic 4), on the other. Category 3 is differentiated in rights linked to traditional minorities or vulnerable groups (Topic 5), such as women, children, the disabled, and the elderly, and newly emerging minorities (Topic 6), such as laborers, the homeless, migrant women, homosexuals, and North Korean defectors. Category 4 concerns international institutions and norms (Topic 7) as well as domestic norms and organizations (Topic 8) crucial in implementing and realizing substantive rights addressed in other categories.[1]

Each of the eight topics at the middle level includes a set of words that effectively capture the content of each topic. For example, integrity and liberties, as topics under Category 1, include sixteen words pertaining to life, the death penalty, torture, human trafficking, disappearance, arrest, prosecutor, police, movement, thought, conscience, religion, association, assembly, and expression. Under Category 2, there are fourteen words pertaining to economic and social rights (Topic 3), including such issues as food, housing, sanitation, income, poverty, polarization, welfare, insurance, labor, labor conditions, labor union, health, healthcare, and disease. These words capture coherent sets of issues associated with conditions under which physical and economic survival may be fulfilled. Topic 6 under Category 3 reflects the rise and legitimization of various social minority or vulnerable groups that received growing attention in many parts of the globe, even though rights of North Korean defectors as well as those of "comfort women" reflect particularities only relevant to the Korean Peninsula. Domestic norms and institutions (Topic 8) under Category 4 encompass a combination of attention to national laws, human rights education, and human rights protection agencies at the local level. Thus, this category includes words pertaining to courts, domestic law, rulings, precedent, human rights education, civil society, NGOs, foundation, governance, and organization. (Proportions of each topic of human rights in each newspaper are presented in Online Appendix Table 1.)

How would the evolution of human rights be depicted if we use this comprehensive framework of human rights? How do different categories of rights compete or coevolve? Which categories receive more attention or legitimacy than others? What happens to more concrete topics, each of which is composed of several substantive topical words? What are the implications of shifts in emphasis of human rights in understanding the public's rights attitudes, improvements of rights practices, and how advocacy is conducted? We seek to answer these questions by

Table 1. Framework of human rights discourse.

1. Civil and political rights		2. Economic, social, and cultural rights	
Integrity and liberties	Justice and participation	Economic and social rights	Education, culture, and environment
life	trial	food	education
death penalty	jurisprudence	housing	university
torture	remedy	sanitation	school
imprisonment	reparation	income	corporal punishment
human trafficking	vote	poverty	ostracized
disappearance	election	polarization	bullying
arrest	elected	welfare	culture
prosecutor	information	insurance	science
police	right to information	labor	artistic works
movement	online	labor conditions	sports
thought	privacy	labor union	environment
conscience	safety	health	air pollution
religion		healthcare	yellow dust
association		disease	climate
assembly			greenhouse
expression			

3. Minority rights		4. Implementation mechanisms	
Old minorities	New minorities	International norms	Domestic law & institutions
disabled	foreigner	UN	courts
women	migrant women	human rights law	domestic law
children	refugee	treaties	ruling
adolescent	precarious work	ratification	precedent
elderly	laborer	international law	human rights education
	soldier		civil society
	sexual minority		NGO
	Korean-Chinese		foundation
	oversees Korean		governance
	North Korean defector		organization
	homeless		
	criminal suspects		
	ex-convict		
	leprosy		
	comfort women		

examining the case of South Korea with the example of media coverage. These are key questions to ask with the new conceptual framework we developed as well as novel large data we collected.

Methodology

The corpus of human rights discourse we compiled includes raw text of more than 108,000 South Korean articles referencing human rights published from 1990 to 2016 in four major newspaper outlets in South Korea: *Chosun* (19,382 articles), *Joongang* (20,089), *Hankyoreh* (36,045), and *Kyunghyang* (26,173).

To assemble this unprecedented, novel dataset, we web scraped all articles published in the four newspapers with the term "human rights" (*Inkwon* in Korean). These data were collected either through newspapers' official web pages (for *Chosun* and *Joongang*) or through Big Kinds, a news aggregator that provides raw texts of newspaper articles for *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang*. After retrieving all articles from the websites, we filtered and screened articles not related to human rights. For example, some articles were collected automatically because *Inkwon* was a part of another word, such as coupons (*Halinkwon*), and in some cases *Inkwon* emerged as a part of the name of a famous Korean celebrity, Inkwon Jeon.

While web scraping, we encountered but resolved numerous technical difficulties, such as tasks to adequately detect and remove special symbols and characters, and the process of refining only text of newspaper articles entailed complicated cleaning tasks. We deleted meta-information such as a writer of newspaper articles and news providers such as AP News. We also erased advertisements and additional news lists attached to selected news.

Using a cleaned corpus of articles from the four news sources, we counted the number of occurrences of each topical word in each news article. Then we calculated the average number of topical words used for each category or topic across news sources and by year. Based on the number of occurrences of each topical word, we also ranked them to see whether there was any difference in the list of words frequently mentioned across news sources. Although some articles contained a limited set of words exclusively pertaining to a single topic, there were also articles containing a list of words belonging to several topics, especially among editorials or feature articles on human rights. However, because we used the average number of topical words for each category or topic as the main outcome of interest, the fact that some articles belong to multiple topics does not affect the results. (By summing an indicator that denotes whether a word was mentioned in an article for each newspaper, we present thirty of the most frequently mentioned words in Online Appendix Table 2.)

Findings

Changes in references to human rights

Figure 1 presents a plot of coverage that reveals the temporal volume of newspapers included in the corpus. The figure demonstrates that the number of newspaper articles referencing human rights increased tremendously in the last two to three decades, from 1,248 articles in 1990, peaking at 7,127, in 2012, and then dropping to 5,526 in 2016. Nonetheless, a notable difference exists between conservative and liberal (or progressive) news outlets: The number of newspaper articles referencing human rights stopped increasing from the mid-2000s for *Chosun* and *Joongang*, two conservative news sources, whereas the number continued to increase throughout the 2010s for *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang*, two progressive news outlets.

Three distinctive cycle-like patterns are observable from this remarkable growth of human rights discourse. The first cycle of a modest growth emerged during 1990–1998, when South Korea experienced democratic transition and consolidation and suffered from the worst economic
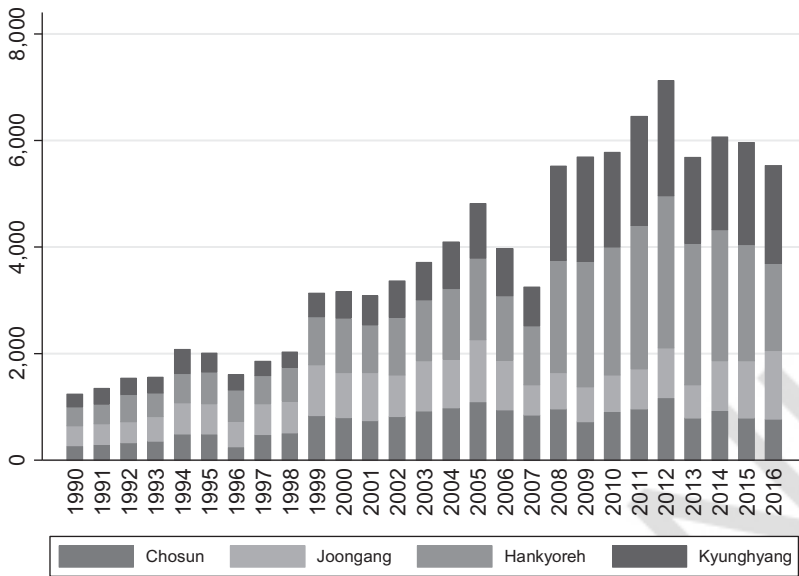
Figure 1. The number of newspaper articles referencing human rights by year from the four news sources, 1990–2016.

crisis in the country's recent history (1997–1998). The second cycle of remarkable growth started in 1999, when Kim Dae Jung initiated a progressive agenda while the country was recovering from economic turmoil, and ended with a downward trend in 2007, the last year of the second progressive presidency under Roh Moo Hyun. The most recent cycle began with another spike in coverage in 2008 associated with a mass protest against lifting the ban on American beef imports and subsequent government repression. This cycle ended with a decline of any notable developments under President Park Keun Hye and her apathetic approach to human rights.

South Korea's experiences of dizzying economic development and failure, as well as its strong desire to establish itself as a major world player, propelled the expansion of human rights discourse in the country during the period under study. In turn, this internal motivation was further facilitated by a wave of global human rights movements and the subsequent institutionalization of human rights laws and organizations worldwide.

Enhanced commitment to human rights issues is evidenced by an increase in the average number of human rights references in an article for four news sources, as suggested in Figure 2. *Hankyoreh* and *Kyunghyang* are more likely to use the term *human rights* than *Chosun* and *Joongang*, with the highest points reaching 3.5 in 2010 and 2012. In both years, average references to human rights in conservative outlets were between 2 and 2.5. Nonetheless, average references to human rights in the four news outlets follow a similar upward trend, with some exceptions in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in which average references in conservative media declined. Together, South Korean media coverage makes the case that human rights as a cultural symbol expanded remarkably in a national society, consistent with the patterns observed in other countries and corroborating a global expansion of human rights (Gordon and Berkovitch 2007).

Trends in media attention to human rights

Figure 3 shows the average reference of topical words that correspond to the four major categories of human rights in a newspaper article. It indicates how often topical words belonging to each category are likely to appear in a newspaper article. As such, it intuitively suggests how
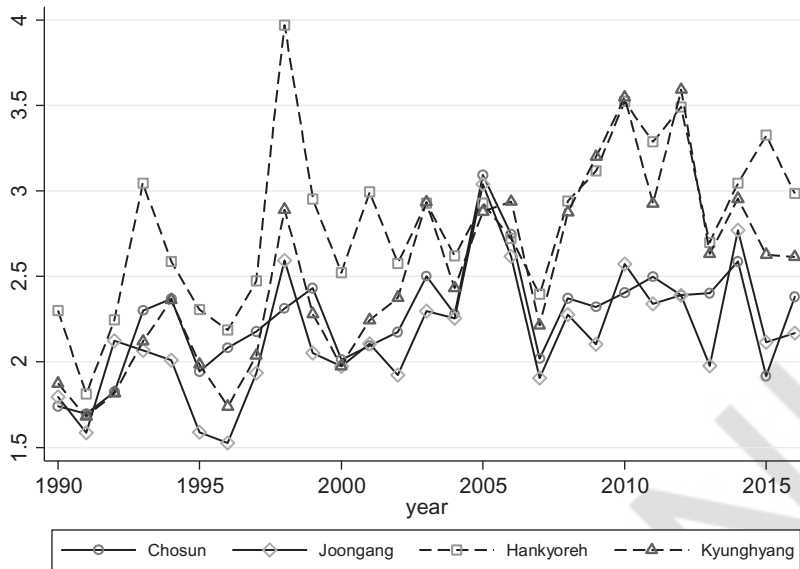
Figure 2. The average number of mentions of human rights for a newspaper article by year from the four news sources, 1990–2016.

larger themes of human rights have evolved and which category has gained more salience than others temporarily. The most dramatic feature of this longitudinal pattern concerns the shift of attention of discussion from civil and political rights (Category 1) to economic, social, and cultural rights (Category 2). In the early 1990s, Category 1 undoubtedly dominated media discussion and substantially exceeded attention to other categories of rights. Yet the tremendous level of attention to civil and political rights began to recede from the mid-1990s forward, and this downward trend lasted until the early 2000s, when attention rebounded and increased further. The apex was in 2008, with several top words referencing aspects of state repression of rights to assembly and association, such as police (6,852 times, #1), organization (4,224 times, #3), and association (3,432 times, #5). Anti-US beef import protests occurred throughout the country in 2008 and led to harsh government repression, lowering the level of human rights protection in South Korea.

By contrast, Category 2 remained parochial during the 1990s, but media attention exploded in the early 2000s, when attention to human rights increased generally in conjunction with the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea (NHRCK) in 2001. This remarkable shift of media attention occurred alongside "the digital information revolution" that radically diversified news sources, agencies, and topics. The common use of the worldwide web through PCs and mobile phones permitted multiple stakeholders to chime in and bring up "less sensational" but crucially important issues relevant to economic and social life of free citizens (Powers 2016). In this changing social and media environment, the newly adopted national human rights watchdog, NHRCK, drew attention to wider human rights issues than traditional personal integrity rights and thus ensured a more balanced and accurate coverage of rights. Figure 3 suggests that media attention to economic, social, and cultural rights hit an apex in 2010, and the most frequently referenced topical words included education (12,357 times, #1), school (6,050 times, #2), women (3,741 times, #5), and culture (2,763 times, #7). Frequent cooccurrence between human rights and education-related words—such as education and school— suggests that expansion at this point may have been spurred by increased public discussion of education in the context of human rights (e.g., corporal punishment as a human rights violation).
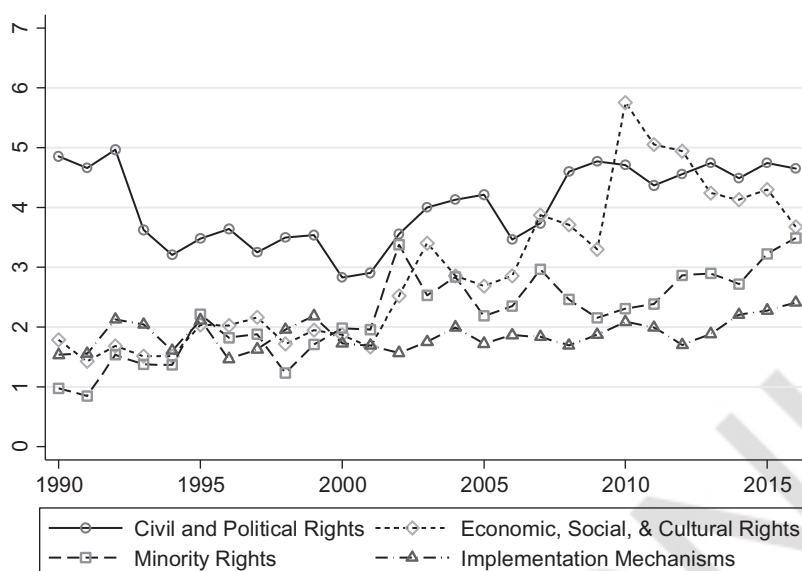
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Figure 3 also indicates how Category 3, associated with minority rights, entered this remarkable evolutionary process. The average reference of topical words related to social minorities remained at about 1 by the early 1990s, but recently this average increased to approximately 3.5, approaching to the level of attention to economic, social, and cultural rights in 2016 (3.7). The steep rise of this category is most notable during the second decade of the twenty-first century. The increased level of freedom of the press and public demands for the corresponding role of media professionalism might have facilitated the heightened coverage of vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the LGBTQ community (Whitten-Woodring 2016).

As a category representing cultural and institutional efforts to materialize the three substantive categories of human rights, Category 4 (implementation mechanisms) occupies a unique place in the human rights spectrum, but also received consistent attention from the media throughout the period under study. The level of attention, however, remained constant, with the range of 1.5 to 2.1 average references until 2013. Notably, the level of attention to this legal, institutional, and cultural arena shows an increasing trend since 2012.

Figure 4 provides a more detailed description of the changes of the four human rights streams by displaying flows of eight topics. Each category of rights is composed of two concrete topics. For example, Category 1 is paired with personal integrity rights and civil liberties. Personal integrity rights—emphasizing individuals' rights to life and bodily integrity—dominated the discourse of civil and political rights, although coverage waned during the second decade of the 2000s, with two conservative leaders in power. The second pair of Category 1—encompassing legal and political procedures, access to information, and privacy protection—was not discussed as much, but references to this topic robustly increased from the second decade of the twenty-first century. The enhanced legal professionalism, the rise of information society, and increased privacy concerns provide the launch pad for this internal shift of attention of civil and political rights.

Figure 4 reveals that both topics—economic and social rights, and education and culture—of Category 2 remained marginal throughout the 1990s, when global human rights discourse penetrated South Korea, yet the average number of references to this rights category addressing redistribution of resources, equity, and opportunities exploded from the first decade of the 2000s. Research suggests liberalization, privatization, and economic openness the country experienced in
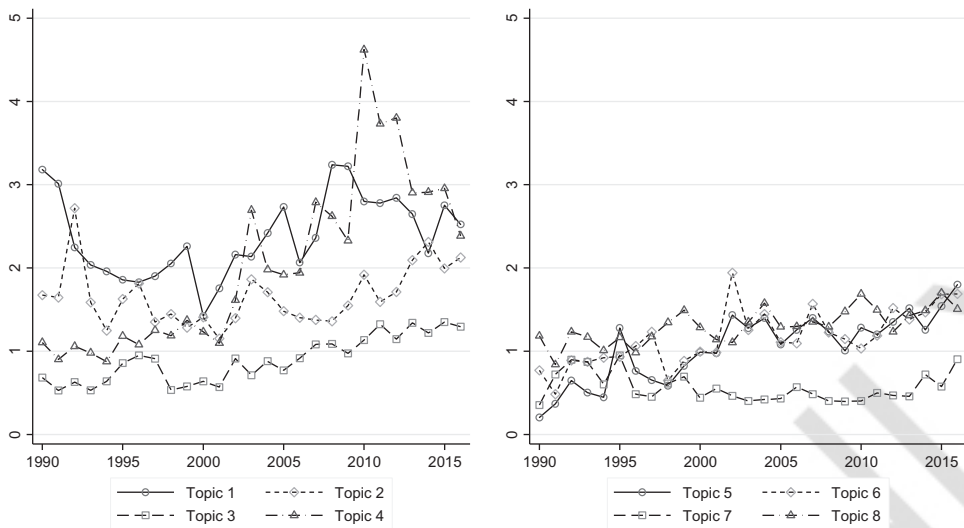
Figure 4. The average number of mentions of topical words in eight topics: Korean newspapers, 1990–2016. Note: Topic 1: integrity and liberties; Topic 2: justice and participation; Topic 3: economic and social rights; Topic 4: education, culture, and environment; Topic 5: old minorities; Topic 6: new minorities, Topic 7: international norms; Topic 8: domestic law and institutions.

the twenty-first century led to acceleration of economic inequality and the reduction in economic and social opportunities (Shin and Choi 2010). Resulting growth in attention to economic, social, and cultural rights from the 2000s forward produced a substantial level of variation between the topic of economic and social rights and the topic of educational, cultural, and environmental issues toward the later periods: Whereas general economic and health-related matters witnessed modest growth, educational, cultural, and environmental matters attracted dramatic attention, surpassing other categories and topics of human rights in media coverage during the second decade of the 2000s. The interplay between mass education and human rights might provide a clue as to how to make sense of this peculiar shift (Meyer, Bromley, and Ramirez 2010). The rise of the environmental justice frame and its fusion with a human rights perspective also contextualize the internal division and changes within this second generation of rights (Frank, Camp, and Boutcher 2010).

The noteworthy changes on two topics of Category 3 in Figure 4—traditional minorities and new minorities—involve similarities between these two trends. The category of minority rights experienced the most dramatic growth in media attention and is equally applied to both topics. Both topics display minimal variation and have received similar levels of attention throughout the period under study. This is a remarkable finding, because media seem to have devoted balanced attention to conventional minorities—including women, children, the disabled, and the elderly— and newly emerging minorities, which encompass migrants, the LGBT community, precarious workers, and North Korean defectors. Various migrants, including labor migrants and marriage migrants, entered the country around the late 1990s, and these two categories of social minorities coevolved and strengthened one another. The expanding scope of vulnerable populations attests to the diversified media environment, savvier tactics of human rights advocacy groups, and the public's improved capacity to frame minority issues as universal human rights issues.

For the last two to three decades, the international community, spearheaded by the UN, has accentuated the need to advance legal and organizational remedies as well as cultural environments for protection and promotion of human rights (Simmons 2009). With countries' ratifications of human rights treaties and conventions, a remarkable level of national incorporation has
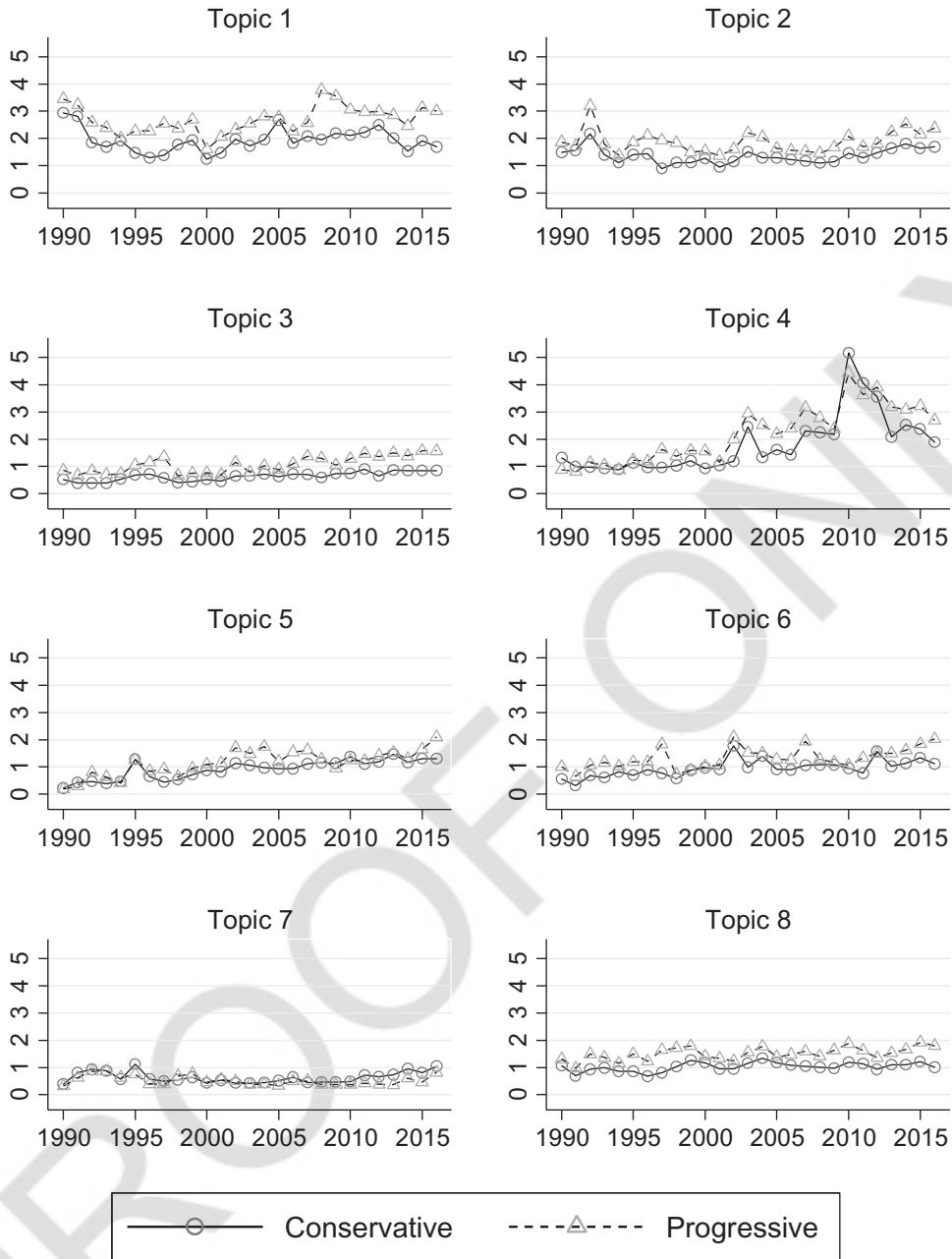
Figure 5. The average number of mentions of topical words in eight topics: conservative vs. progressive, 1990–2016. Note: Topic 1: integrity and liberties; Topic 2: justice and participation; Topic 3: economic and social rights; Topic 4: education, culture and environment; Topic 5: old minorities; Topic 6: new minorities; Topic 7: international norms; Topic 8: domestic law and institutions.

unfolded, creating domestic or local legal procedures (Koo and Ramirez 2009). It is in this context that the international community emphasized implementation mechanisms as crucial in complying with global human rights norms and stressed "localizing" or "domestication" tactics as a way to internalize externally imported social values. It appears that South Korean media devoted scant attention to international norms and institutions related to human rights, yet references to the domestic legal and institutional arena as well as to cultural spaces, increased substantially.

Variation in coverage between conservative and progressive media

Contrary to past studies that largely neglected the role of political biases in framing media coverage, we address how political perceptions of the media matter in selecting and framing media coverage of human rights. South Korea provides an illustrative case in that it has been deeply polarized regarding security issues, which is often closely linked to how the country deals with its hostile North Korean neighbor. *Hankyoreh* was founded and gained organizational legitimacy around the June Uprising and associated prodemocracy movements in 1987–1988, and spearheaded publishing stories about the need to advocate democracy in South Korea. *Kyunghyang* followed suit, differentiating itself from mainstream news sources such as, *Chosun* and *Joongang*, which grew and gained substantial market share under authoritarian governments without provoking such governments. This inertia has perpetuated the current media environment, in which conservative media is more favorable toward conservative governments and political agendas; by contrast, progressive media often favor liberal governments and their agendas that espouse extending freedom of assembly and association, expanding media freedom, and tolerating political dissidents.

The media thus played an instrumental role in producing and reproducing polarized perceptions of how to address national security, and the subsequently divided readership contributed to the perpetuation of this polarization. With this in mind, we compare and contrast variations between conservative and progressive news sources in the context of human rights discussion.

Figure 5 shows how conservative and liberal news sources have responded differently to eight topics of human rights from 1990 to 2016. The most notable pattern shows that progressive news sources allocated substantially more attention to most human rights topics than conservative news sources, except for Topic 7 (concerning international norms), where the pattern is reversed. The differences between these two media sources appear to be most remarkable in Topics 1–4, corresponding to the first and second generations of human rights (Categories 1 and 2), than in Topics 5–8, related to minority rights and implementation mechanisms (Categories 3 and 4).

Comparing Topic 1 and Topic 2, there appears to be more divergence in Topic 1 than in Topic 2, suggesting that more disagreement exists between conservative and liberal news sources when considering personal integrity and liberty than when examining justice and participation. A remarkable divergence is also notable when examining the evolution of economic and social rights (Topic 3), yet the difference becomes narrower when analyzing the trajectory of education, culture, and environment (Topic 4). Conservative news sources provided as much coverage as liberal news outlets when reporting about educational, cultural, and environmental issues, especially during early 2010s. Consider, for example, the ongoing debate regarding how to conceptualize and balance between rights of students and teachers, with conservative media accentuating the need to preserve teachers' autonomy and discretion in classrooms (Kang 2002).

To the contrary, the difference between conservative and liberal news sources remains marginal when the attention was given to minority rights, Topics 5 and 6. But nuanced differences seem to exist in which more divergence occurs in coverage of new minorities (Topic 6), including the LGBT community, than in conventional minorities (Topic 5), such as women, children, and people with disabilities. A similar pattern recurs when examining Topics 7 and 8. A nearly identical pattern of coverage appears on the topic of international norms (Topic 7), with slightly more increased attention from conservative print media toward the second decade of twentieth century. In the analysis of Topic 8, however, liberal media show consistently heightened interests in domestic law and institutions than do conservative print media, an important observation suggesting which side might be more committed to change on rights practices.

Substantively, Topics 5–8, corresponding to Categories 3 and 4, appear to be the areas in which both camps of South Korean print media had fewer gaps in discussions of related rights, suggesting that minority rights as well as implementation mechanisms are subject to less contestation than other substantive areas of rights. Considering different types of social minorities,

however, there is more agreement on the level of attention when considering women, children, the disabled, and the elderly. By contrast, both camps of media diverge significantly on the manner in which rights of new minorities should be addressed, especially LGBT rights. Considering Topics 7–8 (Category 4), however, there is more agreement in global norms and institutions (Topic 8) and more disagreement in domestic laws and institutions (Topic 7), an interesting finding corroborating that conservative media are generally more interested in global issues than progressive media (Koo and Kim 2016).

Conclusion

According to Pinker (2014), we live in a world that better embraces human rights and tolerance than any other time in human history. Yet this embrace is often highly debated and subject to controversies in contemporary society in regard to conceptual boundaries of rights and their significance *vis-à-vis* other competing social values. The rise of isolationism, ethnic nationalism, and supremacist perceptions make the contested embrace ever more controversial and complicated (Hopgood 2013; Posner 2014). Our findings of South Korean media coverage of human rights lend support to the claim that the path to human rights embrace is by no means straightforward and is largely shaped by political perspectives and ideological stances of societal members. The *polarized embrace*, as a conception, captures this worldly reality and characterizes the manner in which mass media zoom in and out of human rights topics and issues. How this polarized embrace takes shape, the manner in which it shapes individual perception and behavior, and how this disagreement affects public policy all offer promising areas of future research.

Scholars have demonstrated persuasively the global expansion of human rights with diverse empirical cases at institutional and organizational levels. Nonetheless, they have largely failed to prove that this is the case in considering changes at the discursive or reporting level. Several studies examining the US media revealed fluctuations in coverage, but noted a decline in coverage of human rights violations in many parts of the world (Caliendo et al. 1999). A study of the Israeli media's coverage of human rights presented a trend much like what was found in the US media (Gordon and Berkovitch 2007). Our analysis makes the case that discursive development may also need to be framed within the larger context of the global diffusion of human rights. It is not coincidence that the expansion and diversification of media coverage in South Korea occurred concomitantly with the rise and expansion of global human rights movements, suggesting the impacts of global institutional and cultural influences (Simmons 2009; Sikkink 2017).

A recent study of the Northern American media's coverage of human rights proved that the media in the Western hemisphere focus more heavily on civil and political rights than on economic, social, and cultural rights, and thus the first generation of human rights clearly dominates the landscape of human rights discourse in the West (Ramos et al. 2007). A more recent account suggested that major international human rights NGOs began to gravitate toward rights issues in the Western countries and thus address more of a wider set of human rights concerns, including economic and social rights (Winston and Pollock 2016). Our findings suggest that there was a notable shift from civil and political rights to economic, social, and cultural rights in print media in South Korea as one of the G8 economic superpowers. Remarkable economic growth, rapid political and cultural globalization, and an aging society may keep the South Korean print media's attention on the economic, social, and cultural agenda. The question of to what extent this shift is generalizable to other parts of the globe, especially the Global North, is worth investigating, and thus future research must address the magnitude and impact of such a shift on the evolution of human rights and forces responsible for the intriguing social change.

It is dangerous, however, to present major findings of this analysis either as results of real changes in human rights practices or as manifestations of changes in public attitudes unless more

817 research is conducted and media's medicating roles are clarified. Although with great potential to
818 represent either rights practices or public attitudes (Pollock 2017), the media operate with consid-
819 erable independence and attain autonomous space. There still is a strong belief that professional
820 journalism and the press play a crucial editorial role in partnering with citizens and NGOs, and
821 in monitoring the government. It further suggests that rigorous editorial process of traditional
822 journalism should not be dismissed when citizens around the world celebrate the use of new
823 media, blogs, and other unconventional ways of communication (Powers 2016).

824 To be more confident about the mediating yet leading role of media journalism, however, it is
825 crucial to understand tone and deeper nuances of media coverage that would enable researchers
826 to assess if increase in coverage of certain topics leads to more favorable or unfavorable aware-
827 ness. Determination of positivity or negativity associated with coverage would bring researchers
828 closer to answers as to how changes in human rights topics have influenced the public's attitude,
829 policy stances, and rights practices. The argument of polarized embrace can be further benefited
830 from and evidenced by this determination of tones alongside the conservative and progres-
831 sive division.

832 Q12 Unlike Prichard's (1991) early claim that increased coverage of human rights in the US media
833 is responsible for increased awareness as well as heightened level of support, we refrain from
834 making such a bold argument. Instead of uncritically romanticizing media advocacy, we are cau-
835 tious about drawing conclusions on the impacts of media coverage. Further research is required
836 to study the complicated intersections between discourse, attitudes, and policymaking. This future
837 investigation must devote close attention to how discursive development affects public opinion
838 and vice versa. How policymakers respond to changes in public attitudes and media coverage is
839 also a research subject requiring systematic investigation.

Note

1. The fourth dimension of Implementation Mechanisms could potentially include "media" or "media institutions," which serve as "agents" in changing human rights norms and practices, and thus their importance deserves special attention. At the current version, the UHRI lacks attention to the roles of mass media. In the fragmented media environment with the rise of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, media professionals can play significant gate-keeping roles in determining the veracity of individuals' human rights claims (Winston and Pollock 2016). We are grateful to the anonymous reviewer who brought this issue to our attention.

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