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To cite this article: Kisun Kim & Saif Shahin (2019): Ideological parallelism: toward a transnational understanding of the protest paradigm, Social Movement Studies

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1681956

Published online: 28 Oct 2019.
Ideological parallelism: toward a transnational understanding of the protest paradigm

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\begin{abstract}
This study advances the protest paradigm as a \textit{transnational} theory by examining how ideological affiliations within and across national borders influence the framing of a protest movement. Our empirical focus is the coverage of the 2016–17 South Korean ‘candlelight’ protests to oust conservative President Park Gyun-hye in Korean and US newspapers. Content analysis of 6 months of coverage suggests that liberal publications in both nations (Kyunghyang Shinmun and New York Times) were supportive of the movement, framing the protests as large yet peaceful and relying on protesters for information. In contrast, the conservative press in the US (Wall Street Journal) was closer in its coverage to Korea’s conservative publication (Chosun Ilbo), which was defensive of Park and her supporters. We argue that ideological affinities can operate beyond national boundaries – what we term ‘ideological parallelism’ – to make news organizations sympathetic or hostile toward a social movement. But nationalist sentiments also remain significant to the extent that a foreign (Korean) social movement affects a nation’s (US) foreign policy. We identify a novel framing device – Gaze – under which the coverage of both US newspapers converged and considered the adverse implications of candlelight protests for America’s relations with South Korea and its containment of North Korea and China. We also show how the US media’s Gaze recursively shapes South Korean press coverage, indicating that transnational protest frames impact local perceptions of social movements and can potentially influence their legitimacy and outcome.
\end{abstract}

Media coverage has, for at least half a century, been viewed as key to the success of a protest movement. Antiwar demonstrators in 1968 Chicago chanted ‘the whole world is watching’ as they were thrashed by the police, referring to television cameras beaming the crackdown into living rooms (Gitlin, 1980). But a substantial body of research argues that the news media are, for the most part, inimical to protest movements – framing them as motley groups of violent radicals disrupting the social order. Beginning with Gitlin’s classic study of news coverage of the 1960s antiwar movement, aptly titled \textit{The Whole World Is Watching}, media critics have argued that institutional linkages between the news media and the nation’s political elite lead journalists to assume a pro-administration stance and delegitimize protesters and their
concerns (Boyko ff, 2007; Hertog & McLeod, 1995). Empirical evidence for this theory, known as the protest paradigm, comes from the framing of protests in national – typically US – news coverage (McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Rauch et al., 2007).

Recently, though, scholars have begun to identify a number of limitations to the protest paradigm (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012; Wouters, 2015). One of these limitations is the influence of ideology. Evidence from both within and outside the US suggests that media coverage of protest movements is not always hostile: news organizations that are ideologically opposed to an administration are likely to be sympathetic to movements challenging it (Shahin, Zheng, Sturm, & Fadnis, 2016; Weaver & Scacco, 2013). This argument echoes Shoemaker and Reese (2014) hierarchy of influences model, which considers ideology to be a higher level of influence on news content than institutionalism.

Building on this line of research, our study advances the protest paradigm as a transnational theory by examining how a protest movement is covered not only by domestic media but also in the foreign press. Specifically, we look at how ideological affinities operating within and beyond national boundaries influence the framing of a protest movement. This is by no means the first look at transnational reporting of protests (Ghobrial & Wilkins, 2015; Kilgo, Harlow, García-Perdomo, & Salaverría, 2018). But extant research tends to assume that the protest paradigm would operate transnationally in the same way as it operates within a nation – a fallacious assumption because institutionalized press-state linkages do not extend across national borders the way they do within. Therefore, little effort has been made to theorize the protest paradigm in transnational coverage. Taking this scholarship to the next stage, our study proffers a systematic understanding of the protest paradigm as a transnational phenomenon, driven not only by institutional but also by ideological affiliations – or what we call ‘ideological parallelism.’

The empirical focus of our analysis is the South Korean ‘candlelight’ protest movement – a series of public demonstrations that started at the end of October 2016, calling for President Park Gyun-hye to step down following accusations of corruption and abuse of power. Soon after, Park’s supporters started staging counter-protests, known as taegukgi (flag) rally. Our study examines the framing of these protests in two Korean dailies, one conservative (Chosun Ilbo) and one liberal (Kyunghyang Shinmun). In addition, we study how two US publications – the conservative Wall Street Journal and the liberal New York Times – covered these protests.

Our study makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, we integrate the insights of recent research on media framing of protests with Shoemaker and Reese (2014) hierarchy of influences model to advance the protest paradigm as a transnational theory, enunciating the interplay of both institutional and ideological factors as well as their limitations. Second, while underlining the importance of some well-established news framing devices that constitute the protest paradigm, such as the cause, size, and violence of protests and source of information, we also identify a new framing device – gaze – or how the Global North views the Global South, and how this, in turn, shapes the way a nation from the Global South views itself. Our study illustrates how global and particularly US media portrayals of protests – the whole world watching, so to speak – can recursively shape local coverage, potentially influencing public as well as elite attitudes toward the protests and contributing to their success or failure.
Korean and US media systems

The end of authoritarianism in South Korea nearly three decades ago brought about wide-ranging social, economic, and political changes. The nation’s media system today is a product of those changes, even as it has itself contributed to those expediting those changes (Yang, 2007). Son, Kim, and Choi (2012) identified three vital and interrelated features of Korean media: fierce competition, political polarization, and the influence of advertisers. Liberalization in the late 1980s prompted the growth of the media industry, which in turn sharpened the competition among newspapers and television channels for a relatively small media market.

Although news organizations were now formally independent and autonomous, ‘major newspapers still allied themselves with political power factions to protect their interests in the competitive market’ (Son et al., 2012, p. 66). Business competition and political polarization thus split the Korean media into ideologically distinct conservative and liberal factions, which often clash with each other publicly. Declining profits and loss of audience in recent years have further entrenched this ideological cleft as media businesses also compete for advertising revenue to sustain themselves. The newspapers Chosun Ilbo and Dong-Allbo are considered to be the conservative mainstream, while Kyunghyang Shinmun and Hankyoreh belong to the liberal side of the ideological aisle (Ha & Shin, 2016).

In their highly regarded theoretical modeling of North American and West European media systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004) classified the US media system as part of the Liberal Model along with Canada, Britain, and Ireland. Key features of this model include the early development of liberal institutions, strong role of the market, democratic pluralism tending toward majoritarianism, and a strongly developed rational-legal authority. On the strength of these features, the US media system is supposed to be highly professionalized and exhibit low ‘political parallelism.’ In other words, Hallin and Mancini do not expect differences among media organizations to reflect the nation’s partisan cleavage. Instead, each publication is supposed to practice ‘internal pluralism’ by giving voice to all sides. The state is expected to play a limited role and journalistic autonomy is constrained by commercial rather than political pressures.

Lately, though, many of these characteristics have been thrown in doubt. Empirical studies have revealed a sharp ideological division in the US media industry that parallels the country’s conservative/liberal (or, more precisely, Republican/Democratic) partisan divide. Moreover, news publications do not always represent all sides: on a range of issues, they tend to favor either the conservatives or the liberals and are in turn favored by either a conservative or a liberal clientele (Stroud, 2010). For instance, Fox News and the Wall Street Journal are regarded as conservative, while MSNBC and the New York Times are supposed to be liberal (Shahin, 2016; Weaver & Scacco, 2013). Lawrence (2010) has noted that while there is an ideological divergence in how the US media report on domestic policy and especially elections, these distinctions disappear in the coverage of foreign policy and national security issues.

Candlelight protests in Korea

South Korea’s ‘candlelight’ protests were a series of agitations demanding the removal of President Park Gyun-hye, who was accused of abusing political power, extortion, leaking
confidential information, and bribery (Ahrens, 2016). Beginning at the end of October 2016, Koreans numbering hundreds of thousands – millions by some counts – gathered at public places across the nation, lighting candles and calling on the conservative leader to step down. The candlelight protests carried on for more than 5 months and are widely regarded as the biggest protest movement in Korea in a decade (Chang, 2017).

The main allegation against Park related to her relationship with Choi Soon-sil, a confidante who allegedly misused her connection with the President to extort millions of dollars from business conglomerates (Feith, 2017; Kim, 2016). Park was also accused of revealing confidential information to Choi, giving her undue influence over the affairs of the government, and even letting her edit presidential speeches (Ahrens, 2016; Ock, 2016). As protests continued to grow, the Korean national assembly impeached Park on December 2016 and the decision was upheld by the constitutional court in March 2017. She was sentenced in April to serve 24 years in prison.

Dissatisfaction with Park was extremely high. In a Gallup Korea (2016) poll, 91% of the participants said she was not performing well as President and 81% supported her impeachment. Nonetheless, about 3 weeks after the candlelight protests began, supporters of the President also spilled into plazas to hold counter-protests called the taegukgi rally (Kang, 2017). Waving the Korean flag, they claimed that Park was a victim of ‘pro-North Korean leftists’ and the press, and demanded that all Koreans participating in the candlelight protests be arrested (Economist, 2017).

The protest paradigm

Protest movements rely on the mainstream news media to spread their message, gain symbolic legitimacy, mobilize the masses, and achieve their objectives (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Gitlin, 1980). However, decades of research suggested that the news media are typically hostile toward various protest movements – a phenomenon that has come to be known as the protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984). Shoemaker’s (1982) experimental study showed that participants who read news articles ridiculing protesters perceived them as ‘less legitimate.’

McLeod and Hertog (1999) defined the protest paradigm as a ‘routinized pattern or implicit template for the coverage of social protest’ (p. 310). Scholars have identified various elements of this template – or ‘framing devices’ – that lead to the delegitimization of protests (see Shahin et al., 2016, for a comprehensive overview). For instance, media coverage of protests tends to disregard the political, social, or economic cause that protesters are agitating for (Boyle et al., 2012). News reports are likely to provide conservative estimates of the size of protests (Mann, 1974) and highlight any violence that takes place at rallies and demonstrations (Hertog & McLeod, 1995). In addition, journalists rely more on administrative sources for information – government officials, police personnel and so on – than protesters themselves (McFarlane & Hay, 2003).

Why does coverage in mainstream media delegitimize protest movements? Scholars have long argued that the news media function as agents of the status quo (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) on account of journalistic norms and practices (Breed, 1955) and their close relations with the political elite (Bennett, 1990). The protest paradigm is viewed as another instance of the news media’s pro-status quo orientation, obtaining from their institutional linkages with the nation’s elite (Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1995). Boykoff
(2007) argued that mass media were veritable instruments of state repression of dissent and media coverage did ‘more harm than good’ to protest movements (p. 227).

In recent years, though, as protest locations and protesters’ causes and tactics have diversified, the understanding that news media are always inimical to protest movements has come to be questioned. Scholars have identified a number of factors – from where the protests take place to protesters’ causes and tactics – that influence the protest paradigm and indicate that protest coverage is more nuanced than traditionally assumed (Boyle et al., 2012; Lee, 2014; Taylor & Gunby, 2016; Wouters, 2015). A major factor is ideology – not any particular ideology as such but the ideological affinity between protesters and the media. Various studies have showed that sections of the media that are ideologically opposed to the administration tend to be sympathetic toward protest movements challenging the status quo. Weaver and Scacco (2013) found that right-leaning US cable TV channels such as Fox News were relatively supportive of the right-wing Tea Party movement than left-leaning channels such as MSNBC (see also, Boyko & Laschever, 2011). In a comparative study of protests in Brazil, China, and India, Shahin et al. (2016) argued that conservative media would be less likely to employ the protest paradigm if the protesters were espousing conservative causes or supporting a conservative government, and the liberal media would do the same for movements that had a liberal orientation.

Ideological affinities thus appear to undercut the institutional linkages that produce the protest paradigm. This interplay echoes Shoemaker and Reese (2014) hierarchy of influences model, which places ideology above institutionalism as an influence on news coverage. The model has five levels of influence of decreasing scope and significance: social systems, social institutions, organizations, routine practices, and individual backgrounds. The social systems level examines diffuse and immaterial ‘structures’ – ideological, cultural, political, and economic – which underpin the operation of ‘systems’ that may be global in scope. The level of social institutions problematizes direct and material linkages between the ‘component parts’ of social systems – or institutions such as the news media, political parties, business corporations and so on. The subsequent level of organizations focuses on news firms and their operations, news routines deals with the day-to-day practices of journalists and other ‘news workers,’ while the individual level of analysis examines how the identities and beliefs of particular journalists influence newsmaking. Shoemaker and Reese note that these levels are ‘conceptually related’ but also have ‘sufficient unique attributes … to justify studying them separately’ (p. 134).

The social systems level subsumes the level of social institutions, according to the model. Ideology is ‘perhaps the most important’ feature of the social systems level of influence (p. 70). Although Shoemaker and Reese understand ideology in terms of constructs such as capitalism and democracy, we argue that sociopolitical ideologies like conservatism and liberalism should also be viewed as operating at this level because of their diffuse and immaterial character and global scope.

Transnational coverage of protests

While protest paradigm research has traditionally focused on the US and, to some extent, Western Europe (Benson, 2013; Ferree, Gamson, Rucht, & Gerhards, 2002), the explosion
of protest movements in the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America since 2011 has sparked scholarly interest in the media coverage of protests in the Global South – which broadly includes relatively underdeveloped and formerly colonized parts of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Pagel, Ranke, Hempel, & Köhler, 2014). Several studies have looked at how the news media in nations such as Brazil, Egypt, Israel, India, and China/Hong Kong framed domestic protests (Chan & Lee, 1984; Mourão, 2018; Shahin et al., 2016). An interesting new line of inquiry is the coverage of protests in one country by the media of another country – or what we call ’transnational’ coverage.

Harlow and Johnson (2011) examined how the print version of New York Times covered the 2011 Egyptian revolution in comparison with a blog and the Twitter feed of a journalist. They found that the newspaper adhered much more to the protest paradigm, hyping up violence at protest sites, relying on official sources, and devaluing protesters’ causes. Ghobrial and Wilkins (2015), however, observed that American publications were more likely to use Egyptian protesters and their own (American) government officials as sources compared with newspapers in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Boyle et al. (2012) examined the coverage of diverse protests in 13 newspapers – six North American, four Asian, and three Middle Eastern – over 2 years. Their hypothesis that ’protests in Asia and other non-North American locations would be treated more critically than North American protests’ received partial support (p. 134). However, they found ’no distinctions between individual papers within regions and their treatment of protesters’ (p. 138). Kilgo et al. (2018) compared the coverage of a US and a Mexican protest movement in the US media, finding that news reports ’emphasized legitimizing frames for foreign protests more than domestic protests.’

Such research is significant because in a mediatized world, transnational coverage – particularly US media coverage – can shape global perceptions of protest movements taking place in various countries and provide or deny symbolic legitimacy to protesters (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). To better understand its significance, we draw on post-colonial theory, particularly the concept of ’gaze,’ explained by Said (1978) as the colonizer’s view of its colonized subject in terms of its value for the colonizer, which simultaneously objectifies the colonized subject and normalizes its supposed inferiority. Crucially, because this asymmetrical relationship is normalized, the colonized subject, too, comes to view itself from the same gaze – as an object that should understand its own value in terms of its worth for the colonizer. Although traditionally found in novels and other literary texts, more recent literature has noted how the postcolonial gaze also shapes media and policy narratives in the Global South (Shahin, 2015; Shome, 2016). This is especially significant in the context of protests – postcolonial gaze, as evinced in the media coverage of the Global North, can potentially shape how the media, political elite, and the public in the Global South evaluate domestic protests. Specifically, their sympathy or hostility toward protesters may be determined by how the protests might influence their relationship with – or value for – the Global North, specifically the US. It can, therefore, be a key framing device in transnational protest coverage.

Scholarship on transnational news coverage of protests thus far presents a mixed bag of findings and offers little clarity over when and how the protest paradigm might be applicable. This is partly because the research designs employed in these studies are not geared to develop a theoretical argument for the presence of the protest paradigm in transnational contexts. Scholars have assumed that the paradigm would operate
transnationally for the same reasons as it does in national contexts. This is fallacious: the institutional linkages between the news media and political elite that exist within a nation – and explain the protest paradigm in national news coverage – do not carry over transnationally. As Shahin et al. (2016) noted, making such an assumption is an example of ‘conceptual stretching,’ or applying concepts in contexts they were not meant for (Sartori, 1970).

However, ideological affinities may be expected to endure transnationally (Murillo & Schrank, 2005; White, 2014). It is possible that conservative media organizations share the same worldview as a conservatively oriented protest movement in another country – even absent any institutional ties between them. In the same way, liberal publications may concur with the reasons for which liberal protesters spill into the streets in a different nation (Ha & Shin, 2016). As ideological affinities are already known to structure news coverage of protests within a nation, we can surmise that they might also do so transnationally – a phenomenon we call ‘ideological parallelism.’ But in what ways and to what extent? Also, how would ‘nationalist’ differences – for instance, variations in news audience and news organizations’ commitment to their own nation’s identities and interests – play out in transnational coverage?

The broad objective of our study is to address these concerns. To guide our empirical analysis, we, therefore, ask the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What framing devices were used in the news coverage of Korean candlelight protests?

**RQ2:** How did ideological differences among publications influence their use of various framing devices?

**RQ3:** How did national differences among publications influence their use of various framing devices?

**Method**

The purpose of our study is to understand the news framing of the 2016–17 Korean protests and, specifically, how ideological and national differences influenced the framing process. To do so, we analyzed the coverage of the protests from a six-month period, beginning with the protests against President Park Gyun-hye on 1 November 2016 all the way to 30 April 2017 – that is, over a month after her impeachment over corruption charges was upheld. We focused our analysis on two Korean and two US publications. From Korea, we selected the conservative *Chosun Ilbo* and the liberal *Kyunghyang Shinmun*. The US sample was drawn from the conservative *Wall Street Journal* and the liberal *New York Times*. Coverage was sampled from the Factiva news archive. Three search terms were used to extract news articles: ‘Park Gyun-hye,’ ‘impeachment,’ and ‘candlelight.’ After removing duplicates and irrelevant articles, we were left with a corpus of 111 articles from *Chosun Ilbo*, 193 from *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, 32 from the *Wall Street Journal*, and 51 from the *New York Times* (N = 387).

Drawing on Reese (2001), we defined frames as ‘organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’ (p. 11). Our frame analysis adopts a qualitatively driven mixed-methods
design. An initial inductive analysis guided by previous research enabled us to identify five generic frames across the four publications – Cause, Size, Violence, Source, and Gaze. Cause refers to whether or not news reports explicitly mention the reasons for the protests. Size refers to the number of protesters who gather at rallies and demonstrations. Violence refers to clashes between protesters and the police. Source refers to the type of information sources that news reports rely on. In addition to these four framing devices that have also been discussed in previous protest paradigm research, we identified a new framing device, Gaze, referring to how the world – especially the US – views the protests and how such perceptions, in turn, affect a nation’s international standing.

To enhance validity, the presence of these frames was subsequently quantified. Cause was measured with four operational values: ‘Park’s illegal use of power,’ ‘trial for Park’s impeachment,’ ‘response to the candlelight protests,’ and ‘other.’ Size was operationalized as the explicit qualification of protests as ‘small’ or ‘large.’ The number of protesters, if noted in a story, was recorded separately. Violence was measured as descriptions of the protests as ‘violent’ or ‘peaceful’ – the latter being used only when a story explicitly called the movement peaceful rather than simply neglected to talk about violence. Source was measured as a single variable with five values – ‘officials,’ ‘candlelight protesters,’ ‘counter-protesters,’ ‘citizens,’ and ‘other.’ Officials included government and police officials as well as political leaders. As a story could have more than one source, our coding recorded the first source quoted, which was presumed to indicate how the news organization framed the story. Finally, Gaze was measured across two dimensions: domestic consequences and international consequences. Domestic consequences referred to the supposed fallout of the candlelight protests in South Korea, with the operational values of ‘democracy,’ ‘social unrest,’ and ‘other.’ International consequences related to the impact of candlelight lights protests on US–South Korea relations and US containment of North Korea.

Three coders were used for the quantitative content analysis. Intercoder reliability was determined over 20% of the sample. Cohen’s kappa ranged from 0.82 (violence) to 1.0. Following the coding, we cross-tabulated the presence of all frames publication-wise to look at similarities and differences in framing across publications. As our data represented the population of coverage about candlelight protests in all four publications over the six-month period, statistical significance was not a concern.

Frame analysis

Cause

The two Korean publications framed the cause of the protests quite differently. Only 33% of articles in the conservative Chosun Ilbo provided a cause for the protests. Of these, just 5.4% attributed the protests to President Park’s illegal use of power (Table 1). A whopping 70.3%, meanwhile, described her trial for impeachment as the cause. In contrast, 90% of the liberal Kyunghyang Shinmun articles discussed the cause, and more than a fifth of these directly held Park’s illegal use of power as responsible for the protests. For instance, an article on November 12 reported a protester as saying, ‘We should convict President Park of illegal and unlawful (use of) power.’ The liberal newspaper was thus more likely to report the cause of the protests – and more likely to identify Park’s
illegal use of power as the cause. But here too, nearly a third of the articles attributed the impeachment trial as a cause of the protest.

Almost all articles in both Wall Street Journal and New York Times discussed the reasons behind the protests. But while the Journal mentioned a broader range of factors, from Park’s illegal use of power to impeachment proceedings and so on, every Times article categorically identified Park’s illegal use of power as the cause. Many Times stories furnished precise details of the scandal. As a November 22 report said, ‘Ms. Park’s troubles stem from her decades of ties to Choi Soon-sil, a daughter of Choi Tae-min, the founder of a fringe religious sect who befriended Ms. Park in the 1970s.’ The report continued to provide further examples of her ‘influence-peddling.’

Size

Relatively fewer stories explicitly described the candlelight protests as ‘small’ or ‘large.’ In Chosun Ilbo, 22.7% of the 22 stories that did so called the protests small, while 77.3% called them large. Kyunghyang Shinmun had more stories – 37 – discussing the size of the protests (Table 2). Of these, only 8.1% called the protests small while 91.9% called them large. Thus, while both Korean publications had a larger proportion of stories calling the candlelight protests large, the liberal publication was much more likely to do so than the conservative one. Chosun Ilbo even questioned the estimates being reported in liberal publications and accused them of exaggerating the number of protesters.

Both US publications shied away from explicitly referring to the protests as small or large, choosing to provide numerical estimates instead. The Wall Street Journal typically noted both official and protester estimates. A November 13 report, for instance, said that police claimed 260,000 protesters had turned out for an anti-Park demonstration, while protesters put their number at 1 million. The New York Times, on the other hand, reported much larger estimates for anti-Park protests – 1.7 million on December 9 (‘the largest protest in South Korean history’) and ‘up to 2 million’ on March 31. Although these seemed to be protesters’ estimates, the newspaper did not say so explicitly, implying that the numbers it was reporting were incontrovertible facts rather than one side’s approximation.

Table 1. Framing the cause of candlelight protests (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Park’s illegal use of power</th>
<th>Trial for impeachment</th>
<th>Response to candlelight protests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosun Ilbo (n = 37)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyunghyang Shinmun (174)</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal (29)</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times (43)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Framing the size of candlelight protests (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosun Ilbo (n = 22)</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyunghyang Shinmun (37)</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times (0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Violence

In *Chosun Ilbo*, 46 articles described the candlelight protests as ‘violent’ or ‘peaceful.’ Of these, three-quarters called the protests violent or expressed the ‘possibility’ that they could turn into sites of conflict and mayhem (Table 3). Reports about the candlelight protests routinely made a mention of the counter-protests as well, emphasizing the tension between the two sides and speculating that clashes could break out any moment. As a February 11 article reported, ‘No one can rule out the possibility of a physical confrontation and a clash, or unexpected difficulty between ‘the candlelight rally’ and ‘the taegukgi-rally.’” But the coverage in *Kyunghyang Shinmun* was effectively the reverse. In 50 articles, 72% drew attention to the peacefulness of the demonstrations, which was deemed all the more creditable because of the presence of such large numbers of protesters. For instance, a November 12 article from downtown Jongno and Euljiro areas stated, ‘Even though police and citizens are counterposed to each other, there are no physical conflicts here.’ The liberal newspaper stressed that a relaxed and festive atmosphere prevailed at protest marches, complete with celebrity attendance and singing performances.

The *Wall Street Journal*’s coverage did not characterize the protests as either peaceful or violent. But in the *New York Times*, two-thirds of such stories noted that the candlelight protests were peaceful. As a December 9 report said, ‘This time, in a sign of how far South Korea’s democracy has matured, peaceful crowds achieved their goal without a single arrest.’ Three months later, a March 9 article noted, ‘Ms. Park was removed without any violence, after large, peaceful protests in recent months demanding that she step down.’

Source

Almost all stories, across all newspapers, quoted sources for information. But their choice of sources varied significantly. In *Chosun Ilbo*, 54.4% of stories had an official – from the government, police or political party – as their first source while another 21.4% had counter-protesters as their first source (Table 4). Their quotes were typically hostile toward candlelight protests and supportive of Park. A March 2 report, for instance, quoted a counter-protester as saying, ‘I wanted to teach my kids that voicing an opinion against a protest is also a part of living in a democracy.’ Candlelight protesters featured as the first source in only 9.7% of the conservative daily’s reports. In contrast, candlelight protesters were the first source in more than half (55.8%) of *Kyunghyang Shinmun* stories, while just over a third (35.7%) started with an official’s quote. Hardly any story (0.6%) had a counter-protester as its first source. Expectedly, candlelight protesters claimed their rallies were the harbinger of ‘real democracy’ in Korea. As one protester said in a November 19 report, ‘I came here to light a candle because I was so mad.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violent</th>
<th>Peaceful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Chosun Ilbo</em></td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kyunghyang Shinmun</em></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wall Street Journal</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>New York Times</em></td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Framing the violence of candlelight protests (%).
Both US newspapers primarily relied on official sources – the Wall Street Journal (54.5%) more than the New York Times (40.4%). But there were other differences between the two. Not a single Journal story started with a quote from protesters of either hue. The conservative newspaper often included statements made by Park herself. New York Times, in contrast, did speak with protesters – with 17% of its stories having a candlelight protester as its first source. It quoted Park’s public addresses, but also covered statements made by opposition leaders. The liberal newspaper also included analyst perspectives, which were typically supportive of the protests.

**Gaze**

The two US publications’ framing converged when it came to considering the consequence of the candlelight protests and their long-term implications for the US and its foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific. South Korea is a US ally in this backyard of traditional rival China. Its feud with North Korea has long served as a justification for the US to maintain military bases that are broadly aimed at encircling China. Both Wall Street Journal (100%) and New York Times (81%) suggested that the protests would bolster democracy in South Korea (Table 5). At the same time, they also agreed that the protests put US’s strategic alliance and its larger foreign policy interests in the region in jeopardy. Every three in four Wall Street Journal articles (78.1%) considered its impact on South Korea’s relations with the US, while almost half the articles (46.9%) mentioned its potential to disrupt US containment of North Korea (Table 6). For instance, a January 12 report noted, ‘It’s troubling that South Korea’s domestic political tumult appears to be sending its foreign policy adrift. This invites North Korea and its patron, China, to press their advantage and make life more dangerous for the U.S. and its friends in the Pacific.’

### Table 4. Use of source frame in coverage of candlelight protests (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officials</th>
<th>Candlelight protesters</th>
<th>Counter protesters</th>
<th>Citizens</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosun Ilbo (n = 103)</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyunghyang Shinmun (165)</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal (11)</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times (47)</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Figures represent the first source quoted in a news report.*

### Table 5. Framing the domestic consequences of candlelight protests (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Social unrest</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosun Ilbo (n = 52)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyunghyang Shinmun (53)</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal (1)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times (21)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. Framing the international consequences of candlelight protests (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Impact on South Korea–US relations</th>
<th>Impact on US containment of North Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosun Ilbo</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyunghyang Shinmun</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Figures represent the percentage of total articles in each publication that mention these frame elements.*
A similar framing was employed by the *New York Times*, although to a relatively lesser degree. Almost half of *Times* articles made a mention of South Korea’s relations with the US and 15.7% of all articles explicitly mentioned containment of North Korea. On December 9, the newspaper rued the ‘deep uncertainty’ that Park’s impeachment would bring for US policy in the region. ‘Ms. Park, a conservative, had adopted a tough approach toward the North, focusing on stronger sanctions,’ the newspaper said. ‘Her administration had also agreed to deploy an American advanced missile defense system that infuriated the Chinese.’

Exactly 4 months later, after Park’s impeachment was upheld, *Times* noted that opposition leaders wanted to engage with North Korea and defuse tensions with China, ‘which has sounded alarms about the growing American military footprint in Asia.’

Interestingly, both Korean publications also viewed the protests through the eyes of the international, specifically US, media. Reports in both newspapers noted how the US media was covering the protests – but they chose to highlight different aspects of US protest coverage. In *Chosun Ilbo*, 10.8% of articles attempted to delegitimize the protests because of its implications for US – and by extension South Korean – foreign policy. For instance, as the nation awaited the constitutional court’s verdict on Park’s impeachment, a March 9 article drew attention to ‘a bigger security and economic crisis’ in the form of North Korea’s ballistic missiles and Chinese ‘retaliation’ against the American missile system that Park was willing to deploy. The report added that as tensions were rising between the US and China under the new US President Donald Trump – who was mulling ‘preemptive strikes and regime change’ – South Korea ‘could end in chaos’ if the impeachment went through. In addition, 75% of its articles that considered the consequence of candlelight protests reported that they led to social unrest, compared with 3.8% that said the protests enhanced Korean democracy.

In contrast, *Kyunghyang Shinmun* considered relations with the US in only 4.7% of its articles. It opted for more legitimizing aspects of international coverage. As a February 13 article observed, ‘The *New York Times* and other foreign media described the scene of 2 million protesters in detail. It was also mentioned that Koreans utilized social media as a medium for organizing a series of candlelight rallies, and the scenes of protests are live on social media.’ While considering the consequences of the protests, the liberal publication was also more likely to claim that the protests bolstered democracy (84.9%) rather than led to social unrest (7.5%).

**Discussion and conclusions**

Traditional protest paradigm research has been driven by an institutionalist argument, according to which the linkages between news organizations and the political elite of a nation lead the media to delegitimize protest movements by using a variety of framing devices (Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1995). Recent studies, however, suggest that protest coverage is more nuanced (Boyle et al., 2012; Lee, 2014; Taylor & Gunby, 2016; Wouters, 2015). In particular, ideological affinities can make news organizations sympathetic toward protest movements (Boyko & Laschever, 2011; Shahin et al., 2016; Weaver & Scacco, 2013). Building on this line of research as well as drawing on Shoemaker and Reese (2014) ‘hierarchy of influences’ model, our study advances the protest paradigm as a *transnational* theory in two ways.

First, our analysis shows that ideological affinities can transcend national boundaries – a phenomenon we call ‘ideological parallelism’ – and shape the transnational coverage of
protests. Three of the five framing devices we found – Size, Violence, and Source – were used differently by ideologically different publications across the national divide. Both liberal publications, Kyunghyang Shinmun and the New York Times, relied more on anti-Park protesters, especially when it came to estimating the size of candlelight protests, and termed the protests as peaceful. On the other hand, the conservative Wall Street Journal’s use of these framing devices was closer to the conservative Chosun Ilbo’s, although the US publication was relatively more ‘balanced’ – giving both protester and official estimates of the size of candlelight protests and refraining from terming the protests as either peaceful or violent.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) consider ideological affiliation to be a higher level of influence on news content than institutional linkages such as those that obtain between the press and the state. Our analysis shows that in the coverage of protests, ideology can indeed supersede institutionalism – not just nationally but also transnationally. Within Korea, the liberal publication’s support for candlelight protests and the conservative newspaper’s hostility can be explained by the political parallelism that exists in the Korean media system, based on institutional linkages between news organizations and political factions (Son et al., 2012). But the appearance of the same broad pattern in US coverage, with which Korean political factions do not have such linkages, implies that protest coverage is also motivated by ideological affinity and that this motivation can transcend national boundaries (see also, Ha & Shin, 2016).

But this is not a deterministic argument. Indeed, our study also shows there are limits to which ideological parallelism overruns nationalist commitments. Both US newspapers, for instance, discussed the cause in extensive detail. Also, both primarily relied on official sources for information – although the Times did also have a sizeable number of stories with candlelight protesters as their first source. In their use of Gaze, too, the US coverage illustrated how nationalist sentiment can upend ideological divergence to the extent that an issue relates to foreign policy (Lawrence, 2010).

Our identification of Gaze as a framing device is the second way in which our analysis extends the protest paradigm as a transnational theory. Both American newspapers viewed the candlelight protests in terms of their implications for the US and its foreign policy objectives in the Asia-Pacific. Although this may be viewed as a case of US media ‘domesticating’ foreign news to cater to its own readership, there is a broader dynamic at play. US media, notorious for their lack of international coverage (Likes, 2014), would be unlikely to cover protracted domestic protests in a small and distant nation for months if not for its implications for America’s hegemonic interests. Perhaps more tellingly, both Korean publications, too, regarded the protests through American, specifically American media’s, eyes – albeit in different ways: Chosun Ilbo to delegitimize the protests, Kyunghyang Shinmun to legitimize them. The Gaze frame thus illustrates how America’s hegemonic relationship with a nation of the Global South can influence the reporting of domestic protests in that nation and potentially shape the perceived legitimacy and outcome of the protest movement itself (Shoemaker, 1982).

Our analysis thus advances the protest paradigm as a transnational theory in two distinct ways – explaining why, and in what ways, transnational coverage would be sympathetic or inimical to protest movements. We also show why such coverage is significant and how it recursively shapes domestic media coverage, potentially influencing public as well as elite attitudes toward the protests and contributing to their success or failure. At the same time, our study has a number of limitations, which can serve as avenues for future research.
First, we focus on one protest and its coverage in one foreign country: the United States. This ‘case study’ type of research design was necessary for theory building, but future research should study transnational coverage more broadly. The coverage of candlelight protests in other countries could be studied. Scholars may also look at how various other protest movements, taking place in other parts of the world, have been transnationally framed – building on ideas such as ideological parallelism and the Gaze frame that we have developed here.

Second, now that we have empirical evidence of ideological affinities influencing transnational protest coverage, we need more research exploring the precise reasons for its significance as well as the scope of its influence. In line with some previous studies (see, for example, Shahin et al., 2016), we do not argue that the tenets of any particular ideology – liberal or conservative – determine attitudes toward protest movements in general. Rather, it is ideological parallelism that explains when a news organization is more likely to be sympathetic toward a particular group of protesters and hostile toward another. But why does this happen, especially across national borders? Also, besides protest movements, what other kinds of transnational news coverage does ideological parallelism influence? Future research can address such questions employing newsroom ethnography and in-depth interviews with journalists.

Antiwar protesters in 1968 Chicago were perhaps exaggerating a little when they chanted ‘the whole world is watching’ as the police brought down their batons upon them (Gitlin, 1980). Such an incantation would, however, be much more accurate today. In the globalized news environment of the twenty-first century, it is not just domestic but also transnational media that take note of – and can make or mar protest movements. A better understanding of such coverage is therefore vital, not only for media and social movement scholars but also for protesters themselves as well as the journalists who cover them. We hope that our study, especially our enunciation of ideological parallelism and the Gaze frame in transnational contexts, can be a step in that direction.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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References


