The Evolution of Moral Politics: Analysis on Moral Foundations of Korean Parties

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Abstract : With the arrival of post-industrial society, social scientists have been giving attention to issues of which factors shape cleavage of political parties. Especially, there is a heated controversy over whether and how social and cultural values influence the identities of parties and voting behavior. Drawing from Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), which approached similar issues by considering the effect of five moral foundations on political decision-making of people, this study investigates the role of moral rhetoric in the evolution of Korean political parties. Researcher collected official announcements released by the major two parties (Democratic Party of Korea, Saenuri Party) from 2007 to 2016, and analyzed the data by using Word2Vec algorithm and Moral Foundations Dictionary. Five moral decision modules of MFT, composed of care, fairness (individualistic morality), loyalty, authority and sanctity (group-based, Durkheimian morality), can be represented in vector spaces consisted of party announcements data. By comparing the party vector and the five morality vectors, researcher can see how the political parties have actively used each of the five moral foundations to express themselves and the opposition. Results report that the conservative party tends to actively draw on collective morality such as loyalty, authority, purity to differentiate itself. Notably, such moral differentiation strategy is prevalent when they criticize an opposition party. In contrast, the liberal party tends to concern with individualistic morality such as fairness. This result indicates that moral cleavage does exist between parties in South Korea. Furthermore, individualistic moral gaps of the two political parties are eased over time, which seems to be due to the discussion of economic democratization of conservative party that emerged after 2012, but the community-related moral gaps widened. These results imply that past political cleavages related to economic interests are diminishing and replaced by cultural and social values associated with communitarian morality. However, since the conservative party's differentiation strategy is largely related to negative campaigns, it is doubtful whether such moral differentiation among political parties can contribute to the long-term party identification of the voters, thus further research is needed to determine it is sustainable. Despite the limitations, this study makes it possible to track and identify the moral changes of party system through automated text analysis. More generally, this study could contribute to the analysis of various texts associated with the moral foundation and finding a distributed representation of moral, ethical values.

Keywords : moral foundations theory, moral politics, party system, Word2Vec