

Contentious Politics in Protracted Transition: An Analysis of South Korean Movement History

Minyoung Kim

Faculty Advisor: Joseph Fewsmith, Ph.D.
Department of Political Science, Boston University

Empirical Question

1. Why is there a persisting existence of movement identity in South Korean politics after democratization?
2. If movement identities are formed around shared ideologies, why did the Justice Party split from the Unified Progressive Party and stayed neutral over the issue of party disintegration decision by the court?

Anomalies & Key Concepts

“Woon-dong-gwon,” “Generation 386”

Though scholarly interest on revolution, revolutionary actors and contentious politics has dropped sharply in the past twenty years, there is a persisting presence of “Woon-dong-gwon” in South Korea.

“Woon-dong-gwon” refers to those who are typically in the “Generation 386” and identify as contentious actors outside of political institutions..

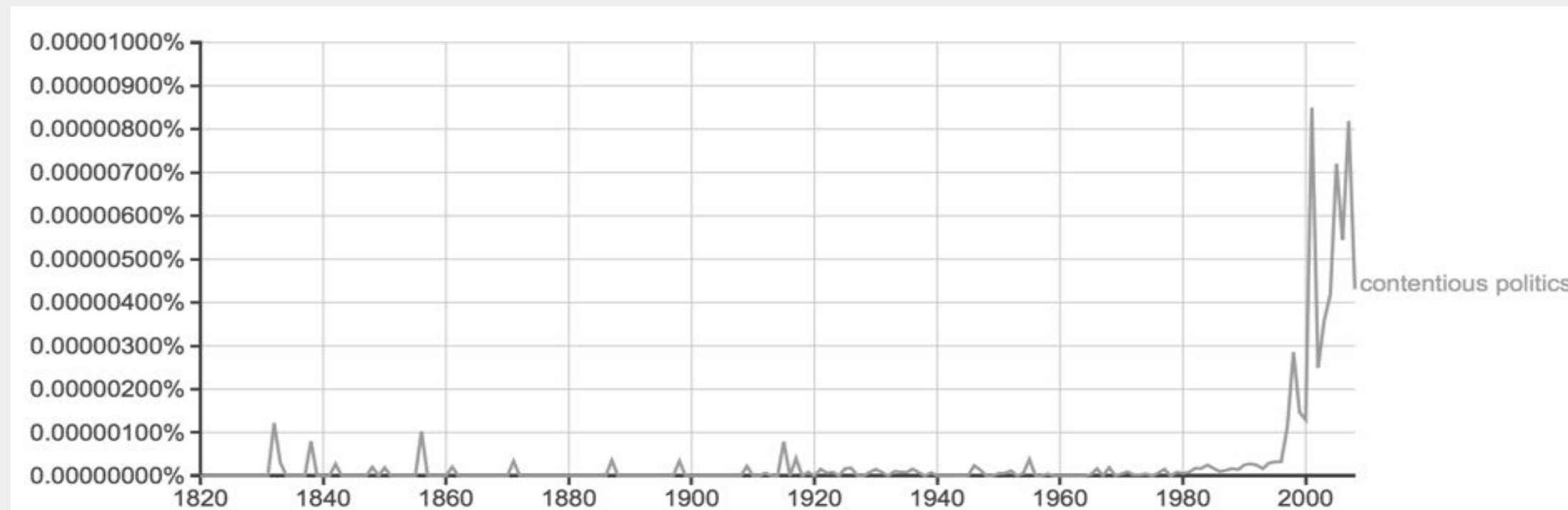


Figure 3. Frequency of the word “Contentious Politics” used between 1800 and 2008 (from Google Scholar DataBase)

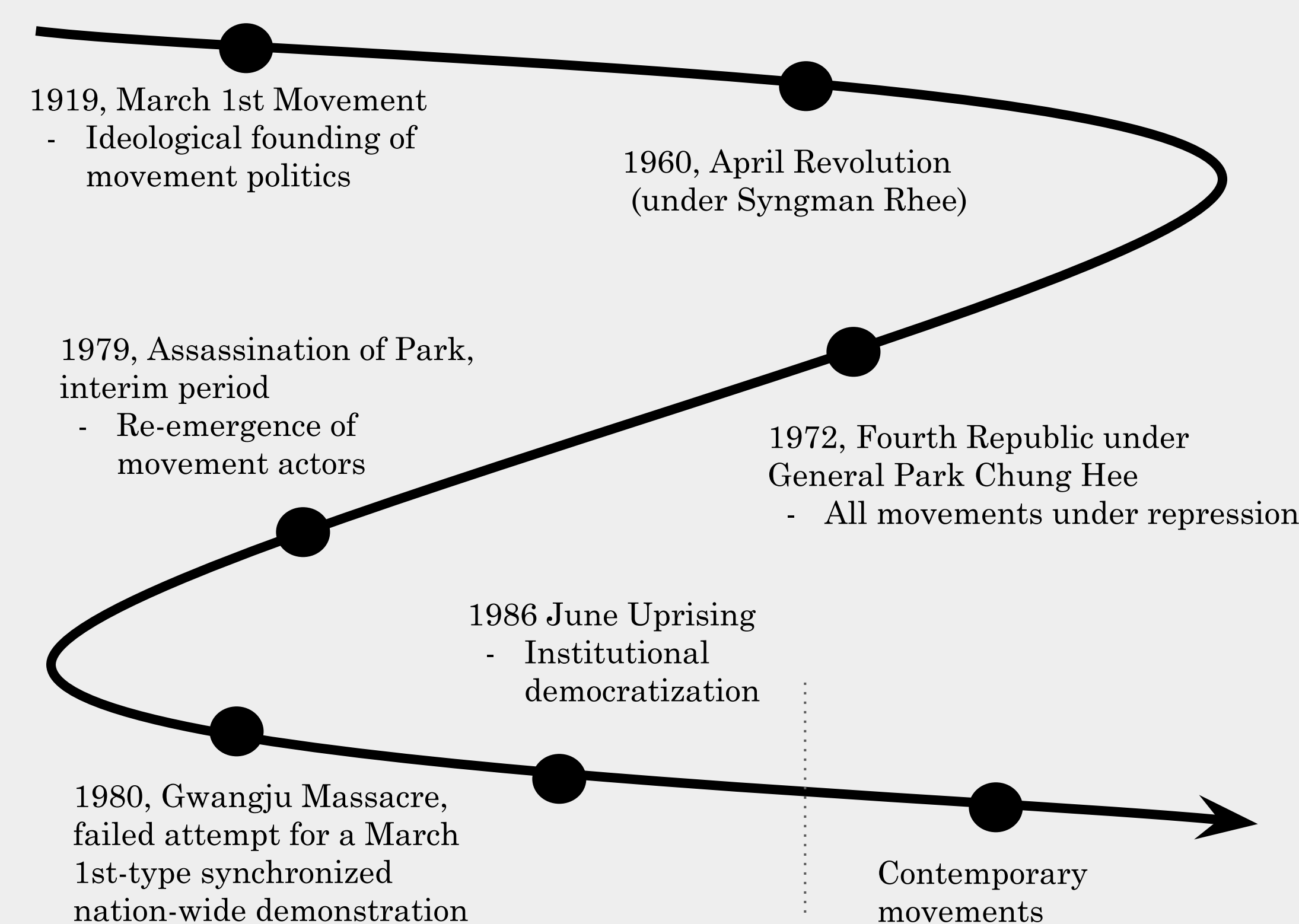
Theoretical Question

Why is there a persisting existence of movement identity in a post-democratization society?
What is its basis of legitimacy?

Methodology

1. Korea Democracy Foundation Open Archives: online archive with relevant protest movement data scanned and photographed, supported by the Korean government (constitutional amendment).
2. BIGKinds: Big Data tool that fetch relevant-themed news articles
Identified historical evidences and manuscripts that support historical symbolization of contentious movements in key periods of South Korean history.

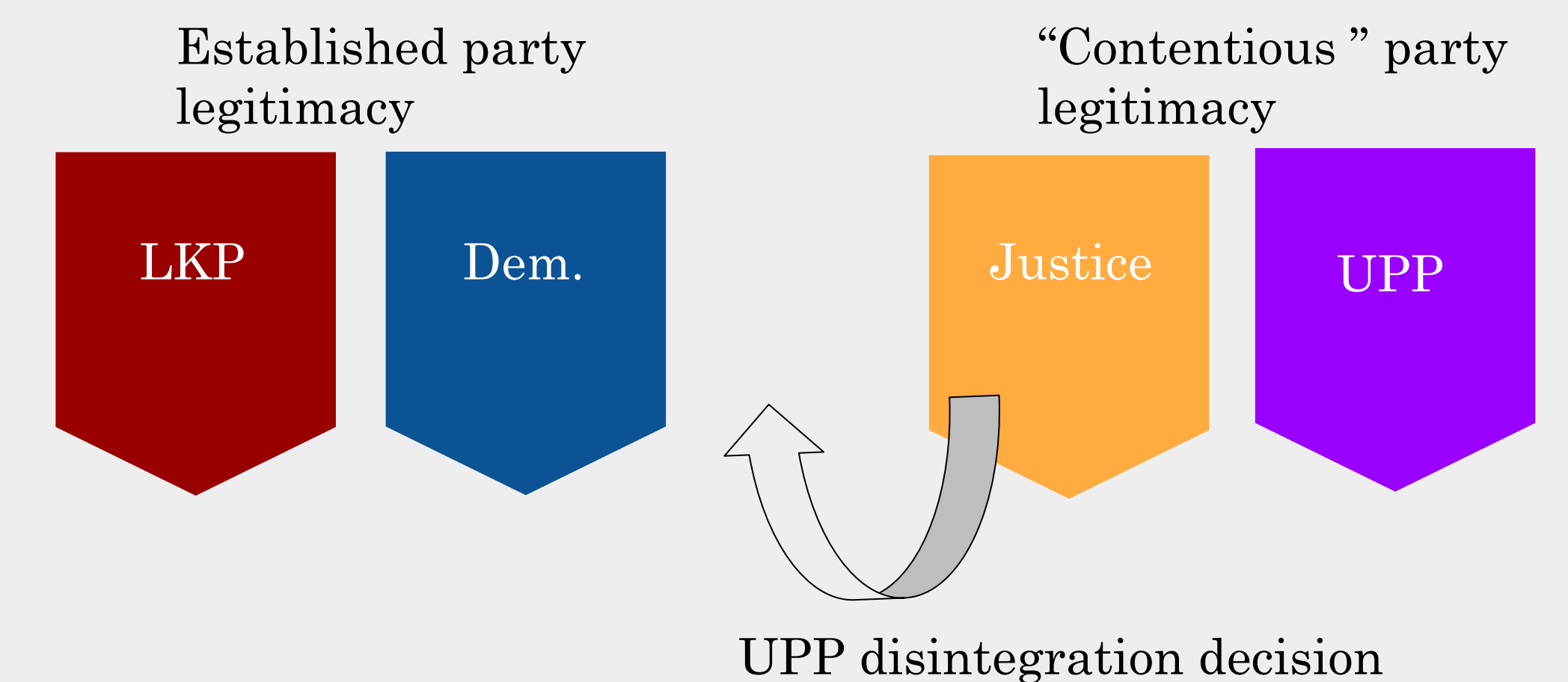
Historical Analysis.



Variable: Symbolization of Identity

- Existing theories assume (1) protests to be temporal, physical outbreak of incidents and (2) demobilization of participating groups once the goals are institutionalized
- I argue that protest identities can persist out of the protest cycles in protracted transitions when the oppositional identity becomes associated with the historical legitimacy.

Conflicting Legitimacy as a Result



Conclusion

- Contentious politics extend beyond the contentious incidents themselves through the creation of identities
- Out of the protest cycles, there may be persisting contentious groups that continue to interact with other social actors or within themselves

Future Works

Intensive study of the “Woon-dong-gwon cohorts” and the motivational factors and resentment.

Existing Literature and Limitations

One of the biggest assumptions of existing contentious politics literature was that protests were “cyclical” -- once political aims are achieved, the actors will gradually demobilize (Tarrow, 1995)