Framing Solidarity: How Media Portrayals of Protest Shape Support for Gender Equality Policies

Abstract

Can social movements be a vehicle for building solidarity for equality beyond their immediate demands? We argue that marginalized groups' prominent role in mass protest can generate public support for their equal standing — but only when their participation is portrayed alongside majority participants under a shared civic identity. Such framing recategorizes marginalized groups as fellow members of a valued civic collective and increases the belief that they deserve equality by highlighting the gap between their equal contributions and continued unequal treatment. An original survey experiment in South Korea following the 2024 pro-democracy protests (N=1,674) supports this argument. Portraying protests as driven by a civic coalition of both women and men increases support for women's equality policies among protest supporters, operating through perceptions of deservingness, whereas portraying women as the protagonists produces no effect. A follow-up experiment (N=1,000) confirms that civic coalition portrayals increase attention to structural inequalities women face.

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When marginalized groups march at the forefront of mass protests — women in pro-democracy movements, immigrants in civic mobilizations — advocates often highlight this participation as evidence of civic belonging, hoping to translate visibility into broader public support for equality. Yet whether such cross-cutting solidarity actually materializes remains an open question. Research shows that protests shift public opinion on issues from civil rights to immigration (Andrews, Beyerlein and Tucker Farnum 2016; Branton et al. 2015; Wallace, Zepeda-Millán and Jones-Correa 2014), increase support for protest causes (Reny and Newman 2021; Wasow 2020), and shape attitudes toward groups featured in demonstrations (Naunov 2025; Mazumder 2018). Yet most research asks whether protests increase support for their stated cause, such as whether civil rights protests increase support for racial equality, immigration protests affect immigration attitudes, or police accountability protests shift views on criminal justice reform.

We ask a different question: can protests build solidarity that generates cross-cutting support for policies outside the protest's immediate demands? When protests mobilize citizens around broad values, such as defending democracy, demanding accountability, and protecting rights, and involve participants from marginalized groups, can this collective action increase support for policies addressing those groups' disadvantages, even when the policies are not directly related to why people protested? Can women's prominent role in pro-democracy protests, for instance, generate broader public support for addressing the structural inequalities they face?

We argue that such cross-cutting effects are possible but conditional. Drawing on the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Gaertner et al. 1993), we propose that protests can generate solidarity beyond the protest cause when participants from marginalized groups are recategorized as valued members of a shared civic collective. This recategorization reveals what we call the contribution-treatment gap: marginalized groups are seen contributing equally to valued civic projects yet continue to face unequal treatment, activating deservingness perceptions that extend across policy domains. Because most citizens encounter protests not through direct participation but through mediated portrayals (Chong and Druckman 2007; McLeod and Detenber 1999; McLeod and Hertog 1999), how protest participation is represented

determines which identity categorization—shared civic membership or distinct social group—becomes salient to observers. When media portrayals represent participation through broad civic categories that subsume marginalized groups within a shared identity, the conditions for recategorization are met. When instead portrayals foreground the distinct social identities of marginalized participants, the conditions for cross-cutting solidarity may not materialize, and in polarized contexts, such framing may activate resistance.

To test these expectations, we fielded an original multi-arm survey experiment in South Korea in the aftermath of the 2024 martial law declaration (N = 1,675), where young women's visible participation in nationwide pro-democracy protests unfolded against some of the most pronounced gender polarization in the developed world. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of three texts: a news article portraying the protests as driven by young citizens, embedding young women within a broader civic coalition; a news article portraying the protests as driven by young women, making women the protagonists of collective action; or an unrelated weather forecast. Following exposure, respondents reported their level of support for policies addressing challenges faced by men, women, and young Koreans.

We find that among protest supporters, portraying the protests as driven by a broader civic coalition of both women and men increases support for policies addressing women's concerns and promoting their equal standing. This effect operates through deservingness perceptions: situating women within a broader coalition heightens the sense that women deserve fair recognition. By contrast, making women the protagonists of collective action produces no significant effect. A follow-up experiment (N = 1,000) further corroborates this mechanism, showing that citizens pay more attention to structural inequalities facing women when they are embedded in a broader civic coalition than when they are portrayed as sole protagonists. We find little evidence for alternative explanations based on backlash or heightened perceptions of agency.

Together, our results suggest that cross-cutting support for equality is driven less by the mere visibility of marginalized actors in social movements than by the disparities their participation brings into focus. Inequality becomes politically salient only when a reference point makes dif-

ferences in treatment observable. Casting marginalized groups as the protagonists of collective action highlights their civic contributions, but presenting them in isolation obscures the contrast with majority counterparts that would reveal the gap between equal contribution and unequal treatment. Without that comparison, perceptions of deservingness are unlikely to develop. When the same participation is instead situated within a broader civic coalition, the contrast becomes legible, inequality comes into view, and support for equality follows.

Our study makes several contributions. First, we demonstrate that protests around broad causes can increase support for policies benefiting marginalized groups even when those policies are unrelated to protest demands. This extends research on protest effects beyond the immediate causes that motivate collective action (Andrews, Beyerlein and Tucker Farnum 2016; Reny and Newman 2021; Wasow 2020). Second, we show that whether support extends to unrelated policies depends on identity recategorization made available through media framing of protest participation. How participation is represented shapes whether solidarity extends across policy domains (Chong and Druckman 2007; Entman 1993). Third, we identify the the contribution-treatment gap as the mechanism through which protest generates cross-cutting solidarity. Situating marginalized groups within a broader civic coalition activates perceptions of deservingness, increasing support for equality policies without triggering the identity threat that explicit group-centered portrayals can provoke (Craig and Richeson 2014; Mutz 2018). Finally, our findings speak to a broader challenge in contemporary democratic politics. In an era of heightened polarization around identity-based issues, efforts to advance marginalized groups' equality often struggle to attract cross-cutting support. We show that positioning marginalized group alongside majority participants under a shared civic identity can counteract this constraint. By emphasizing shared civic engagement, protest-driven solidarity can extend to policies addressing their broader disadvantages.

PROTEST AS A SITE OF IDENTITY RECATEGORIZATION

The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) holds that intergroup bias can be reduced when members of different groups come to perceive themselves as belonging to a shared, superordinate category (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Gaertner et al. 1993). When a superordinate identity becomes salient, individuals who were previously categorized as outgroup members are recategorized as fellow ingroup members. This recategorization extends the cognitive and affective benefits of ingroup membership to formerly excluded groups, including more favorable evaluations, greater empathy, and increased willingness to allocate resources (Dovidio et al. 1997; Levine et al. 2005).

Protests organized around broadly shared civic values offer a natural site for such recategorization. When citizens mobilize to defend democracy, they participate in a collective project that can constitute a superordinate political identity, one defined by shared commitment to democratic governance rather than by demographic characteristics. Participants from different social backgrounds — men and women, different age cohorts, different class positions — become members of a common category: citizens defending their democracy. Research on opinion-based group identity suggests that shared political convictions can serve as a basis for meaningful group identification, generating solidarity that extends across pre-existing social boundaries (McGarty et al. 2009; Bliuc et al. 2007).

However, whether this superordinate identity produces cross-cutting solidarity depends on how participants are represented to the broader public. Most citizens experience protests not through direct participation but through mediated portrayals such as news reports, social media, and public discourse (Chong and Druckman 2007; McLeod and Detenber 1999; McLeod and Hertog 1999). Media framing shapes which aspects of protest participation become salient and, critically, which identity configuration, superordinate or subgroup, is activated in observers' minds (Entman 1993; Iyengar 1994; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997). We therefore focus on how two types of media portrayals — what we call inclusive framing and identity-centered framing — shape the identity categorizations available to protest supporters, with downstream consequences for

cross-cutting policy support.

Inclusive Framing and Cross-Cutting Support

We define inclusive framing as media portrayals that represent protests as driven by broad civic categories that encompass diverse social groups — for instance, "citizens defending democracy" rather than "women defending democracy." Importantly, inclusive framing does not require depicting participation in strictly universal or society-wide terms. What makes a framing inclusive is that it invokes a category broad enough to subsume both marginalized and non-marginalized participants, allowing audiences to perceive them as members of a common civic group.

We argue that inclusive framing facilitates cross-cutting solidarity through a two-step process. The first step involves identity recategorization. For example, when protests are framed as driven by "young citizens," this broad civic category implicitly includes both young men and young women as co-members of a valued group contributing to collective welfare. For observers who support the protest cause, this framing activates a superordinate identity that subsumes gender subgroups within a shared civic category. Marginalized participants — in this case, women — are positioned not as a separate interest group but as fellow members of a valued civic collective.

The second step involves what we term a *contribution-treatment gap* that activates deservingness perceptions. Once women are recategorized as contributing members of the civic collective, a comparison becomes cognitively available: women are contributing equally to a valued collective project (defending democracy) yet continue to face unequal treatment in social and political life. This juxtaposition of equal contribution alongside unequal treatment maps onto the core dimensions of deservingness that structure public attitudes toward redistributive and equality-promoting policies. Research on deservingness identifies several criteria that shape public support for targeted policies: whether the group contributes to society, whether their disadvantages result from circumstances beyond their control, and whether they comply with prevailing social norms (Lamont et al. 2016; Petersen et al. 2011; Oorschot 2000). When inclusive framing positions women as fellow civic contributors, their continued disadvantage becomes harder to justify,

potentially shifting deservingness judgments in their favor.

We note that deservingness perceptions, while most commonly studied in the context of welfare and social transfers, operate more broadly as a heuristic for evaluating the justice of group-targeted policies. Lamont et al. (2016) show that perceptions of whether groups are recognized and respected shape support for a range of policies addressing group disadvantage, including but not limited to direct transfers. Furthermore, this process does not require observers to consciously think "women participated equally with men." Petersen et al. (2011) demonstrate that deservingness judgments function as automatic cognitive responses to information about groups' efforts and circumstances. The deservingness heuristic is applicable precisely because the inclusive framing has made this gap salient: groups seen as contributing to collective welfare yet receiving inadequate institutional recognition are judged as warranting corrective policy action. Once activated, deservingness perceptions can extend across policy domains (Larsen 2008).

Following these arguments, we expect that among protest supporters, inclusive framing of protest participation will increase support for policies benefiting marginalized groups within the inclusive category, even when those policies are unrelated to the protest cause (**H1**).

Identity-Centered Framing: Competing Expectations

The effects of identity-centered framing, i.e., media portrayals that explicitly foreground a particular social identity when depicting protest participants (e.g., "young women leading resistance"), on cross-cutting support generate competing predictions. On the one hand, explicitly highlighting marginalized groups' participation may increase recognition of their political agency and civic contributions. When women are directly centered as protesters defending democracy, this makes their civic engagement highly visible. Such visibility may demonstrate their commitment to collective welfare and signal that they are deserving of reciprocal support, facilitating cross-cutting solidarity for gender equality policies. This visibility hypothesis suggests that among protest supporters, identity-centered framing will increase support for policies benefiting that group, including policies unrelated to the protest cause (**H2a**).

On the other hand, identity-centered framing may fail to generate cross-cutting solidarity—or may actively undermine it—by activating identity-based resistance. This expectation draws on two potential mechanisms. First, identity-centered framing may activate *identity threat*. When protests are framed as driven by a specific social group whose demands for equality are politically contested, this foregrounding can make group boundaries salient and trigger zero-sum thinking about distributional policies (Craig and Richeson 2014; Wetts and Willer 2018). Members of dominant groups may perceive policies benefiting explicitly centered groups as threatening their own status or resources. In highly polarized contexts—where gender equality has become a flashpoint in broader cultural conflicts—explicit centering of women's activism can activate defensive reactions even among those who support the protest cause itself (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Mason 2018). The key insight from the identity threat literature is that such reactions are driven not by opposition to democratic values but by the perception that one group's advancement comes at the expense of another's standing (Bobo 1999; Mutz 2018).

Second, and critically, identity-centered framing may fail to activate the contribution-treatment gap that enables cross-cutting solidarity under inclusive framing. When women are explicitly centered as protesters, they are visible as political actors. However, the framing does not position them *within* a broader civic category alongside non-marginalized participants. Without the implicit juxtaposition of equal contribution and unequal treatment that inclusive framing provides, the deservingness perceptions that drive cross-cutting policy support may not be activated. Observers see "women protesting for democracy" but not necessarily "women contributing equally alongside others yet receiving unequal treatment in society." The comparative reference point is absent. In terms of the CIIM, identity-centered framing maintains subgroup-level categorization rather than activating a superordinate identity, and the recategorization that would extend ingroup favoritism to the marginalized subgroup does not occur.

Moreover, the effects of identity-centered framing may vary by audience. For those already sympathetic to the centered group, explicit highlighting may reinforce support. However, for those ambivalent or skeptical—particularly members of dominant groups in polarized contexts—identity-

centered framing may trigger identity threat and fail to activate deservingness perceptions that extend across policy domains. If backlash among resistant audience members offsets gains among sympathetic ones, the net effect may be null or negative. This backlash hypothesis suggests that among protest supporters in polarized contexts, identity-centered framing will not increase support for policies benefiting the centered group (**H2b**).

CASE SELECTION: SOUTH KOREA

To test our hypotheses, we draw on the South Korean president's declaration of emergency martial law in 2024, which sparked nationwide pro-democracy protests. This episode of democratic backsliding occurred within a broader context of escalating gender polarization with growing political divergence between young men and women. At the same time, large-scale protests marked by significant participation of young women created space for demonstrating women's role in defending democratic values.

President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law on December 3, 2024, invoked a constitutional provision that transferred authority for internal security to the military. Yoon defended the move by accusing the opposition Democratic Party of exercising a "legislative dictatorship," alleging that it was obstructing his administration by launching repeated impeachment attempts against his cabinet members and collaborating with anti-state forces sympathetic to North Korea. The declaration halted sessions of the National Assembly and local legislatures, restricted press freedom, limited the right of assembly and association, and authorized arrests without judicial review. Yet the military rule was brief. The National Assembly passed a motion to annul the decree within hours, and the cabinet revoked it the same day, ending direct military control. On December 14, the legislature adopted articles of impeachment against President Yoon. What required more time was the judicial process that followed. The Constitutional Court confirmed his removal from office in April 2025, bringing the entire episode to a close in roughly four months.

Our analysis centers on the two-week period between the martial law declaration and the

impeachment vote, when pro-government legislators delayed scheduling the impeachment motion. Because martial law had been a hallmark of earlier authoritarian rule, its reintroduction raised fears of democratic breakdown. Large pro-democracy protests erupted in major cities in response. Protesters urged the National Assembly to move forward with impeachment and to safeguard constitutional order. Surveys indicated that more than 70% of Korean citizens supported Yoon's impeachment, suggesting that public sentiment aligned with the demonstrators.[1] Both the protests and the protesters were widely understood as defending the collective interest in preserving democratic governance.

Importantly, the protests were marked by the visible presence of young protesters (*chungnyun*, referring to people in their twenties and thirties) at the forefront of mobilization.[2] Particularly notable was the participation of young women.[3] Women in their twenties and thirties accounted for the highest share of any age and gender group, comprising 29% of one of the largest demonstrations in Seoul three days after the declaration of martial law.[4] Media coverage framed these protests differently. Some outlets emphasized "young citizens" defending democracy. Others highlighted "young women" leading the resistance against authoritarianism. Depiction of the same protest events—massive, peaceful, ultimately successful in securing the president's impeachment and removal—thus diverged in how they were presented, who was protesting, and why their participation mattered.

The two visible constituencies, young citizens and young women, carry different implications. The former reflects generational traits that are more politically diverse. In contrast, the latter has more often been regarded as representing a narrower group interest that challenges established

[1] https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/politics/20241231/poll-nearly-70-of-south-koreans-believe-constitutional-court-should-uphold-presidents-impeachment

[2] https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/03/world/asia/south-korea-election-young-voters.html

[3] https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/12/17/in-south-korea-young-women-spearhead-protests-against-the-president_6736159_4.html

[4] https://www.koreaherald.com/article/10017118

norms and traditional values. This discrepancy reflects a broader context of gender polarization in South Korea. Over the past decade, young men and women have grown apart, with opinions diverging between those who believe further efforts toward gender equality are needed and those who argue that feminism has gone too far. The history of male conscription alongside women's exemption has further fueled male resentment, as many young men view this policy as unfair and inconsistent with the principle of gender equality. In fact, close to 80% of South Korean men in their twenties report believing that men face discrimination.[5] Similar patterns of widening political gaps between men and women have been observed across much of the developed world (Campbell and Shorrocks 2021; Gidron, Adams and Horne 2020; Norris 2019), yet gender remains one of the most pronounced political cleavages in South Korea (Jung and Moon 2024; Kim and Kweon 2022; Kim 2023).

This setting has three features that strengthen our inference. First, the same protest episode was widely portrayed as driven either by young citizens or by young women, allowing the experimental frames to closely track real-world discourse and enhancing external validity. Second, because the survey was fielded five months after the peak of the protests, respondents had already been exposed to coverage and discussion of the events. Under these conditions, the treatments operate as modest primes that reactivate existing considerations, making any estimated effects conservative. Finally, South Korea's high levels of gender polarization create a demanding context for generating cross-cutting support for women targeted reforms. Evidence that inclusive framing increases support in this setting therefore provides a hard test of the argument.

[5] https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an original, pre-registered survey experiment in South Korea (N = 1,674).[6] The experiment was fielded online from May 23 to May 28, 2025, which is approximately five months after the peak of the protests and two months following the Constitutional Court's decision to remove Yoon from the presidency. We randomly assigned respondents to one of three conditions. The first group received a treatment vignette portraying the protests as driven by young citizens, featuring interview quotations from both young men and young women and presenting their participation under a shared civic identity (*Inclusive Framing*). The second group received an otherwise identical vignette that replaced young citizens with young women, featuring quotations exclusively from young women and positioning them as the protagonists of collective action (*Identity Centered Framing).* The third group received a placebo vignette presenting a weather forecast of similar length and tone. Each vignette was paired with a corresponding image, either of protesters or, in the control condition, a weather-related image.[7] The resulting vignettes read as follows:

Treatment Vignette: Inclusive/Identity Centered

The Protagonists of Yeouido's Political Protests: [Youth/Women] in Their 20s and 30s

At 5 PM on the 14th, news broke that the impeachment motion against President Yoon Suk-yeol had passed the National Assembly plenary session. The 2 million citizens gathered in front of the National Assembly (unofficial police estimate: 200,000) erupted in massive cheers. It was a moment that reaffirmed the simple truth that history is **changed by its citizens.**

The protests, which continued for 11 days following the "December 3 Martial Law Crisis," marked the emergence of a new protest culture that replaced candles with light sticks and traditional protest songs with K-pop. Above all, the participation of the "2030 generation," particularly the **[youth/women]**, stood out, and some predict that the experience of passing the impeachment motion will lead to their active political engagement.

[6]The pre-analysis plan (PAP) is provided as a separate file, and further discussion appears in SI Section C.

[7]For discussions on the treatment design, see SI Section A.2.

University student **[Kim Jung-tae(M)/Kim Seo-young(W)]** (21), interviewed at the protest site, said, "The atmosphere was more exciting than I expected, which made me want to come." High school student **Kang Min-jung (W)** (17) commented, "Protests need to have a lively atmosphere for more people to participate." Another high school student, **[Choi Yoo-chan(M)/Choi Si-woo(W)]** (17), assessed, "Thanks to this kind of atmosphere, the protest could remain peaceful and gain more support." University student **[Shin Sang-woo(M)/Shin Bo-yeon(W)]** (20) added, "I lived in Gwangju briefly and learned about the democratization movement. Witnessing this situation made me want to say something."

Foreign media outlets extensively covered Korea's unique protest culture, which resembled a festival. The BBC reported, "The large screens and crane cameras at Korean protests were reminiscent of an outdoor music festival. Protesters sang various K-pop songs and enjoyed the demonstration." The New York Times (NYT) wrote about the protest in front of the National Assembly, saying, "The Saturday protest in front of the National Assembly began in a festive atmosphere, promising to be the largest in scale."

Figure 1: Inclusive Framing

Figure 2: Identity Centered Framing

Control Vignette

"Afternoon Spring Showers Forecasted—Watch for Heavy Rain and Slippery Roads" [Tomorrow's Weather]

Rain is expected in Seoul, the greater capital area, Gangwon's Yeongseo region, and northern parts of Chungcheong Province. According to the Korea Meteorological Administration (KMA), skies will be cloudy nationwide from early morning to late afternoon, with 5 to 20 mm of rainfall forecasted in some regions. Morning temperatures are expected to range from 6 to 18 degrees Celsius, with daytime highs reaching 21℃ in Seoul, 23℃ in Daejeon, 24℃ in Gwangju, and 22℃ in Busan—similar to seasonal averages. Notably, strong, short bursts of rain may occur around evening commute hours in Seoul, northern Gyeonggi Province, and parts of inland Gangwon, so caution is advised.

The KMA explained, "This rain is due to a low-pressure system, and the timing of precipitation will vary by region," adding that some areas may also experience gusty winds and light thunder or lightning. Roads may be slippery from the rain, so pedestrians and drivers should exercise caution and carry umbrellas or light outerwear.

Meanwhile, air quality is expected to improve slightly in areas where rain falls. However, fine dust levels in the capital region, Chungcheong, and Yeongseo may reach "bad" levels, with the possibility of temporarily worsening to "very bad" during the afternoon. The KMA recommends that those with respiratory issues wear masks when going outside and monitor air quality updates.

While most regions will see clear weather through midweek, rain is expected to return across the country later in the week. The KMA also advised caution, noting that large daily temperature swings—often exceeding 10 degrees—may pose health risks.

Figure 3: Control

After reading the vignette, participants answered a series of questions measuring their support for Targeted Social Policies (TSP) that address the challenges faced by men, women, and young generation in Korean society.[8] Table 1 lists the policies included in the survey. To avoid conflating support for a specific policy with broader support for group TSPs, we included two

[8]In addition to policies targeting young Koreans and women, we included men as a third policy target group. This allows us to test whether any treatment effect on women-focused policies reflects attitudes toward women specifically or toward gender-related policies in general. Including men also helps detect possible backlash. If highlighting women's prominent role in the protests increases support for men-focused policies while leaving support for women-focused policies unchanged or lower, this would signal a backlash.

policies for each group and asked respondents two questions for each policy: whether they considered the policy necessary and whether they agreed with adopting it. Responses were recorded on 4-point Likert scales ranging from "Very unnecessary" to "Very necessary" for necessity questions, and "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" for agreement questions (for the full questionnaire wording, see SI A.1). This design yields four responses for each group, corresponding to two policies and two evaluative questions. We constructed the indices of our outcome variables, *Men TSP*, *Women TSP*, and *Young TSP*, by taking the average of these four items for each group. All resulting indices range from 1 to 4. Cronbach's α values of 0.79, 0.85, and 0.87 indicate strong internal consistency for the three indices.

Table 1: Policies and Programs Referenced in the Survey

Target Group	Description
Men	**Recognition of Military Service Experience**: The period of mandatory military service is recognized as work experience at the rank at which one is first appointed after completing the obligation. For public officials, up to three years of mandatory military service under the Military Service Act is counted as career experience (pay step). **Policy to Maintain Male Enrollment Ratios in Education Universities**: Since the 1980s, education universities have applied criteria to admit at least 25–40% male students.
Women	**Women's Quota System**: A system that allocates a certain proportion of seats for women in areas such as the National Assembly, public university faculty, and civil service management positions where female representation is significantly low. **Nighttime Safe Escort Service for Women's Safety**: A municipal service that supports nighttime safe commutes for vulnerable individuals, such as women.
Young	**Youth Jeonse Loan Program**: A financial program that allows young people to borrow security deposit funds for rental housing at low interest rates. **Tomorrow Learning Card**: A government-issued card that supports job training expenses for job seekers and workers, helping young people with employment and career development.

[1] *Note*: This table summarizes the six policies used in the experiment to measure support for group-targeted policies. Note that the *Category* column is included in this table for readers' reference. Respondents were shown each policy's name and description, but not the category labels.

Estimation Strategy

We estimate the following ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \gamma X_i + \epsilon_i$$

where Y_i denotes the post-treatment outcome for respondent i, T_i denotes treatment assignments, X_i is a vector of individual-level controls, and ϵ_i is the error term. To test H1, we compare respondents assigned to the Treatment 1 (inclusive framing vignette) with those in the control group (weather vignette). To test H2, we estimate the effect of the Treatment 2 (identity-centered framing vignette) relative to the control. The coefficient β_1 captures the estimated average treatment effect. We report heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors.

RESULTS

We begin by outlining the demographic characteristics of our respondents. Our survey includes 1,674 participants. The average age is 49, and 44% of the sample identify as women. Educational attainment is relatively high: 79% hold a college degree, 20% completed high school, and fewer than 1% have less than a high school education. The average monthly income is about 4.8 million won, which corresponds to roughly $3,900 USD. In terms of political affiliation, 39% of respondents support the Democratic Party (DP), which is the main opposition party, while 18.5% support the People Power Party (PPP), the ruling party at the time of the martial law declaration. An additional 25.7% report no partisan affiliation, and the remaining respondents identify with smaller parties.

Each of the three experimental conditions included 558 respondents. Age, education, income, partisan alignment, and region are well balanced across the treatment and control groups (see Table A.3 in the SI for full details). Yet the treatment group that received the identity-centered framing vignette included a smaller proportion of women than the control group. To address this imbalance, all main analyses use a fully specified model that includes age, gender, and party

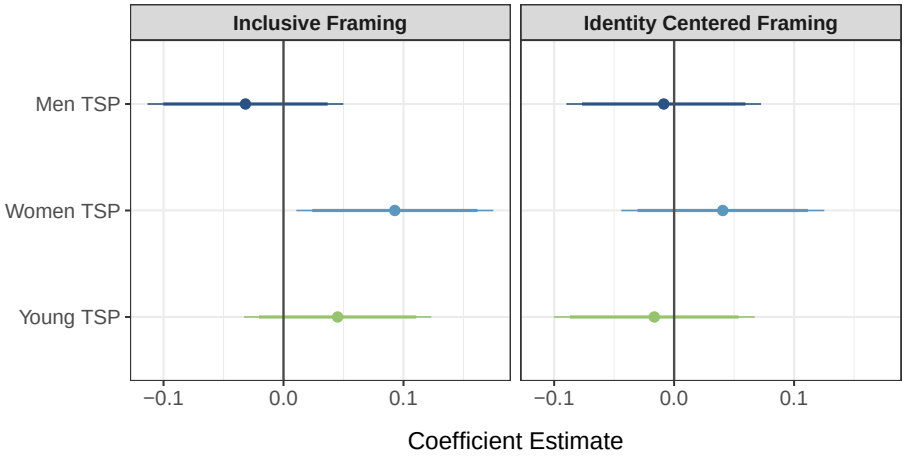
identification as controls.

Support for Group Targeted Social Policies

Our three main outcomes of interest are *Men TSP*, *Women TSP*, and *Young TSP*, each ranging from 1 to 4. The control group's average score for Men TSP was 2.93. This corresponds roughly to "Slightly Agree" on the 4-point Likert scale. The baseline averages for Women TSP and Young TSP also fall within the "Slightly Agree" range. However, support for Women TSP was the lowest at 2.85, whereas Young TSP received the highest level of endorsement at 3.25. In our survey, 71.3% of participants expressed support for the protest. Our analysis focus on how exposure to information about the participation of young citizens and women in the protest shapes support for group-targeted social policies among the 1,193 respondents who identified as protest supporters.[9]

Impact of Exposure to Inclusive Framing of Protest Participation

Figure 4: Estimated Average Treatment Effect Among Protest Supporters



Note: This figure presents the estimated average treatment effects of the Inclusive Framing (left panel) and Identity Centered Framing (right panel) on *Men TSP*, *Women TSP*, and *Young TSP* among protest supporters. All models control for age, gender, and party identification. Horizontal lines denote 95% and 90% confidence intervals. Full model specifications are provided in SI A.6.

[9]For the results that pool all respondents regardless of whether they supported the protest, see SI A.5.

Figure 4 presents our results. We find that among protest supporters, exposure to information about young citizens' protest participation (inclusive framing) significantly increased support for women-targeted policies ($\beta = 0.094, p = 0.025$). The predicted support score for Women TSP rises from approximately 2.1 to 2.2 on the 4-point scale, holding all other sociodemographic covariates constant. This result is notable given that women-targeted social policies received the lowest baseline support. Although the lower baseline leaves greater room for change, it also reflects that such policies are generally less likely to garner endorsement. Meanwhile, we do not find a statistically significant effect of the young citizens' participation information on support for men-targeted social programs. The coefficient is negative but not significant, and the estimated effect size is substantively small ($\beta = -0.032, p = 0.439$). We also find no statistically significant effect on support for social programs addressing young citizens' concerns, where the coefficient is positive but substantively small ($\beta = 0.046$, $p = 0.246$).[10]

Impact of Exposure to Identity Centered Framing of Protest Participation

Next, we examine how information about women's active participation in the protest (identity-centered framing) affected support for women-targeted social policies among those who support the protest. As shown in the right panel of Figure 4, respondents who read the vignette highlighting women protesters expressed somewhat higher support for women-targeted social

[10] Although this effect does not reach statistical significance at the 95% confidence level, the null finding may reflect the high baseline level of support for such policies. As shown earlier, respondents in the control condition already reported an average score of 3.2 out of 4 on Young TSP, the highest among all group-targeted policies. Figure A.4 in the SI further shows that the distribution of support for Young TSP is concentrated at the upper end of the scale, with a larger share of responses at 4 compared to the Women TSP and Men TSP outcomes. These patterns indicate that a ceiling effect likely constrained the observable treatment effect. In light of this, we view the modest positive shift among treated respondents as substantively meaningful, since an increase of this size emerged even when baseline support was already near the upper limit of the scale.

policies. However, this effect is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, and the estimated size of the effect is smaller than that observed for the young citizens' vignette ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.386$). Likewise, exposure to information about women protesters did not lead to meaningful changes in support for men-targeted policies ($\beta = -0.007$, $p = 0.860$) or social policies targeting the young generation ($\beta = -0.019$, $p = 0.651$).

These results indicate that, unlike the vignette highlighting young citizens' participation, emphasizing women's participation in the protest did not lead to increased support for women-targeted social programs. Moreover, the contrast between the two conditions points to an important asymmetry. When a broad category—such as young citizens—is highlighted, respondents extend support to marginalized participants within that category, as reflected in the increase in Women TSP observed earlier. However, when the vignette centers on a specific group, such as women, this support does not generalize outward to broader group-targeted policies. Taken together, our results lead to two substantive conclusions. First, we find that inclusive framing of the protest participants is effective and leads to a significant increase in support for Women TSP, suggesting that portrayals emphasizing broad civic participation can foster cross-group solidarity toward marginalized participants, increasing support for policies that address their disadvantages. Second, identity-centered framing has limited effects, producing little change in support for policies benefiting the featured group. With these results in mind, we next discuss the heterogeneous treatment effects.

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

In this section, we examine whether the treatment effects vary by two sets of moderators: identity and personal involvement in the movement. For identity moderators, we focus on age and gender. Age is a plausible moderator not only because younger citizens participated in large numbers in the protests, but also because gender polarization is especially pronounced among younger cohorts. Gender may also condition the treatment effects given that our outcomes concern support for policies addressing gender inequality. Examining heterogeneity by gender thus

allows us to assess whether the observed effects are driven primarily by women respondents or whether men respond in similar ways. To assess heterogeneous treatment effects, we reestimate the main models including interaction terms between treatment assignment and respondents' age and gender.

Table A.5 in SI summarizes the results. First, we find no evidence of age-based heterogeneity in responses to the young protester vignette. The interaction between the young protester treatment and age is small and not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.001$, $p = 0.742$), indicating that the effect of emphasizing young citizens' protest participation on support for women TSP does not vary across age groups. In contrast, younger respondents exhibit a significantly smaller treatment effect in response to the women protesters vignette than older respondents. The coefficient on the interaction between the women protesters treatment and age is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.008$, $p = 0.026$), indicating that the estimated treatment effect increases with respondent age.[11] We do not observe significant age-based heterogeneity for other outcomes, including support for men TSP and young TSP.

Second, we find no evidence that the increased support for Women TSP in response to young protester vignette is driven primarily by women respondents. The interaction between respondent gender and the young protester treatment is not statistically significant for support for Women TSP ($\beta = -0.068, p = 0.422$), nor is the interaction between respondent gender and the women protester treatment ($\beta = -0.047, p = 0.578$). These results indicate no significant difference between men and women in their responses to either vignette. If anything, the point estimates suggest slightly smaller treatment effects among women respondents. We likewise find no significant gender-based heterogeneity for other outcomes, including Men TSP and Young TSP. Taken together, the treatment effects are largely stable across gender and age, with the exception that the women protester vignette produces a smaller effect among younger respondents than among older respondents.

[11] Substantively, the interaction coefficient implies that the estimated treatment effect at age 40 is approximately 0.16 points larger than at age 20, holding gender and partisanship constant.

We next examine heterogeneous treatment effects based on personal involvement in the movement. If shared mobilization generates cross-cutting solidarity, then respondents who physically joined the protests should already be more supportive of women targeted policies, having directly observed women participating alongside men. For these participants, the vignette provides little new information. By contrast, non-participants who support the protests did not witness the coalition firsthand and must infer who took part through mediated portrayals. If so, framing should matter more for this group. To measure personal involvement, we asked respondents whether they had participated in a political rally or protest activity since the declaration of emergency martial law, during the four months preceding the survey. We use this item to construct a binary indicator of protest participation and reestimate the main models with interaction terms between treatment assignment and protest participation.[12]

The results in SI Table A.6 support our expectations. In the control condition, protest participants show higher support for Women TSP compared to non-participants ($\beta = 0.304, p < 0.001$), consistent with the idea that direct exposure anchors perceptions of women's civic contribution and deservingness. In fact, the conditional treatment effects are negative for both inclusive framing ($\beta = -0.153$) and identity centered framing ($\beta = -0.344$) among protest participants. Although these estimates are not statistically distinguishable from zero at conventional levels, their negative direction suggests the possibility that participants may view both framings as narrowing a heterogeneous movement into a more selective account, whether centered on youth or on women as a distinct identity claim. In contrast, inclusive framing produces a positive treatment effect among non participants, and the difference in treatment effects between participants and non-participants is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.290, p = 0.025$).[13] The results thus indi-

[12] Approximately 11.5% of respondents reported participating in a political rally or protest activity in the four months following the martial law declaration.

[13] In the non-participant subsample, inclusive framing increases support for Women TSP by 0.129 points ($p = 0.004$), whereas identity-centered framing yields a smaller estimate that does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($\beta = 0.077, p = 0.095$).

cate that the estimated effect of inclusive framing is larger among non-participants than among protest participants, further supporting our expectation that mediated portrayals matter more for those who encounter the movement indirectly.

To demonstrate that this moderation is linked to firsthand protest experience rather than political engagement more broadly, we replicate the analysis using other contemporaneous forms of participation: posting or sharing political contents on social media and discussing politics with friends, family, or colleagues.[14] As shown in Table A.6, we find no comparable heterogeneity. The interaction terms for these alternative indicators are small and statistically indistinguishable from zero across outcomes (social media: $\beta = 0.011, p = 0.917$, political conversation: $\beta = -0.017, p = 0.864$). Together, the results suggest that cross-cutting solidarity is most readily shaped through mediated portrayals among those outside the movement, while direct participation is associated with higher baseline support that is not further increased and may even be slightly dampened when protest participation is re-presented through mediated frames.

In the next section, we examine the mechanisms that help explain why information about young citizens' protest participation generated a significant increase in support for policies targeting women, whereas a similar effect did not emerge when women were presented as the primary group engaged in the protest.

MECHANISMS

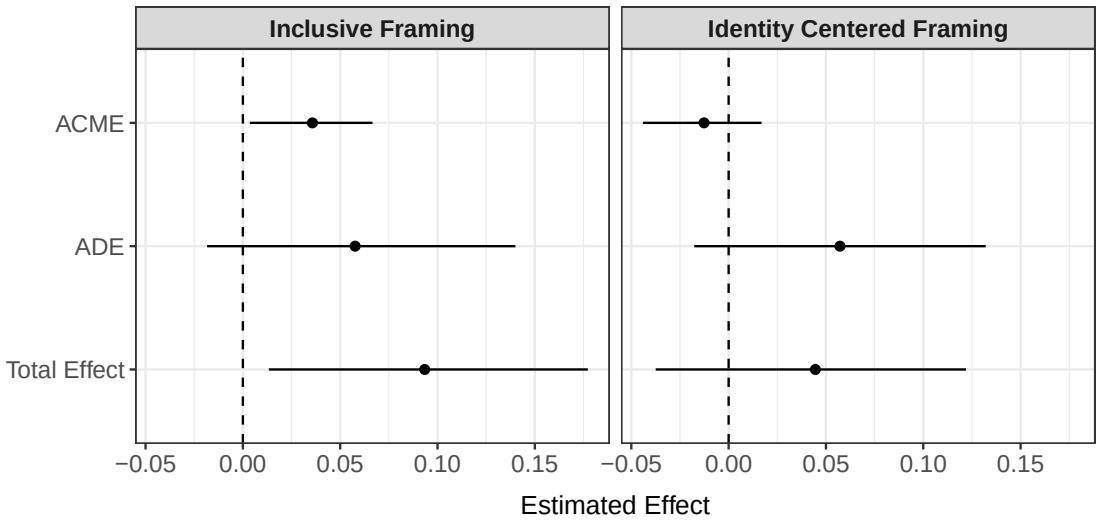
One explanation for the increase in support for Women TSP following exposure to inclusive framing is that women may be understood as integral yet under-recognized participants in the pro-democracy movement. Specifically, their participation alongside men may have drawn attention to a broader societal reality where women often do not receive fair treatment or recognition, even when they contribute equally to collective efforts. Thus, exposure to a vignette portray-

[14] Approximately 17.5% of respondents reported engaging with politics on social media, and 68.4% reported discussing politics with friends, family, or colleagues during the same period.

ing young citizens' protest participation as involving both young men and young women may have reminded respondents that women play a meaningful role in democratic mobilization while continuing to face structural inequities. This recognition could heighten perceptions of women's *deservingness*, which are central to welfare policy attitudes (Petersen et al. 2011; Schneider and Ingram 1993), and help explain why support for women-targeted social programs increased even though women were not explicitly highlighted in the treatment.

To assess this possibility, we asked respondents to evaluate how well the term "deserving" describes women in Korea following the treatment. The responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Not well at all" to "Extremely well." Using this measure, we conducted a mediation analysis to examine the extent to which the observed increase in support for Women TSP in the inclusive framing condition operates through heightened perceptions of women's deservingness.

Figure 5: Mediation Analysis



Note: This figure presents the point estimates and 95% credible intervals from a mediation analysis based on 1,000 bootstrap simulations. The top coefficient displays the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME), representing the portion of the treatment effect that operates through the mediator. The middle coefficient reports the Average Direct Effect (ADE), which captures the part of the treatment effect that is not transmitted through the mediator. The bottom coefficient presents the total effect, which is the sum of the ACME and ADE.

Consistent with our expectation, the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME) is 0.036 and

statistically significant in the inclusive framing condition ($p = 0.014$), indicating that exposure to information about young citizens' protest participation increases support for Women TSP by shifting perceptions of women's deservingness (see the left panel in Figure 5). Although the total treatment effect on support for Women TSP is 0.093 and statistically significant ($p = 0.030$), the direct effect becomes small and not statistically distinguishable from zero once the mediator is included ($\beta = 0.058, p = 0.154$). This suggests that, after accounting for perceived deservingness, the treatment does not exert a detectable direct influence on support for Women TSP. The estimated proportion mediated (approximately 38%) further shows that a substantial share of the total treatment effect operates through shifts in perceived deservingness ($p = 0.040$). By contrast, in the identity-centered framing condition, the ACME, ADE, and total effect are all statistically insignificant (see the right panel in Figure 5). Taken together, these results suggest that the increase in support for Women TSP observed in the inclusive condition is partly driven by respondents viewing women as more deserving of social support, whereas directly highlighting women's participation did not produce comparable shifts in perceived deservingness.[15]

Our second question, then, concerns why respondents exposed to identity-centered framing did not show a similar significant positive response. One possibility is backlash. Given the high level of gender polarization in South Korea, information that explicitly foregrounds women's political participation may trigger resistance rather than support among some respondents. A second possibility is that directly presenting women as leading protest activity heightens perceptions of women's agency, which may reduce the perceived need for policies designed to address gender-specific disadvantages. A third possibility is tied to the mechanism identified above. When women are depicted within the broader category of "young citizens," which implicitly includes both men and women, their disadvantage becomes more salient because they appear to participate equally alongside men in the democratic movement while continuing to face unequal societal treatment. When women are presented alone, this comparative reference point disappears, making perceptions of discrimination less cognitively salient and reducing the likelihood

[15]For the sensitivity analysis results, see Figure A.7 in the SI.

that respondents will increase support for policies that benefit women.

With these possible explanations in mind, we conducted a follow-up survey with 1,000 participants drawn from our original sample to examine whether inclusive framing and identity-centered framing shapes the image of women that comes to respondents' minds in distinct ways. In this second experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that presented either information about young citizens' protest participation (inclusive framing) or information about women's protest participation (identity-centered framing). The vignette followed the style of the original experiment but was presented in a shorter format and without accompanying images. The treatment text was as follows:

> Following the December 3 Martial Law declaration, demonstrations in Yeouido continued for eleven days, with strong participation from the 2030 generation, particularly **[young citizens/young women]**.[16] Some observers suggest that witnessing the impeachment motion pass in response to these protests may spur sustained and active political engagement among **[younger generations/young women]**.

After reading the vignette, respondents provided open-ended answers by listing three words that came to mind when they thought about "Korean women."[17] Using these responses, we constructed three binary indicators capturing whether respondents characterized women in derogatory or negative terms (*Backlash*), described them as agentic or proactive (*Agency*), or referenced discrimination and structural inequality facing women in society (*Inequality*).[18] These categories are not mutually exclusive. A respondent could, for example, list terms reflecting both agency and inequality (such as "strong" and "glass ceiling"), or combine a backlash-oriented term with one referencing inequality (such as "selfish" and "gender equality"). All coding was conducted manually. Intercoder reliability was 0.925 for *Backlash*, 0.837 for *Agency*, and 0.884 for *Inequal-*

[16] In Korean, the terms for "(2030) generation" [sae-dae] and "young citizens" [chung-nyun] carry distinct meanings. Using both therefore does not create tautology.

[17] For question wordings, see SI B.1.

[18] SI B.3 presents the English translated and the original Korean word clouds for the open-ended responses.

ity during the initial coding process, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion to reach consensus. SI B.2 provides a detailed description of the coding rules.

We estimate three separate logistic regression models, each using one of the binary follow-up outcomes that code whether respondents described women in terms of backlash, agency, or inequality. For each outcome, we regress the indicator on the treatment variable that presented information about young citizens' protest participation (inclusive framing), with respondents who viewed the vignette about women's protest participation (identity-centered framing) serving as the reference category. The analysis is restricted to respondents who supported the protest, which aligns with the theoretical scope of the mechanism.

Table 2: Effect of Young-Citizen Protest Information on Perceptions of Women

	Backlash	Agency	Inequality
(Intercept)	−0.820	−0.686	1.458**
	(0.647)	(0.484)	(0.519)
Treatment	0.154	−0.015	0.456*
	(0.239)	(0.159)	(0.186)
Num.Obs.	704	704	704
Log.Lik.	−239.753	−452.844	−362.315
F	4.766	4.725	4.811
Controls	✓	✓	✓

Signif. Codes: $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$,
Note: Table entries display estimates in log odds from logit models with robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 2 presents the results. We find that respondents exposed to the inclusive framing have roughly 1.58 times higher odds of using inequality related descriptors for women than those who viewed the identity-centered framing (odds ratio $e^{0.456} = 1.58$, $p = 0.014$). By contrast, the estimated effects for backlash terms (odds ratio $e^{0.154} = 1.17$, $p = 0.518$) and agency terms (odds ratio $e^{-0.015} = 0.99$, $p = 0.926$) are small and do not differ significantly from zero. These results indicate that information about women's protest participation does not, on its own, prompt respon-

dents to express greater hostility toward women than information about young citizens' protest participation. Nor does placing women at the forefront of the vignette make respondents more likely to view women as agentic compared to presenting women as part of a broader cohort of young protesters. The only significant difference is that exposure to the inclusive framing makes respondents more likely to mention discrimination and inequality, suggesting that women's unequal treatment becomes more salient when women are positioned as part of a broader protest coalition rather than highlighted in isolation.[19]

Taken together with the mediation analysis—which showed that information about young citizens' protest participation increased perceptions of women's deservingness, thereby fostering support for Women TSP—our follow-up experiment further indicates that respondents become especially attentive to women's unequal social position when women are presented within a broader cohort of young protesters rather than as the sole focal group. This pattern helps explain why support for Women TSP increased in the young-citizen condition but not when women were highlighted directly.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In summary, we show that shared mobilization can translate into cross-cutting solidarity, and that inclusive framing of social participation can be a particularly effective strategy for building public support for inclusionary reforms. Our study speaks to the politics of redistribution in polarized democracies. Political polarization often coincides with group-based cleavages that

[19] Models that include the age group interaction term show that the treatment effect on perceptions of inequality among younger respondents is roughly half the size of the effect among older respondents. This difference, however, is not statistically significant ($p = 0.136$), and the subgroup analysis is not sufficiently powered to detect effects of this magnitude. We therefore cannot conclude that the treatment effects differ significantly between the two age groups. Full results on heterogeneous effects by age and gender are presented in Table B.2 in the SI.

structure both identity and material interests. Under such conditions, building cross-cutting support for policies that promote equal rights and opportunities for marginalized groups becomes particularly challenging. We suggest that such policies may gain broader support when beneficiary groups are situated within coalitions organized around shared values rather than presented as narrow identity categories competing for resources.

At the same time, we acknowledge important limitations. First, our study focuses on South Korea's 2024 impeachment protests following President Yoon's martial law declaration. While this setting offers strong internal validity, South Korea's intense gender polarization may condition the effectiveness of identity centered portrayals of women's activism. In contexts where gender divisions are less pronounced, highlighting women's participation may generate broader sympathy and stronger support than we observe in this study. Future research should examine whether these patterns generalize to other polarized settings and to protests organized around different issues.

Second, our empirical setting captures a case in which mass mobilization contributed to a successful democratic outcome. The mechanisms we identify may operate differently in contexts where protests fail, fragment, or are met with severe state violence. In such settings, protest participation may be interpreted less as shared civic contribution and more as partisan conflict or disorder, potentially limiting the scope for cross-cutting solidarity. Future research should examine whether similar framing dynamics emerge under conditions of protest failure, authoritarian consolidation, or prolonged instability.

Despite these limitations, our findings carry practical implications for activists, political communicators, and policymakers. For policymakers and advocates working to advance gender equality in polarized environments, our findings underscore the challenges of direct advocacy in contexts of intense backlash. Recent research documents widening political gaps between young men and women in the United States (Gillion, Ladd and Meredith 2020; Ondercin and Lizotte 2021), the United Kingdom (Campbell and Shorrocks 2021; Di Landro 2025), and across Europe (Nennstiel and Hudde 2025). When gender itself becomes a polarizing political cleav-

age, policies framed explicitly as benefiting women may face heightened resistance, particularly among younger men who perceive themselves as disadvantaged. Alternative framings that emphasize fairness, equal opportunity, or collective welfare, while still addressing gender specific inequalities, may encounter less opposition (Jacoby 2000; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997).

In demonstrating the effectiveness of framing social movements as reflecting broad social backgrounds, we do not mean to suggest that women's prominent roles should not be highlighted. Emphasizing women's active political participation serves important purposes that extend beyond the outcomes examined in this study. Directly emphasizing women's protest involvement can shape public's broader attitudes toward women, strengthen women's sense of political efficacy, empower those who took part in the demonstrations, and encourage greater political engagement among women who observe their peers' activism (Carpenter et al. 2018; Corder and Wolbrecht 2016; Teele 2018; Kreft 2019). Our findings should therefore not be interpreted as suggesting that spotlighting women's activism is unimportant or suboptimal. Rather, our results suggest that when the aim is to build broader societal support for policies addressing women's concerns and reducing gender inequality, situating women within a wider collective may be a particularly effective strategy, as it draws attention both to the substantive role they play and to the inequities they continue to face.

While this study focuses on gender, the logic may extend to policies targeting other marginalized groups, where explicitly group-centered appeals can activate zero sum perceptions and defensive reactions among out groups. Situating redistribution and inclusion within a shared moral or civic framework may help broaden support by linking group specific remedies to widely held principles of equal membership and democratic reciprocity. In this sense, our results underscore the strategic value of portrayals that emphasize shared values and collective action (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001) while minimizing the appearance of narrow group interests. Highlighting diverse participation and situating specific groups within broader coalitions may be more effective than centering the activism of a single, politically polarized group—even when that group has legitimate grievances and plays a leading role in mobilization.

Across a wide range of contemporary movements, from resistance to democratic backsliding to struggles over labor rights and racial justice, social movements often unfold in polarized environments marked by deep social divisions. In these contexts, activists and organizers strategically foreground marginalized groups at the forefront of collective action to make their contributions more visible to broader publics and to challenge exclusion from political recognition. Our findings suggest that such visibility efforts do not generate uniform gains, but instead depend on whether marginalized participation is communicated through inclusive civic categories or emphasized as a distinct identity claim. These results illustrate both the promise and the limits of social participation as a vehicle for advancing equality in divided societies. When movements successfully activate inclusive identities organized around shared political values, they can extend sympathy and support to marginalized groups even under intense polarization. Yet this potential depends on strategic framing choices that situate marginalized participants within broader coalitions rather than presenting them as isolated claimants in perceived zero sum distributional conflicts. As democracies worldwide grapple with deepening social divisions, understanding these dynamics becomes increasingly crucial for both scholars seeking to explain political change and citizens working to build more equitable societies.

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