



# Text Mining Based on Zhihu: An Exploration of the Controversy Surrounding the Divorce Cooling-off Period

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**Abstract:** Since its implementation, the divorce cooling-off period has been highly controversial, with apparent discrepancies between its original intent and actual effects. This paper uses Python to obtain posts and textual data related to the divorce cooling-off period on the Zhihu platform. Based on text mining software and employing methods such as high-frequency word statistics, it delves into people's subjective understandings of the system, explores the underlying controversial issues, and attempts to propose constructive suggestions.

**Keywords:** Divorce Cooling-off Period; Text Mining; Data Analysis

## I. Introduction

To reduce impulsive divorces, China's Civil Code officially introduced the divorce cooling-off period system on January 1, 2021, applicable to consensual divorces. The core provisions of this system can be summarized as follows: ① Both spouses must jointly submit a divorce application to the marriage registration authority. Upon acceptance, a 30-day cooling-off period begins. ② During the cooling-off period, either party can withdraw the application. If neither withdraws, they must jointly apply for the divorce certificate within the subsequent 30-day processing period. ③ Failure to jointly apply for the certificate within this period results in the application being deemed withdrawn, requiring the entire process to be restarted.

While the system has reduced impulsive divorces, it has also sparked controversy over issues such as restrictions on marital freedom and the inability to divorce amicably. Data shows that the proportion of consensual divorces dropped from 86.1% to 71.9%, while contested divorces surged to 28%. Young people have remarked, "Divorce is difficult, and getting married is even more frightening." As controversy surrounding its implementation persists, some delegates during the 2025 "Two Sessions" suggested deleting the divorce cooling-off period clause. This topic trended and topped lists on social media, reigniting widespread debate.

## II. Issue Focus: Current Status Related to the Divorce Cooling-off Period

### 1. Elaboration on the Original Intent of the Divorce Cooling-off Period System

Family is a crucial component of Chinese society, and the legislative intent behind the divorce cooling-off period rules is commendable. Spouses, bound by affection or responsibility, form families to share life's pressures and burdens, raise children, support parents, and accompany each other through life. This bond should be cherished. The core objective of the divorce cooling-off period is to prevent hasty divorces triggered by trivial matters or emotional impulses. Legislators aimed to provide a 30-day buffer, allowing couples to re-evaluate their marital conflicts and avoid destabilizing families due to momentary rashness. Data indicates that approximately 58% of applicants abandoned their divorce applications in the initial implementation phase, suggesting that some impulsive divorces were successfully averted. Essentially, the divorce cooling-off period seeks to balance individual freedom and social responsibility. While marital freedom is a fundamental right, marriage as a social institution also carries familial and social responsibilities. The cooling-off period respects individual marital freedom while considering the impact of divorce on society, family, and children.

### 2. Implementation Dilemmas of the Divorce Cooling-off Period

The legislative intent, reflecting certain social value orientations, is laudable. However, whether the lawmakers' purpose aligns with practical outcomes remains debatable<sup>1</sup>. The divorce cooling-off period, by mandatorily intervening in the fundamental right to marital freedom through administrative means, requires couples to endure a 30-day waiting period even after reaching a rational, mutual agreement. In practice, this has caused dissatisfaction among involved parties and public opinion. This system reflects the traditional value of "promoting reconciliation over separation," which clashes with the pursuit of personal well-being valued in contemporary society. While supporters argue the cooling-off period helps maintain family



stability, opponents contend that this systemic design overlooks the complex power dynamics and individual differences within marriages, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities. The widespread debate triggered by this system reflects a profound collision between traditional family concepts and modern individual rights awareness during this period of social transformation<sup>2</sup>, necessitating deeper reflection and exploration in both legislative philosophy and specific systemic design.

### **3. Review of Domestic and International Research Status**

Scholars domestically and internationally hold diverse perspectives on the divorce cooling-off period system.

Professor Yang Lixin, in his paper *Legislative Evaluation of the Divorce Cooling-off Period Stipulated in the Draft Marriage and Family Chapter of the Civil Code*, elucidates that the introduction of the divorce cooling-off period in the draft aimed to curb hasty and impulsive divorces, optimize the divorce legal system, consolidate marital relationships, and maintain social stability. However, academic controversy persists regarding the legitimacy of this system as proposed<sup>3</sup>. Xia Qin, in *An Interpretation Theory of the Registered Divorce Cooling-off Period Clause in the Civil Code*, emphasizes that the legislator's inclusion of this period was based on necessity, yet debates continue. Analysis of this regulation should follow specific paths: first, clarifying the basic definition and essence of the system; second, exploring the multi-dimensional conflicts of interest among individuals, families, and society under this clause; and third, examining the trade-offs between values like divorce freedom, family ethics, and public order<sup>4</sup>. Professor Guo Jianping, in his academic work *Jurisprudential Thoughts on the Construction of China's Divorce Cooling-off Period System*, profoundly states that through in-depth analysis of the internal logic of the law, judicial practice mechanisms, and social realities, the concept aligns closely with China's current context of high divorce rates, reflecting its solid jurisprudential foundation and practical relevance<sup>5</sup>. Zhang Jianyuan, commenting on Article 1077 of the Civil Code, points out that the system will face continuous legal adjustments and refinements as society develops. However, understanding its essence requires looking beyond the specific clause to examine its position within the broader legal system and its interaction with social reality, thus grasping its connotation accurately and discerning the intertwined construction of law and society<sup>6</sup>. Hyunjoo Shim and

Bailey L. Ocker, in *Divorce in South Korea: An Introduction to Demographic Trends, Culture, and Law*, analyze that after implementing a divorce cooling-off period, uncontested divorce cases decreased in South Korea, but contested cases increased, suggesting the system may not be highly effective<sup>7</sup>. Virgil H. Langtry, in *Juvenile Crime - An Approach to Solving Some Fundamental Problems through Changes in Divorce Laws*, notes that while problems in marriage are common, excessively easy divorce might encourage couples to avoid rather than solve problems, thus justifying the need for a cooling-off period<sup>8</sup>. George Brown, in *Divorce Reform*, argues that rising divorce rates can lead to the degradation of marital values and social morality, increasing phenomena like cohabitation and non-marital births. He advocates for measures, including cooling-off periods, to curb high divorce rates<sup>9</sup>.

### **III. Research Design**

This paper focuses on people's subjective perceptions of the divorce cooling-off period within China's complex social context. It aims to identify the core reasons for public opposition, explore deeper contemporary marital values and influencing factors related to the system, and offer constructive suggestions for this controversial social issue. The big data used in this study compensates for the limitations of traditional data collection methods. By employing web scraping technology to obtain large-scale unstructured textual data and conducting data mining and text analysis, we can gain a deeper understanding of individual consciousness while reducing response biases caused by external pressure or expectations.

#### **1. Data**

This paper analyzes posts and question content under the "divorce cooling-off period" tag within the marriage on Zhihu. Zhihu serves as an excellent platform for text mining, gathering users from various professions. Its monthly active users (MAU) exceeded 120 million in 2023, with daily active users (DAU) surpassing 38 million. This vast user base generates massive daily interactive data, including notes, comments, likes, and favorites, providing sufficient breadth of textual data. Zhihu community reports indicate that over 60% of users hold a bachelor's degree or higher, signifying high user quality. Discussions cover diverse fields like technology, economy, and culture, offering rich, high-quality corpora for data mining and adding depth to the textual data. The platform's inherent Q&A format provides structured text, facilitating



later analysis. Compared to platforms like Xiaohongshu, Zhihu's user demographics are more balanced in terms of gender, helping mitigate research biases stemming from gender. Therefore, Zhihu, possessing depth, breadth, and timeliness, is an ideal data source for text mining.

Regarding specific topic selection, after considering current hot issues, social context, text quality and quantity, and research relevance, this paper ultimately selected the specific tag divorce cooling-off period for data collection. This tag has nearly 55.37 million views and 51,000 discussions. Observing the answers under this topic reveals diverse perspectives, including those of males, females, singles, and married individuals. Discussions under this tag comprehensively present the views of Zhihu users from various backgrounds on the divorce cooling-off period system.

## 2. Methods

The specific analysis proceeds as follows: First, Python is used to scrape user responses under the divorce cooling-off period topic on Zhihu as the analysis sample, excluding invalid data such as responses containing only videos or images. The sample includes user response text, creation time, IP address, and number of 赞同 (likes). After data extraction, all sample IPs are tallied. Based on IP statistics, we analyze which groups are more prone to

discuss such policy topics, whose consensus the subsequent research results might lean towards, and the social status quo and values reflected by the IP distribution. Subsequently, the data sample undergoes word segmentation processing. High-frequency word statistics are calculated, and a word cloud is generated. Using the software's co-occurrence network analysis function, we analyze and visualize associations between keywords to identify core controversial issues related to the divorce cooling-off period. Finally, the response year is set as an external variable for correspondence analysis. This displays frequently occurring words for each year since the policy's implementation in January 2021, allowing observation of how discussion points evolved over time and analysis of the underlying deeper meanings.

## IV. Text Mining Analysis of the Divorce Cooling-off Period Narrative from the Netizen Perspective

### 1. IP Address Statistics Analysis

Addressing a serious and somewhat political topic like the divorce cooling-off period, which involves multiple facets and concerns the public, this paper first tallies the IP locations of all valid sample data. The aim is to uncover underlying reasons and social phenomena through IP analysis of discussions on this topic. Figures 1 and 2 present the statistical results.



Image 1

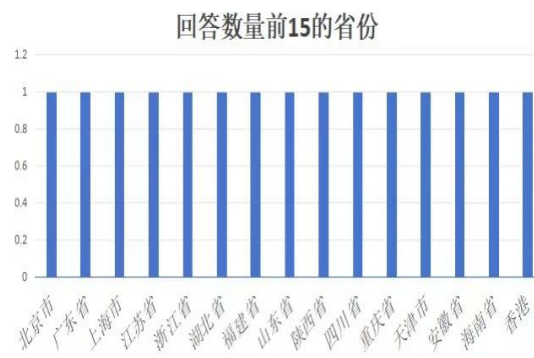


Image 2

It is evident that major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and the more developed eastern coastal provinces show higher attention and discussion enthusiasm for this topic. This regional distribution results from multiple factors and reveals certain social patterns and current conditions.

Firstly, residents in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and coastal developed cities generally have higher education levels and stronger legal awareness, making them more sensitive to issues like marital freedom and individual rights. As a policy

potentially restricting divorce freedom, the cooling-off period easily triggers questions about public power interfering in private life, thus sparking public discussion. Secondly, the controversy essentially embodies the conflict between traditional family ethics and modern marital autonomy<sup>10</sup>. The illustrated areas exhibit higher urbanization, more open and inclusive thinking, weaker traditional family concepts (e.g., *till death do us part*), and a tendency towards individualism, with more people viewing marriage as a dissoluble contract, leading to





**Values and Society:** Society (954), Tradition (598), Modernity (576), Concept/Value (621), Freedom (1421), Choice (1387), Independence (487), Equality (465), Dignity (443). These reflect the clear value conflict between tradition (family stability) and modernity (individual freedom). The opposition between *freedom* and *bondage* highlights ideological differences caused by the policy. High frequencies of *equality* and *dignity* signal the involvement of gender perspectives.

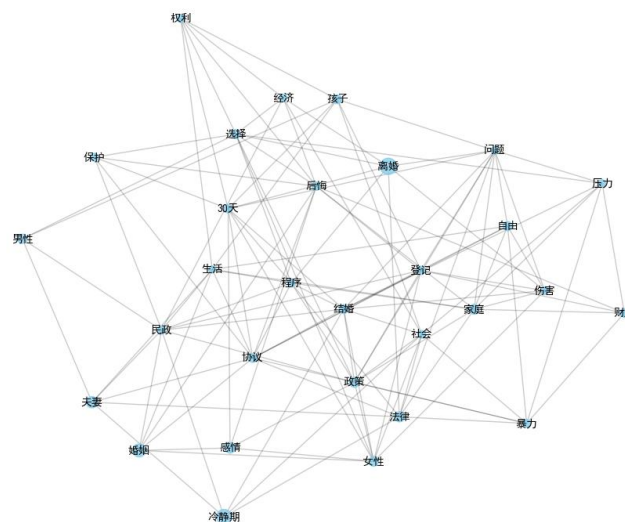
**Economic Factors:** Economy (912), Pressure (889), Life (865), Property (1289), Agreement (1254), Sense of security (709). Frequent mention of economic factors like property division, agreements, and urban life pressure suggests divorce decisions are influenced not only by emotions but also significantly by material conditions.

Public opinion appears polarized, with opposition (798) and support (776) having similar frequencies, underscoring the policy's controversial

nature and the value of this study. The high frequency of young people (687) hints at generational differences. These preliminary findings from high-frequency words warrant further in-depth analysis.

### 3. Co-occurrence Network Analysis

To further grasp the core issues, this paper extracts keywords based on high-frequency words and conducts co-occurrence network analysis. Using text mining software, a co-occurrence network map is constructed to visualize potential associations between keywords. Topic extraction from closely monitored word clusters allows for a deeper understanding of the public's shared concerns regarding the controversy. Interpreted within China's social context, this analysis aims to reveal the multiple implications behind the divorce cooling-off period.



Based on the co-occurrence network illustrated, analyzing connections between words reveals three core issues particularly emphasized in the divorce cooling-off period narrative:

**Conflict between Individual Rights and Institutional Constraints:** Core word group (Rights, Freedom, Choice, Policy, Law, Procedure, 30 days, Cooling-off period). The focal point of controversy is whether the mandatory divorce cooling-off period excessively interferes with citizens' marital freedom<sup>12</sup>. Supporters believe it reduces impulsive divorce, while opponents argue it may deprive individuals, especially domestic violence victims, of timely exit options (evident in links to *rights*, *harm*). The combination of high divorce rates and strong legal awareness in developed regions leads to greater

sensitivity to public power intervention. Less developed areas might rely more on traditional mediation or remain silent. With the former group having a louder voice in the public sphere, online opposition to the system appears stronger.

**Economic and Gender Dynamics in Marriage:** Core word group (Economy, Property, Agreement, Resources, Male, Female, Pressure, Life). Divorce is not just an emotional end but also an economic reorganization and an adjustment of gender power relations<sup>13</sup>. Urbanization increases the number of economically independent women, and women's thinking and social status are continuously rising. However, deep-seated issues like unequal resource distribution within marriage and women's hidden vulnerability persist due to long-standing male



dominance<sup>14</sup>. The cooling-off period inadvertently amplifies problems and contradictions related to property and gender, making it a major point of contention.

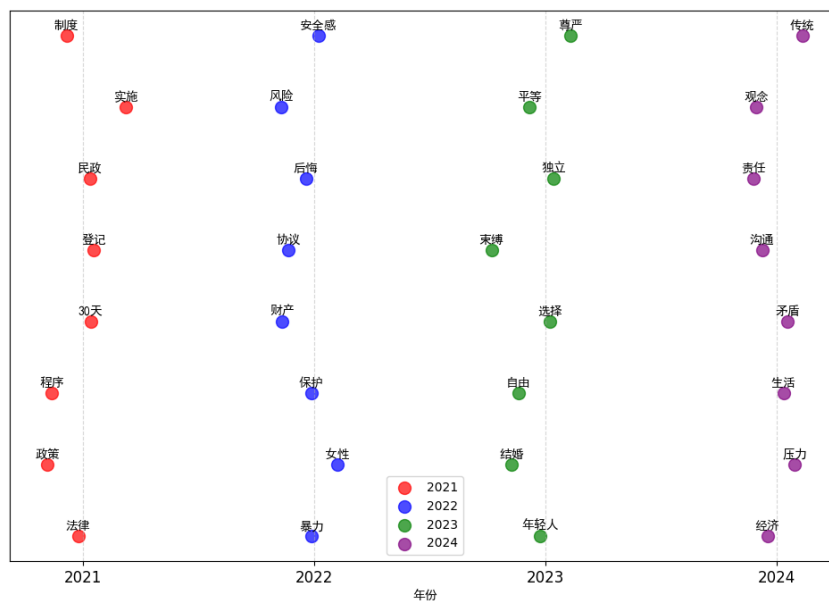
**Tension between Emotional Rationality and Family Responsibility:** Core word group (Emotion/Feeling, Marriage, Couple, Child(ren), Regret, Violence, Harm, Society). The cooling-off period attempts to use time to buffer *emotional impulse* and awaken a sense of responsibility, yet it somewhat overlooks irreversible harm already existing in some marriages (linked to *violence, harm*). The high association with child(ren) reflects societal concern for the well-being of children in divorced families, but whether the policy effectively protects children's rights remains questionable. This reveals a cognitive dissonance between traditional family values and the contemporary pursuit of emotional

quality in relationships. The younger generation views marriage as a dissoluble relational contract, while the policy still defaults to marriage as a social unit requiring maintenance. This significant generational difference fuels conflict and controversy<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4. Correspondence Analysis: Temporal Evolution of Focus Since Implementation

Amidst rapid social change, the divorce cooling-off period policy has been implemented for over four years. Public views have evolved due to changing external factors. This paper uses the response year on Zhihu (2021-2024) as an external variable in correspondence analysis to observe changes in focal points within public discourse on the divorce cooling-off period over time.

图4 按年份的“离婚冷静期”话题关键词分布



Specifically, in the 2021 response data, words like *system, policy, civil affairs, and procedure* were frequently mentioned. This reflects initial institutional controversy and rights anxiety at the policy's outset. Public attention was highly focused on procedural details, and debates centered on the rationality of government intervention in private rights. The public was still digesting the system itself, with discussions leaning towards legal procedures rather than practical impacts. In 2022, amidst increasing economic downward pressure (recurring COVID-19, job market fluctuations), economic conflicts within marriages intensified. Terms like *economy, pressure, property, female, and male* appeared frequently. Property and gender issues

heated up (e.g., spread of female independence ideology). The cooling-off period became integrated into gender equality discussions. Statistics from the All-China Women's Federation in 2022 showed that 60% of domestic violence victims experienced intensified abuse during the cooling-off period, with extreme cases leading to death. This stage saw a shift from procedural debates to practical consequences. By 2023, marriage rates continued to decline, and child-free/anti-marriage trends gained popularity among youth. Conflicts between emotional rationality and generational values erupted. Two years post-implementation, the public began assessing the policy's actual impact on marital quality. Younger people emphasized the emotional



foundation of marriage, viewing the cooling-off period as forcibly prolonging a failed relationship, while the older generation still valued family responsibility. The gap deepened between the policy's attempt to uphold traditional family values and the needs of an individualizing society. In 2024, with accumulated cases and gradual publication of policy effectiveness data (e.g., divorce rate changes, domestic violence complaints), the systemic risks of the policy were comprehensively re-examined. Social fairness issues, such as the protection of vulnerable groups, became the core of public discussion.

From discussing the system itself in 2021 to focusing on policy effects and social fairness in 2024, the public's focus has become increasingly socially grounded and thoughtful, enhancing the research value. Hence, when delegates proposed abolishing the divorce cooling-off period during the 2025 Two Sessions, it quickly trended, sparked heated discussion, and gained much support.

#### **V. Reflections and Suggestions**

This paper takes over 10,000 Q&A text entries on the divorce cooling-off period from the Zhihu platform as its research object, deeply analyzing the Chinese public's subjective perceptions of the system and revealing the core controversies and deeper implications embedded in their narratives. While the original intent of the divorce cooling-off period is commendable, problems emerging during implementation require adjustment and reform. Based on data analysis, the author offers reflections and attempts to propose some suggestions.

According to contradictions identified in the IP analysis, a one-size-fits-all implementation approach for the divorce cooling-off period is inadvisable. Pilot programs should precede nationwide rollout. For less developed regions, implementation could be delayed. Initial trials in more developed areas, under public and media scrutiny, would facilitate the exposure and resolution of problems. Once the system and its supporting safeguards are largely in place, national promotion could follow, potentially avoiding many issues.

Based on high-frequency word and co-occurrence network analysis, legal constraints should first be established for this system—specifically, creating a differentiated cooling-off period mechanism. Establish exemption clauses to protect high-risk vulnerable groups. This applies to situations involving domestic violence, major fraud, disappearance of a spouse, or malicious delay of divorce proceedings. Victims could apply for an expedited divorce channel through civil affairs departments or courts, bypassing the 30-day waiting

period. Establish a data linkage system among civil affairs, public security, and courts to verify exemption applications. Collaborate with women's federations and social organizations to provide legal aid for exemption applicants. Furthermore, for example, in judicial practice, domestic violence determination requires proof of sustained, regular nature or significant harmful consequences. Isolated physical conflicts or mutual fighting are typically not recognized, and psychological violence is hard to prove, making support difficult. Although 2025 regulations clarified conditions for admonition orders, grassroots enforcement still harbors a family matter mindset, limiting intervention effectiveness. Consequently, many divorce cases involving legally complex determinations like domestic violence or asset transfer cannot bypass the 30-day cooling-off period, potentially endangering the vulnerable party. From this perspective, supporting systems and implementation frameworks must be improved. Initiatives could include "special case green channels" merging mediation and litigation procedures. Pilot projects could test online filing and electronic evidence admission, paired with legal aid funded by judicial departments for economically disadvantaged victims. Concurrently, operational norms for civil affairs departments should be optimized, clarifying informing obligations. Upon divorce registration, parties must be informed in writing of their rights and obligations during the cooling-off period, including exemption conditions. Training staff in domestic violence identification and conflict mediation is crucial to avoid mechanical policy enforcement. Finally, a policy effectiveness evaluation system should be established. For instance, civil affairs departments could quarterly release Divorce Cooling-off Period Implementation Reports disclosing data on divorce rate changes, remarriage rates, domestic violence complaints, etc. Entrust universities or research institutions with social impact studies, comprehensively safeguarding the cooling-off period's implementation, reducing public controversy, and rebuilding public trust<sup>16</sup>.

Based on the correspondence analysis of temporal changes, as time passes and more complex real-world problems emerge, public reflection on the system deepens. This demands that relevant departments and legislators focus not only on the system itself but also consider reality and handle complex issues with nuanced approaches. For example, tiered cooling-off periods could be implemented. Simple examples: For uncontested divorces (both parties willing), no property/child disputes), shorten the cooling-off period to 7-15 days and simplify procedures. For high-conflict divorces



(economic disputes, custody battles), retain the 30-day period but mandate supporting mediation services. For crisis marriages (one party insists on divorce, the other opposes), retain the 30 days and introduce professional marriage counselor assessment. Continuously refine the system based on urgent public concerns to enhance public acceptance.

As a significant force in the internet age, public opinion's power cannot be underestimated. While improving the system, relevant departments should mitigate negative policy spillovers and strengthen public education and communication. Use case studies to illustrate the cooling-off period's buffering effect on impulsive divorce. Clearly communicate that cooling-off period ≠ prohibition of divorce and that situations like domestic violence warrant exemptions. Provide targeted support for vulnerable groups. Establish economic assistance funds offering housing and vocational training subsidies for low-income women during the divorce transition. Provide free psychological counseling for divorcees experiencing domestic violence or emotional trauma. Demonstrating such humane concern could reduce public resistance to the system itself and somewhat alleviate young people's fear of marriage stemming from perceived divorce difficulties.

## VI. Conclusion

This study, through the text mining of 10,000+ Zhihu posts, systematically deconstructs the public's subjective perceptions of the divorce cooling-off period and the underlying social conflicts it reveals. The findings indicate that the controversy surrounding this policy is not merely a debate over legal procedures, but a concentrated manifestation of profound tensions between individual autonomy and institutional intervention, emotional quality and familial responsibility, and gender roles within the context of China's rapid social transformation.

The core contribution of this paper lies in empirically validating the theoretical conflicts identified in existing literature, such as the clash between traditional family ethics and modern individual rights consciousness, as discussed by scholars like Zhang Hui. The co-occurrence network analysis further refines these macro conflicts into three core public issue: *Individual Rights vs. Institutional Constraints*, *Economic and Gender Dynamics*, and *Emotional Rationality vs. Familial Responsibility*. The diachronic analysis reveals a deepening public discourse—from initial procedural concerns to current structural critiques centered on social equity and the protection of vulnerable groups. This evolution reflects a reflexive modernization of

public legal consciousness, where the top-down institutional logic is increasingly interrogated by bottom-up lived experience.

The study also carries important policy implications. First, the current uniform 30-day cooling-off period fails to account for the heterogeneity of marital situations. There is an urgent need to transition from a one-size-fits-all administrative control to a differentiated judicial and public service system. This includes establishing clear exemption clauses for domestic violence and other victimized groups, and exploring a graded cooling-off mechanism for different types of divorce conflicts. Second, the prominence of economic and gender issues in the discourse highlights the necessity for a systemic support system. The policy's implementation must be accompanied by legal aid, psychological counseling, and economic assistance to address the structural inequalities it may inadvertently exacerbate.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample is inherently biased. As the IP analysis suggested, the spiral of silence implies that the voices of less developed regions and disadvantaged groups (e.g., rural women, the less educated) are largely absent from this online discourse. Therefore, our findings primarily represent the perceptions of relatively educated, urban netizens. Secondly, text mining excels at identifying what people are talking about, but is less effective at uncovering the deep-seated why behind their views. Future research could combine these quantitative findings with in-depth interviews to provide richer, more nuanced explanations. Finally, this paper describes the evolution of public opinion but stops short of systematically evaluating the actual, long-term social outcomes of the cooling-off period itself, such as its definitive impact on divorce rates, child welfare, or domestic violence recidivism. Future studies should leverage more comprehensive datasets to conduct rigorous policy effect evaluations, thereby bridging the gap between public perception and objective reality.

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