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Adapting violence for state survival and legitimacy: the resilience and dynamism of political repression in a democratizing South Korea*

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ABSTRACT

Capacity in violence and its utilization is generally understood to be a first-order condition of the state-building process. As capacity increases and a state gains supremacy over would-be competitors, the use of violence by the state is hypothesized to decline, especially in polities that have made the democratic transition. However, we here demonstrate theoretically and empirically that the conventional wisdom is inadequate. We argue that political violence ubiquitously evolves according to the changing socio-political environment and varying tasks of the state.

Using the case of South Korea, a high-capacity, consolidated democracy, as a prism for theory building and corroboration, this study chronicles the evolution of political violence from the state's explicit mobilization of thugs to suppress opposition at the early stage of state building through its collaboration with criminal organizations for developmental projects to the manipulation of quasi-governmental organizations after democratization in the late 1980s, coeval with the traditional use of public sources of force. We specifically look at how political development, that is, democratization, has produced new demands for – and constraints on – political violence and how post-authoritarian governments have responded.

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KEYWORDS political violence; state capacity; state–non-state cooperation; Korean politics

Introduction

State-sponsored political violence, mostly linked to nationalistic or religious fanaticism, electoral competition in hybrid regimes, or protection rackets, is not uncommon and can be easily and widely observed cross-nationally.[1] South Korea (Korea hereafter) recently experienced outbreaks of political violence by civil organizations, including the Korea Parent Federation (*ŏpŏiyŏnhap*, KPF), an organization of ultra-conservative retirees; the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights (*pukhan minjuhwa netŭwokŭ*), consisting of North Korean defectors; and the Association of Meritorious Undercover Operatives in North Korea (*tŭksu immu suhaengja hoe*), a non-

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profit organization of former special forces operatives. Former President Park Geunhye's office mobilized them for anti–North Korea, pro-government rallies in which they exercised physical violence against progressive civil society organizations. An investigation revealed that they were subsidized by the government and the Federation of Korean Industries (*chŏn'guk kyŏngjein yŏnhaphoe*), Korea's most influential business association (*Hankyoreh*, April 26, 2016; *Sisa Journal* no. 1384, April 28, 2016; *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 21, 2017).

Although those machinations might appear to be a simple case of corruption, the systemic issue of political violence in contemporary Korea is worth theoretical investigation in several important ways. First, although conventional wisdom draws a link between "weak state capacity"[2] or "perverse state formation"[3] and democracy, as in the cases of authoritarian elections,[4] major indices have judged Korea to be a "very stable" state retaining high capacity.[5] Second, government-sponsored violence persists in Korea even though it has been a stable democracy with "very high" electoral integrity since the late 1980s.[6] Thus, although Korea continues to exhibit many aspects of a "defective democracy", elections have become "the only game in town", and the constitution has generated "self-enforcing compliance with the outcome of an election".[7] In short, Korean politics have been and continue to be under significant pressure from democratic expectations, which has undoubtedly influenced the ways in which violence is exercised. Third, the motivations for political violence in the post-democratic period have been consistently in line with on-going state-development goals, including but not limited to violence related to redevelopment and labour protest suppression. Fourth, political violence is frequently exercised through private proxies, rather than through the state's repressive apparatus, which demonstrates the evolution of political violence, as well as the need for political actors to maintain their political legitimacy in competitive, democratic settings.

Political violence is known to be a critical element of state building, for which state-based supremacy in coercion is of paramount concern.[8] After statehood has been achieved, however, a variety of private actors continue to exercise political violence for various strategic reasons. In Korea, the state's explicit mobilization of street gangsters to suppress opponents at the early stage of state building in the 1950s transformed first into collaboration with criminal organizations in the 1960s and 1970s and then into manipulation of quasi-governmental organizations since the late 1980s. The Korean case leads us to challenge conventional views that systemic political violence disappears as a state's capacity increases, or the *withering-away* perspective. We also confute the popular understanding that political violence is no more than the state's direct manipulation of physical forces in society, as in cases of political assassinations,[9] electoral violence,[10] or the militarization of the state apparatus.[11] Instead, we argue that political violence has evolved according to the changing socio-political environment and the varying tasks of the state.

We specifically look at how democratization has produced new demands and constraints on political violence and how post-authoritarian regimes have responded by controlling the incidence and *targets* of physical conflicts. To illustrate the evolution of political violence and contribute to generalizable theory generation, this study chronologically analyses major incidents of political violence since the establishment of the Republic of Korea, from communist suppression by harnessed political gangsters, riot-police in private uniforms, and service companies to pro-government rightist groups.

Withering away of political violence?

Political violence is "a heterogeneous repertoire of actions aimed at inflicting physical, psychological and symbolic damage on individuals and/or property with the intention of influencing various audiences in order to effect or resist political, social, and/or cultural change".[12] From this basic definition, political violence can further be bifurcated into: state repression and non-state responses. Studies of the former discuss mainly the "conditions and incentives that encourage state repression", whereas studies of the latter consider "political conflicts and social environments in which violent forms of action emerge" as a "protest by other means".[13] Those two research trends, state suppression studies and the social movement literature, have been fused in the discourse of political violence because "oppositional violence and repression are closely related".[14] In short, the study of political violence has centred on studying "state violence against civilians and the use of violence by non-state actors against the state".[15]

Theorists have thus asked under what conditions and circumstances political violence varies and on what scale. Numerous factors, including a history of state repression,[16] political culture,[17] socioeconomic conditions,[18] international intervention,[19] weakness of the state,[20] authoritarian ideology,[21] and regime types,[22] correlate positively with the ebb and flow of state-based political violence. What this literature commonly implies is that state-based or state-sanctioned repression is a backward political tool that eventually withers away as its practicality dwindles – *i.e.* through the evolution of democratization – where the use of illegitimate violence by the state becomes incrementally riskier and unnecessary.

The study of political violence has thus endeavoured to identify the relationship and mechanisms between democracy and political violence, exploring the paths of "multiple causality".[23] The widely accepted, conventional conclusion is that democracies are much less repressive than authoritarian regimes.[24] It is also proclaimed that violence will, and should, eventually be tamed and routinized, along with other political observables, through the process of democratization.[25] However, as Fein[26] and Regan and Henderson[27] illustrate, immature or semi-democracies are probabilistically *more* repressive than authoritarian polities or consolidated democracies. Acemoglu et al.[28] demonstrate that private armed actors can persist within countries that meet at least the minimum standards for categorization as electoral democracies, as seen in Colombia. Also, internal violent conflict is not *clearly* correlated with the level of democracy, contrary to the *withering-away* thesis.[29] In other words, the extant empirical evidence confirms that political violence, rather than conforming to normative assumptions of what *should* be, is a persistent, albeit dynamic institution that exists within flawed or otherwise illiberal democracies such as Colombia or that can be retriggered within authoritarian-like enclaves within advanced democracies such as the United States.

Political violence as an evolutionary institution

We argue that the lacuna in explaining the persistence of political violence originates from traditional instrumental perspectives. The most typical examples stem from Marxist or "Marxist-esque" accounts that view the state apparatus as fundamentally underwritten through the use of violence.[30] In other words, from that viewpoint, political violence "provides the ruling class with an important element of the repression it requires".[31] This *instrumental* view of political violence is also prevalent within

conventional political discourse, which reinforces the notion of political violence as a kind of "protection racket" for the elite class,[32] whose coercive capacity is the key to sustaining authoritarianism.[33]

Empirical reality however, forces us to reject the arguably out-dated if not naïve idea that political violence will eventually wither away as democratization becomes consolidated. This teleological *withering-away* perspective based on an *instrumental* understanding of political violence fails to explain the persistence of political violence in established electoral democracies – demonstrated by our case study below – and the ubiquity of political violence within democratic polities outside the scope of our Korea-centred analysis. We instead posit that state-sanctioned political violence should be viewed as a dynamic and resilient institution of public and private collaboration in the market for politically motivated repression, which varies depending upon political, social, and historical conditions. In turn, we argue that because the extent and quality of democracy and state development empirically varies within even the strongest democracies, both state and state-tolerated repression and outright violence can persist in authoritarian enclaves or niche markets where the state is weak or non-existent. In other words, as supported by Mazzuca and Munck,[34] democracy does not simply pick up where and when state development finishes. Rather, leaders of any polity-type continually need to reproduce their legitimacy and hold over power – though democracy certainly affects the political calculus and policies involved.

Our theoretical approach is largely built on the literature describing state–non-state collaboration in the pursuit of political goals, including the case studies of Japan,[35] the study of state-building and violent entrepreneurship in Europe,[36] the analysis of lynching in the U.S. southern states,[37] coupled with the discussion of the diversity of state repression, including the study of "tyrannical peace".[38] Whilst this literature has made a substantial contribution, it predominately discusses state–non-state collaboration in the exercise of state-sponsored coercion when the state's coercive capacity is weak and democracy low. In short, state-seekers use various forms of and strategies for repression, to establish their coercive supremacy and compliance-inducing capacity.[39] However, to explain the persistence of political violence *after* the completion of state-building, especially *following* a democratic transition, we must look into the historical transformation of political violence, as well as its variation once a polity has achieved democratic classification.

In addition to the persistence of political repression in developed states, another puzzle is why states would underwrite extra-legal violence by private proxies. Studies that have investigated this puzzle have principally theorized it as reflecting low levels of capacity,[40] general neo-liberalization,[41] or a result of state capture by capitalist interests.[42] Although each argument has varying levels of explanatory power, we find those studies insufficient because they fail to address the political calculations conditioned by state strength and democratization, both of which are directly linked to a state's ability to ignore, or not, the pluralistic preferences of its society.

We propose a model that considers the role of state-based autonomy from societal forces as a key variable. The lower the level of state-based autonomy, the more state actors must consider the political consequences of their political policies and actions or inactions.[43] Using the private market for violence might thus become a selectively profitable strategy for state actors who face the threat of political backlash – electorally, in terms of reputation, or other negative externalities – for actions they deem necessary but politically risky.[44] "[T]he leaders of democratic societies

have", Dunigan explains, "on occasion, outsourced violence to distance itself from actions in warfare that may be considered illegitimate by their electorate".[45] Although much of the literature on outsourcing violence focuses on international settings, we argue that similar causal mechanisms and observable outcomes occur at various domestic levels as well.

To establish and illustrate our theoretical arguments, we use the case of Korea, a representative example of a consolidated electoral democracy with high state capacity.[46] Historically, political violence after Korea's independence from Japanese colonial rule largely fit the weak state explanation. The government was weak in terms of coercive capacity, political legitimacy, and infrastructural power, and thus it resorted to the crude mobilization of private violence for political agendas. After three years of war (1950–1953), the nascent state-building process was nearly complete, and the newly established military regime used economic and social development as its legitimizing raison d'être. Therefore, repression – sacrificing civil liberties – in the name of modernization and industrialization became the political norm. This repressive modernization thesis has been the dominant explanation for the resilience of the violent state – society interactions in Korea.[47]

As part of the development process, the state's official coercive institutions – the military and police forces – were expanded, including the integration and subjugation of private violence organizations. However, democratization had a significant effect on the state's ability to exercise violence, and although non-state sources of violence were significantly downsized, they were not completely eradicated, leaving room for sporadic cooperation. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have continued to be mobilized for the state's political purposes. In short, Korea showcases the dynamic nature of political violence.

Organizing violence under authoritarian rule

A post-colonial weak state and the spread of violence

The precolonial origins of Korea's non-state violence specialists can be traced as early as the peddlers (*pubosang*) who were harnessed by the Chosŏn Dynasty as proxy forces in return for guaranteed commercial rights.[48] The subsequent Japanese colonial government also frequently hired private violence brokers for strategic purposes.[49] This state-sponsored private coercion remained a frequent pattern in the fabric of Korean power politics.

Following Japanese capitulation in 1945, the peninsula was a territory without a state, and life for the population was indeed brutish in its then state of nature.[50] In the midst of this power vacuum, a plethora of state-seekers began to dot the peninsula's landscape. Each upstart political faction had its own highly active private coercive elements made up of youth groups and refugees from various parts of Korea and abroad. The practice was so common that a report from the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) noted that "violence and terrorism on the part of political groups was an accepted technique for getting things done".[51] By the end of August 1945, an estimated 2000 individuals had been organized for such services in Seoul, with more than 140 branch organizations outside the southern capital, including the Northwest Young Men's Association (*sŏbuk ch'ŏngnyŏn hoe*, NYMA), which was made up of anti-communist North Korean refugees.[52]

The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) arrived on the scene and was tasked with obtaining control in the face of growing social chaos. However, they too faced low levels of capacity and were ineffectual in achieving their mission.[53] Thus, to expand capacity, USAGMIK itself began to recruit its own paramilitary groups in concert with other factions of the day, including what would become the National Korean Youth Corps (*chosŏn minjok ch'ŏngnyŏndan*).[54] CIC also found NYMA useful in espionage operations, despite its label as a terrorist organization. NYMA notably played a key role in the Cheju Insurgency (1948–1949), which, in conjunction with the Korean National Police (KNP), killed 20,000–60,000 residents.[55]

Although left-leaning coercive organizations were also highly conspicuous, after the religiously anti-communist Syngman Rhee was elected, it was the rightists who controlled the scene as the *de facto* state. The Rhee regime went about consolidating its power, using KNP and paramilitary violence as a defining feature "for the purpose of completely suppressing the Leftist activity".[56] Rhee solidified his position by absorbing all the rightist youth organizations into the Korean Youth Association (*taehan ch'ŏngnyŏndan*), which was then afforded support and official status.[57]

Despite his iron-fisted rule, however, Rhee's control was consistently contested, and he was ultimately ousted following student uprisings and the loss of U.S. support in 1960.[58] After a brief interlude, Korea found itself in the grip of yet another authoritarian leader who proved much more successful at both consolidating his state-based coercive apparatus and industrialization, which brought new challenges to this embryotic state.

Mobilization and suppression: consolidated authoritarianism

In 1961, General Park Chung Hee appropriated power through a coup d'état. In crystallizing his control, he declared the Law Regarding Extraordinary Measures for National Reconstruction (*kukkajaegŏn pisang choch'ipŏp*), which included among its six stated measures a policy for eradicating corruption and other "social evils".[59] In a few short weeks after the takeover, 13,500 gangsters and 6300 prostitutes were arrested and sent away to labour on development projects.[60] Some of them were conspicuously paraded down Seoul's streets under military escort, holding signs identifying their status as social miscreants (*Dong-A Ilbo*, May 24, 1961, 3).[61]

Anti-communism remained on the agenda. Coeval with the criminal sweep, more than 3000 pro-Communists (*yonggongbunja)* were arrested. Following the promulgation of the Political Purification Law (*chŏngch'ihwaltong chŏnghwapŏp*) and the Anti-Communist Act (*pan'gongpŏp*), another 4000 individuals were barred from political activity.[62] A purge of suspected disloyal bureaucrats, police, and military members was carried out as well.[63] The purges were part of the military junta's attempt to not only gain supremacy over the means and use of violence, but also to win populist support.

Under those circumstances the government devised a strategy for mobilizing problematic subsets of the citizenry for the sake of the state. In fact, just one week after the coup d'état, the military government announced that convicted criminals be sent to mines and construction sites for economic development following their prison terms (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, May 24, 1961, 3). One year later in 1962, the government further announced the "Five-Year Plan for Social Work" (*sahoesaŏp o-gae-nyŏn kyehoek*), which aimed to mobilize the vagrant population to work on an expansive development project.[64] The largest public works project was the Korea Youth

Reclamation Corp (*taehan ch'ŏngsonyŏn kaech'ŏktan*, KYRC), composed of 800 workers, mostly ex-convicts, mobilized to make 26 acres of land fill (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 29, 1963, 7).[65] The authoritarian regime justified its use of violent force to transform criminals and outlaws into "industrial warriors" (*sanŏpjŏnsa*) with its publicly popular economy-first and developmental ideology.[66]

Park Chung Hee won a series of questionable elections and strengthened his political power throughout the 1960s. However, a crisis developed in 1968 when a military unit from North Korea attempted to assassinate Park. After that incident, the military prepared for a retaliatory assassination attack against North Korean leader Kim Il Sung by training a group of special operation troops (*New York Times*, February 15, 2004). At that time, the regime's idea of social development became linked to the idea of mobilizing all available resources for national security.[67] Criminals and outlaws were again mobilized for the sake of the state, now under the banner of national security.

The Korean military installed several units under the direct command of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA). They were mostly composed of special force veterans or volunteer servicemen, but the 803rd Detachment, 902nd Intelligence Group of the Army Intelligence Unit – commonly known as the Sŏngapto Islet Unit – recruited convicts and gang members by promising to pardon them upon the accomplishment of undercover missions.[68] Although the retaliatory plan was cancelled due to a thaw in political tensions, this event, along with the case of KYRC, illustrates the authoritarian regime's view of the use of non-state violence for the sake of the state.

Political opposition rose rapidly to Park's brand of authoritarianism, which had shifted from a façade of democracy to outright dictatorship with the promulgation of a new "Yushin Constitution" in 1972. Despite the regime's political purges and successive suppression campaigns, the largest opposition party, the New Korean Party (*shinmindang*, NKP), became increasingly influential through impressive performances in legislative elections. The rise of political rivals, including future presidents Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, was perceived as a major threat to the regime's survival. The regime attempted to remove Kim Dae-jung by kidnapping and assassinating him using KCIA agents, but it received severe international condemnation. As it became more difficult to engage directly in political violence, KCIA and the Presidential Security Service plotted political terror by manipulating criminal syndicates.[69] Sanctioned groups raided the NKP convention for party leadership elections in May 1976. As a result of the so-called NKP Wooden Club Incident (*shinmindang kangmok nandong sakŏn*), a pro-ruling party politician was elected as the NKP president instead of Kim Young-sam (*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, September 24, 1980, 7).

In addition to purges of criminal and political opponents and the forced integration of private sources of violence, Korea experienced massive growth in the more traditional state-based coercive and intelligence apparatus and capacity throughout Park's tenure. In particular, the combat police (*chŏnt'ugyŏngch'al*) system was established in 1967 and tasked with an anti-communist agenda.[70] The KCIA expanded dramatically, from an initial staff of 3,000 in 1961 to more than 100,000 employees by the early 1970s.[71] Along with the military, the KCIA facilitated the shift away from unreliable non-state sources of violence.

New demands and the remobilization of violence

Shortly after Park's assassination, South Korea witnessed its second coup d'état in 1979, this time by General Chun Doo Hwan, who brutally suppressed the Gwangju

Democratization Movement in the following year. Similar to his predecessor, Chun initiated a range of measures to cement his new regime's power, including the creation of an Emergency Committee for National Security (*kukkabowi pisangdaech'aek wiwonhoe)* with a sub-committee called the Society Purging Committee (*sahoejŏnghwa wiwonhoe*). Through those committees, nearly 5500 civil servants and high-ranking officials were dismissed from their positions under the charge of corruption.[72]

The new wave of authoritarianism appeared to be harsh on private violence, as demonstrated by the installation of Purification Camps (*samch'ŏnggyoyuktae*) to detain more than 60,000 former and potential criminals (*pulryangbae*, literally "bad hoodlum"). Eighty percent of the inmates were charged with committing violent crimes.[73]

Chun used a mixed approach that included both violence toward and appeasement of the key players to govern. Given that Korea had been transformed from a poor and agrarian state into an industrialized and contentious nation culturally in favour of democracy, he needed to consider the pluralistic preferences of society, especially the middle-class and growing civil society, more fully than his predecessor had in planning his governance repertoire. Part of this shift in the balance of power between the state and society was the relaxation of various anti-democratic measures and controls beginning in 1983, including lifting restrictions on academia, releasing political prisoners, and ending a 36-year-long curfew.[74] Another part of the shift was the implementation of expansive infrastructure development projects, control of consumer prices through labour suppression, and hosting the 1988 Summer Olympiad.

This period furthermore included an important shift in the collaborative arrangements between state and private violence specialists. In the 1980s, the middle class expanded, leading to construction booms and soaring asset prices. The government initiated a series of urban development and redevelopment projects to meet the middle-class's growing housing demand, as well as to "beautify" urban areas for upcoming international sporting events. Those redevelopment projects entailed compulsory land expropriations and acquisition and forcible evictions of squatters, which caused significant social resistance and conflict.[75]

The use of force for demolitions and evictions became a lucrative industry for so-called "service companies" (*ch'ŏlgŏyongyŏkhoesa*) in the mid-1980s, which also saw the growth of the labour and democracy movements. Governmental and quasi-governmental agencies and public corporations began to outsource the violent jobs that had the potential to instigate middle-class opposition.[76] As expected, the majority of the employees of the demolition companies were active and retired members of criminal syndicates, who could easily mobilize street gangs to commit violence against squatters, street-vendors, and other targets.

Democratization and the re-organization of violence

Public goods, private means

Chun's regime faced growing public demand for democracy and finally capitulated, agreeing to restart presidential elections in 1987. Another former general, Roh Tae-woo, won the election that year by a narrow margin. To win support, the Roh administration pursued populist policies such as massive construction projects, which required more violence and repression. Given the authoritarian–democratic

demarcation of 1987, the governments that subsequently emerged operated – and continue to operate – with much stricter limitations on their use of violence than previous regimes faced because their legitimacy is at least partly determined by their distance from authoritarian practices. This new political reality, coupled with growing pressure from the continued labour movement (Figure 1), created the impetus for the institutionalization and regulation of outsourced violence.

Unlike the authoritarian-era police, who unapologetically sided with management in suppressing labour, governments after 1987 could not easily mobilize its own repressive forces against the labour movement, which had developed into a sizable political force. As such, management began to hire service companies to break strikes and suppress union leaders and activities. The state then played the role of a "neutral moderator", interfering only when labour conflict escalated beyond manageable levels of violence and predictably siding with management (*Hankyoreh*, December 19, 1992, 3). The employees of those private contractors, so-called *kusadae* – literally "rescue-the-company teams" – were widely recruited from the same questionable sources that had staffed the demolition service companies.

The use of *kusadae* by management soared as the number of disputes increased. *Hankyoreh*, a newly established progressive newspaper, reported 151 episodes of *kusadae* violence in 1988 and 130 episodes in the following year. *Kusadae* violence was exercised either by official security companies, such as SECOM's action against workers' attempts to form a union at Samsung Heavy Industry, or by "hired thugs", as in the case of the "Knife Terror Incident" (*sikkal t'erŏ sakŏn*) against union leaders at Hyundai Heavy Industries.[77] The rapidly corporatized criminal organizations, estimated in 1990 to be around 350 groups with 4300 members nationwide, were the major sources of such violence (*Dong-A Ilbo*, June 23, 1990, 3).

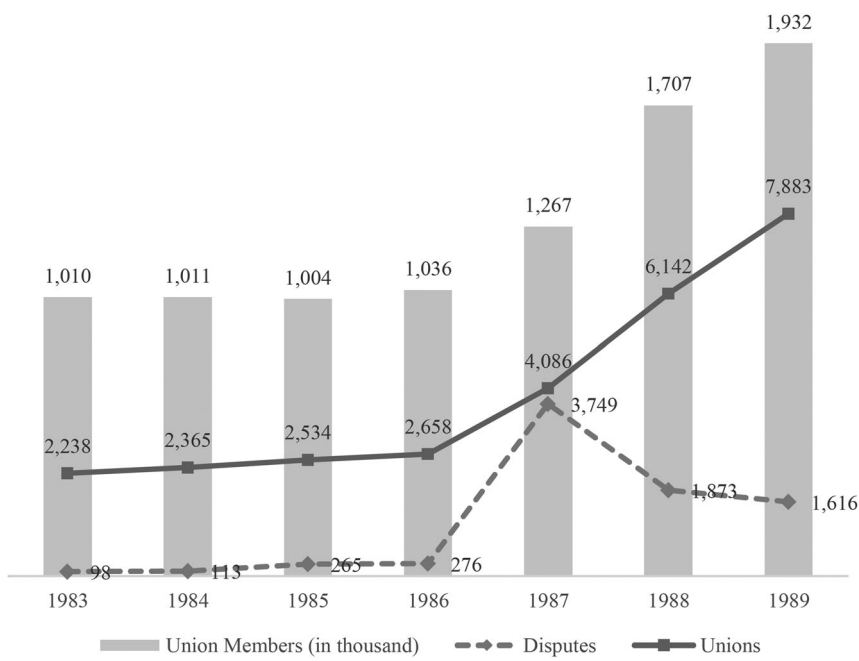

Figure 1. Labour disputes and union activities, 1983–1989. Source: Koo, *Korean Workers*, 159.

Thus, after democratization in 1987, the middle-class, principally though not exclusively, stood to benefit both from urban redevelopment and labour suppression, but they were the very same group that threatened to punish the state at the polls for illiberal actions. The fact that Korea was a nascent democracy in those years shaped the responses of society, with the long shadow of authoritarianism limiting the post-democratic state's ability to use direct violence. The state, still burdened with the need to carry out violence while maintaining at least some semblance of political legitimacy, responded by outsourcing violence and suppression to create the perception of distance between itself and such actions.

Growth of civil society: new challenges, new approaches

Since 1987, democracy has become incrementally consolidated and institutionalized, and civil society has developed and expanded. The quantitative growth of civil society has been dramatic, as demonstrated by the number of associations established since the democratic transition. In a survey in 1994, 68.1% of civil movement groups were found to have been established between 1988 and 1993.[78] General surveys in 1996 reported the existence of 9000 NGOs, and 20,000 were reported in 1999.

In the same period, electoral politics became more competitive, with the first regime change from conservative to liberal taking place in the late 1990s. Under Kim Dae-jung, Korea saw the pursuit of active state-based collaboration with progressive civil society. The Kim administration promulgated the Assistance for Nonprofit NGO Act (*piyŏngri min'gandanch'e chiwonpŏp*) in an effort to "promote public interest activities of NGOs and to contribute to the development of a democratic society by guaranteeing their voluntary activities and supporting their growth into civil organizations" (Article 1). The government's financial support for NGOs cemented the tie between them.

Using that Act (Article 6), the government has provided subsidies of 10–15 billion won (120–170 million dollars) every year since 1999 to NGOs selected by the Committee for the Selection of Public-Interest Business (*kong'iksaŏp sŏnjŏng wiwonhoe*), which is composed of 15 members, including three recommended by political parties. Although the Act specified subsidy-eligible categories of public-interest business, the definition of each category could be politically determined.[79] Furthermore, the categories were subject to augmentation when a conservative regime was elected.

The government also recruited civil society leaders into major decision-making positions. During the Kim Dae-jung administration, 113 governmental positions were filled by executive members of the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (*ch'amyŏyŏndae*, PSPD), the largest civil society organization with a progressive agenda, and PSPD representatives filled 158 positions during the subsequent liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration.[80] The Kim administration installed a Senior Presidential Secretary for Public Participation (*kungminch'amyŏ susŏkpisŏgwan*) in 2003, and the Roh government appointed a Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Society Affairs (*shiminsahoe susŏkpisŏgwan*) in 2004 to maintain a close and cooperative state–civil society relationship. In short, civil society's influence in the state's policymaking has become increasingly significant since the democratic transition, especially under liberal regimes, resulting in a close relationship between the government and civil society. At the same time, civil society organizations have become ideologically polarized, and the government has mobilized them politically.[81]

Politically useful violence

Civil society has retained and often reinforced the militant repertoire that originated from its protest heritage. From 1989 to 2005, only 25.2% of protests were lawful and successful, whereas 29.1% were unlawful and mostly violent but still successful (*Joong-Ang Ilbo*, June 29, 2006).[82] The most noticeable incident in the mid-2000s, under the liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration, was a confrontation between the state and organizations protesting the government's plan to relocate U.S. military bases to Taech'uri, Pyŏngt'aek. Following the government announcement, residents of Taech'uri created coalitions with civil society organizations critical of the U.S. to have the decision repealed. The confrontation escalated dramatically as a growing number of anti-American, progressive organizations joined the protest, and the government finally mobilized 13,000 police officers, 2000 military personnel, and 1300 contracted workers (*yongyŏk*) to suppress the protest in May 2006.[83] Around the same time, former members of the special-forces trained for anti–North Korean operations formed ultra-rightest civil society organizations and initiated a series of violent demonstrations demanding governmental recognition and compensation, as well as the government's firm stand against Japan (*Hankyoreh*, April 15, 2005).

After the conservative regime shift in the late 2000s, the government's support for civil society became more explicit, with clear ideological preferences. The government's subsidy to registered NGOs increased continuously under the conservative administrations. Whereas only 153 NGOs had been receiving government subsidies, 289 received subsidies in 2013. The average subsidy ratio of individual NGOs also increased from 14.0 to 20.5% during the same time. In 2011 and afterwards, the "promotion of national security" became one of the main categories for selecting civil society organizations to receive state funding.[84] Simultaneously, conservative governments deliberately blocked progressive NGOs from receiving state subsidies, regardless of their organizational goals.[85] The conservative regimes' intention to use NGOs for pro-governmental activities by mobilizing and nurturing ideologically conservative NGOs was obvious, as illustrated by changes in the definition of public-interest activities (Table 1).

Civil society organizations supporting the conservative regimes' major policy goals, such as the "Four Major Rivers Project" and "Green Growth Development", were sponsored by the government, which mobilized their members for pro-government rallies and campaigns. The conservatives' efforts took effect, as shown in Figure 2, swelling the size of conservative civil society. In other words, the conservative administrations used civil society organizations as a platform to mobilize civil society for political purposes.

Violent entrepreneurs turned nationalist instruments

The growth of conservative civil society gained traction under the leadership of Park Geun-hye, who advocated a rightest and nationalist ideology. As illustrated in Table 1, the Park Geun-hye government put the utmost priority on national security. In 2014, 35 of the 59 NGOs subsidized by the government in the politics and national security issue area were conservative-leaning organizations, including the National Action Campaign for Freedom and Democracy (*kungmin haengdong ponbu*, NACFD), which is known for its violent incidents, including the demolition of a memorial altar set by citizens in memory of the late progressive president Roh Moo-hyun in

Table 1. Categories of NGO activities eligible of government subsidy, 2008–2016.

Admin.	Roh Moo-hyun	Lee Myung-bak		Park Geun-hye	
Year	2008	2009	2013	2014	2016
Cat 1	Social integration and peace promotion	Promoting the new government's 100 projects	Social welfare, volunteerism, and philanthropy	Social integration and welfare promotion	Same as left
Cat 2	Strengthening cultural foundation for civil society	Low carbon green growth	National security, disaster safety, and social integration	Promotion of advanced citizenship	Same as left
Cat 3	Promoting volunteerism and NGO activities	Job creation and the Four Major Rivers Project	Promotion of sound society and advanced citizenship	Development of economy and culture	Development of economy, culture, and public safety
Cat 4	Public safety, culture, and disaster relief	Social integration and promoting the movement for social advancement (*sŏnjinhwa*)	Low carbon green growth and resource (energy) savings	National security and public safety	National security and peaceful unification
Cat 5	Human rights promotion	Others	Global cooperation and networking	Environmental protection and resource savings	Same as left
Cat 6	Resource savings and environmental protection			International cooperation	Same as left
Cat 7	International cooperation				

Note: Source: MIS, 'Piyŏngri […] hwaltong' (each year).

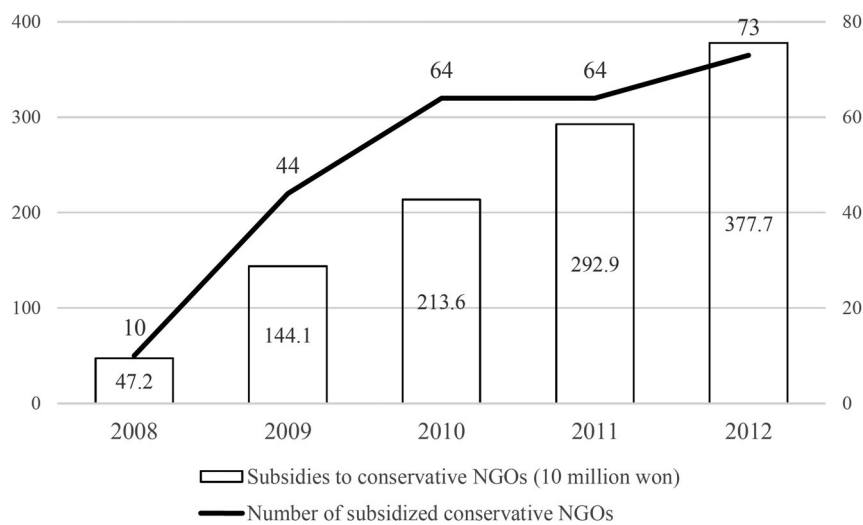

Figure 2. Growth of conservative civil society, 2008–2012.
Note: MIS, 'Piyŏngri […] saŏp' (each year); *Sisa Journal* (June 25, 2012).

2009 (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, June 25, 2009). NACFD was one of the major organizations that supported the government's attempt to nationalize history textbooks, mobilizing demonstrators and staging a series of pro-government rallies. In 2015, the polarization and politicization of public subsidies became even more extreme, with funding going to forty conservative NGOs and zero liberal or progressive ones (*Sisa-In*, May 3, 2016). NACFD has received government subsidies every year that Korea has had a conservative government.

NGOs, including KPF and the Korean Disabled Veteran's Association by Agent-Orange in the Vietnam War (*taehanming'uk goyŏpche chŏnwuhoe*, KAOVA), founded in mid-2006 to advocate ultra-rightest, anti-communist, pro-American ideas, frequently used violence against liberal political parties and progressive NGOs, staging violent demonstrations against judges who delivered verdicts in favour of progressive politicians and NGO activists (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 21, 2010). Some KAOVA members drove a truck filled with explosive gas canisters toward PSPD's office to protest its pro–North Korean statement after the ROKS Cheonan sinking (*Pressian*, June 17, 2010). In another incident in that same year, rightest NGO members wearing military uniforms trespassed on the Chogyesa Temple, driving away people participating in a Buddhist service criticizing the government's Four Major Rivers Project (*Hankyoreh*, December 24, 2010).

The rise of anti–North Korean rightest organizations, which frequently used international and security issues to garner popular support, was also a noticeable aspect of civil society under recent conservative regimes. They mobilized military veterans and North Korean defectors to commit violence against liberal and progressive civil society to promote the conservative government's ideological campaigns, mostly anti–North Korean, anti-liberal, pro-American, and nationalist in nature. When the government wanted to keep open lines of engagement with North Korea without appearing unresponsive to human rights issues or overly aggressive toward its anti-North Korea constituency, they were mobilized in balloon propaganda campaigns sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets to North Korea. Violent confrontations have frequently occurred between them and peace activists, with the local police intervening selectively and politically.[86]

The government's subsidies to those ultra-rightest NGOs, which collected 9.4, 8.8, and 14.9% of all subsidies to NGOs in 2013, 2014, and 2015, respectively, continued throughout the Park Geun-hye government (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, April 27, 2016). Since the impeachment of President Park in 2017, investigations dubbed the "Whitelist Scandal" have revealed that official state agencies, including the Presidential Office, the National Intelligence Service (NIS), and the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, maintained cooperative relationships with those civil society organizations by providing monetary and political support (*Sisa Journal*, May 17, 2016; May 2, 2017; October 30, 2017). The government preferred ideologically motivated senior-citizen organizations like KPF because "their protests and demonstrations were always violent and unreserved, so their voices were delivered very well with great impact while receiving weak condemnation by the media because they are elderly people".[87]

Conclusion – ideology, nationalism, and the persistence of privatized political violence in democratized Korea

The evolution or adaptation of political violence in Korea has been dramatic indeed, as empirically demonstrated throughout this article and summarized in Table 2. Since its

Table 2. Changing features of political violence in Korea, 1945–2017.

Regime periods	State (institutional) capacity	Societal contention/ opposition	Type of state's major tasks/goals	Main feature of political violence
Post-colonial repressive regime (1945–1960)	Weak	High	Political	State-sponsored violence
Military-authoritarian regime (1960–1981)	Strong	High	Political and developmental	State-mobilized violence
Transition from soft authoritarianism to procedural democracy (1981–1997)	Strong	High	Political and developmental	Outsourced violence
Democratic consolidation under liberal regimes (1997–2007)	Strong	Low	Developmental	State-tolerated violence
Unpopular conservative regimes (2007–2017)	Strong	Moderate	Political	State-proxied violence

inception following the end of colonialism in 1945, the Korean state has used private violence, largely under the logic of weak state capacity. As robustly explained by the weak-state premise, following sequential authoritarian regimes and increases in compliance-inducing means, *i.e.* capacity, the state's systematic practice of using non-state elements of coercion declined in favour of public institutions – the police and para-military organizations. Still, the sporadic reliance upon and *direct* mobilization of private thugs has occurred as occasions required. The Yongpari Incident, a violent clash between opposition politicians and government-mobilized mobsters employed to interrupt the then largest opposition party's launch ceremony,[88] illustrates one such occasion, in which the state's decision-making calculus involved increasingly normative concerns rather than considerations of capacity.

In conjunction with, or perhaps as a consequence of, the rise and deepening of industrialization, political decision makers in Korea have faced a highly contentious and politically active society in favour of democracy, whereas political party system that could effectively link the state and society has been significantly under-institutionalized.[89] This societal preference shift and incremental power-balance rotation put further constraints on the state's direct use of violence, both public and private.[90] Although the effects of democratization were profound in shaping the state's use of violence in Korea,[91] the state still needs to maintain its paramount position and provide populist policies and public goods. At the same time however, the state is under the threat of punishment from society for actions the state deems necessary but that the public finds politically unpalatable and risky. Rather than retreat from the use of political violence, the state has instead employed a new form of indirect violence through the private, tolerated proxy of legally recognized organizations. Using this approach, organizations such as KPF carry out tasks that a democratic government cannot do, including harassing and suppressing anti-government protests, as in the recent case of a disturbance at the memorial altar for the late president Roh Moo-hyun, which was illegally occupying a public space but could not be pragmatically relocated due to popular resistance.

We have posited a theory for the evolution of state–non-state collaborative violence in a modern, democratic state. Conventional theories posit that such collaboration occurs when a state lacks physical capacity and is thus widely observed only in the early stage of state building or in otherwise weak states. It is thus logical to expect

the demise of state-sponsored political violence as states finish the building process and acquire popular legitimacy. Contemporary theories of political violence predominately use the perspective of human rights violations committed in the past or present by authoritarian regimes. The case of Korea, on the other hand, illustrates that state–non-state cooperation in the market for violence can persist even after successful state building and democratization.

It is particularly worth noting that political violence in Korea has survived and evolved under both liberal and conservative regimes. Democratization in the late 1980s incentivized conservative governments to outsource their physical violence to private actors. The subsequent liberal governments in the late-1990s promoted civil liberties and civil society activities, developing a good environment for state-tolerated violence to wear the cloak of non-profit organizations whose violence the government mobilized for political and economic purposes. Recent conservative regimes, as revealed by on-going investigations and court trials since the liberal turn in 2017, were bold enough to forcibly suppress political opponents by mobilizing and supporting non-profit organizations directly through state agencies and big businesses (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 13, 2018).

Pinker notes that democracy "is a form of government that inflicts the minimum of violence on its own citizens, so the rise of democracy itself must be counted as another milestone in the historical decline of violence".[92] However, he also points out that democracy "is woven into a fabric of civilized attitudes that includes […] a renunciation of political violence. Without this fabric, democracy brings no guarantee of internal peace".[93] Thus, democracy and violence are mutually exclusive "in theory at least", but "democracy needs violence and uses it".[94] A contentious and ideologically driven civil society, often mobilized by nationalism, facilitates the emergence of state–non-state collaboration in the market for physical force. The case of Korea demands an update of our general theoretical priors and expectations in favour of more robust explanations and predictions, a process we have begun in this article.

Notes

1. Hollander, "Introduction."
2. Duran-Martinez, "To Kill and Tell?"; Birch and Muchlinski, "Electoral Violence."
3. Pearce, "Perverse State."
4. Seeberg, "State Capacity."
5. Andrews et al., *Building State*, 20; FFP, *2018 Fragile States*, 6.
6. Andersson and Mechkova, "V-Dem," 3–12; Norris et al., *Corruption and Coercion*, 7. Various measures, including Polity IV ('Democracy'), Freedom House ('Free'), and EIU Democracy Index (20th/167 countries) all attest to the high level of institutional democracy in Korea.
7. Croissant, "Quo Vadis," 3; Chu and Im, "Two Turnovers," 118. See Merkel, "Embedded and Defective" and Seeberg, "Mapping Deviant Democracy", for the defective aspects of Korean democracy.
8. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital*; Kuzmarov, *Police Training*.
9. Bartman, "Murder in Mexico."
10. Kraetzschmar and Cavatorta, "Bullets over Ballots."
11. Stacher, "Fragmenting States."
12. Bossi et al., "Contextualizing Political Violence," 1.
13. deMeritt, "Strategic Use"; Bosi and Malthaner, "Political Violence," 442.
14. della Porta, "On Violence," 159.
15. Lawrence and Chenoweth, "Introduction," 3.
16. Gurr, "Political Origins."
17. della Porta, *Social Movements*.

18. Henderson, "Conditions."
19. Ron, "Varying Methods."
20. Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist."
21. Rummel, *Death by Government*.
22. Davenport, "State Repression."
23. Ragin, *Comparative Method*.
24. Davenport, "Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception"; Tilly, *Politics of Collective Violence*.
25. Keane, *Violence and Democracy*.
26. "More Murder."
27. "Democracy, Threat."
28. "Monopoly of Violence."
29. Hegre, "Democracy and Armed Conflict," 160–61.
30. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 143.
31. Ollman, "Why Does the Emperor," 94.
32. Stanley, *Protection Racket*.
33. Albertus and Menaldo, "Coercive Capacity," 152. The Korean state effectively co-opted major conglomerates through a combination of threats, selective violence, and rent-sharing—among other strategies—in its successful pursuit of industrialization. See Oh, *Mafioso*; Oh and Jun, "Economic Miracle."
34. "State or Democracy."
35. Szymkowiak and Steinhoff, "Wrapping Up"; Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza*.
36. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates*.
37. Tolnay and Beck, *Festival of Violence*.
38. Davenport, "State Repression."
39. See also Tilly, "War Making."
40. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates*; Ong, "Thugs-for-Hire."
41. Jones and Newborn, *Private Security*.
42. Kim, "Issues of Squatters."
43. Although modern capitalist democracies have sufficient infrastructural power, they are 'despotically weak' because leaders should rule 'only with the consent of the people'. Mann, "Infrastructural Power," 356.
44. See Meron, *How Democracies Lose*; Porteux and Kim, "Public Ordering."
45. *Victory for Hire*, 8.
46. Korea has the 11th largest economy in the world and is one of only two Asian OECD members. Despite impressive markers and a wealth of empirical data, Korea has often been ignored in the general comparative politics literature.
47. Hong, "Kŭndaehwa," 64.
48. Pak, *Pubosang*, 1.
49. Henderson, *Korea*, 52; USAIC, *History of the CIC*, 93.
50. See McCune, *Korea Today*.
51. USAIC, *History of CIC*, 76.
52. Kim, "Paramilitary Politics," 291–2.
53. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, 17–8.
54. USAIC, *History of CIC*, 76.
55. Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 221.
56. Ibid., 202.
57. Kim, "Paramilitary Politics," 319.
58. Lie, *Han Unbound*, 36–7.
59. Ibid., 49.
60. MPA, *Hyŏngmyŏngchŏngbu*, 136–7.
61. See also PTC, *Ŭimunsa*, 219; Lee, "Organized Crime," 65.
62. MPA, *Hyŏngmyŏngchŏngbu*, 33; See also Lie, *Han Unbound*, 53.
63. Kim, *Korean Presidents*, 100.
64. Kim, "5.16 kunjŏnggi," 331.
65. It was revealed that many workers were forced to join the Corp at gunpoint. *Hankyoreh*, January 15, 2017.
66. Yi, "Kyŏngje cheil chuŭi," 151.

67. Heo, "Pak Chŏng-hi chŏngkwon-ha," 224–5.
68. Kim, *Uri-ga chiun ŏlgul*, 272.
69. Kim, *Kim T'ae-ch'on*.
70. Moon and Morash, "Policing in Korea," 109–12.
71. Kim, *Politics of Military*, 112; Halloran, "Seoul's Vast Intelligence", 3. The exact number of KCIA personnel is unknown.
72. PTC, *Ŭimunsa*, 219.
73. Army Headquarters, *Kyeŏmsa*, 590–91.
74. Kim, "Issues of Squatters," 80–86.
75. Hong, "Kŭndaehwa."
76. Porteux and Kim, "Public Ordering," 380.
77. Kim, *Han'guk nodong undongsa*, 225, 236.
78. Kim, *Politics of Democratization*, 108.
79. Kim et al., *Piyŏng'ri min'gandanch'e*, 96.
80. On the contrary, only 22 positions were filled by PSPD members during the conservative Kim Young-sam administration.
81. Yŏm, "Shimin shakai."
82. See also EAI, *Chiphoe siwi*.
83. COI, *Pyŏngt'aek kukka pokryŏk*.
84. NARS, *Piyŏng'ri min'gandanch'e*, 18.
85. Choa, "Yi Myŏng-bak sigi."
86. Feffer, "Korea's Balloon War"; McDonald, "Balloon-Born Messages."
87. A former high-profile NSI official's testimony at the KPF scandal trial. See 1MBC, "Samsŏng, ŏbŏiyŏnhap."
88. JPRS, "East Asia," 63; Kim, "NIS."
89. Croissant and Völkel, 'Party System Types'.
90. Porteux and Kim, "Public Ordering."
91. Pinker, *Better Angles*, Ch. 5.
92. Ibid., 279.
93. Ibid., 284.
94. Schwartzmantel, "Democracy and Violence," 223–4.

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