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PUBLIC ORDERING OF PRIVATE COERCION: URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN SOUTH KOREA

Abstract

This study explores collaboration between state actors and non-state specialists in the market for coercion. We focus on the case of forced evictions in South Korea, where violence carried out by private companies has occurred with the implicit, and at times explicit, sanctioning of the state. This level of government–private security cooperation has traditionally been explained by various hypotheses, including arguments about the weak capacity of a state to enforce compliance, trends in the neo-liberal marketization of state power, or as the outcome of a state being captured by the capitalist classes. Documenting the history of urban redevelopment projects and changes in government responses to major protest incidents in Korea, we instead argue that this niche market for private force is an observable implication of a shift in state–society relations in the wake of democratization. This phenomenon is, in effect, a very undemocratic response to democratization, by state elites.

Keywords

South Korea, democratization, state–society relations, state capacity, state autonomy, public coercion, private violence, urban redevelopment, private security company

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on explaining the evolution of cooperation between state actors and non-state specialists in the market for extralegal force. To illustrate the argument, this paper examines specific cases of forced evictions in South Korea (Korea hereafter) where legally sanctioned private security companies have obtained implicit, and at times, explicit approval by the state for coercive, and sometimes illegal—according to Korean statutes—activities. Beginning with a discussion of the repressive shantytown development in the 1960s and 1970s, we carefully trace the shifting political tactics, clearly observed in the highly politicized and publicized protests in the 1980s, in which private actors in the market for force have increasingly replaced the police on the front lines of anti-eviction protests. In doing so, these private specialists in violence have frequently acted as proxies for state power.

Traditional wisdom posits that such phenomena can be explained by various suppositions, including (a) a lack of material capacity on the part of the state to enforce compliance (i.e., the “weak state” argument), (b) a general trend in the neo-liberalization of the

state (i.e., the “contracting-out” argument), or (c) as an outcome of the state being manipulated by the material interests of the capitalist class (i.e., the “captured state” argument). While we find some merit to these arguments, we argue that explanations that fail to address the role of state strength and democratization suffer from omitted variable bias.

To grasp the underpinnings of our argument, we begin with conceptualizations of states, of which “ideal-types” emphasize monopolistic power over the available means and the use of coercion (Weber 1946). This supremacy in force, it is argued, is a necessary first-order condition for moving out of chaotic environments and into ones characterized by stability and productivity (Olson 2000). More specifically, as noted by Bates, Greif, and Singh (2002, 61), the success or failure of states is reflected in their ability to (a) enforce private property rights, (b) pacify civil society, and (c) extract taxes. All three tasks depend on the ability of the state to achieve primacy over the means and use of coercion within their given territory.

SUBCONTRACTING COERCION TO ENHANCE STATE CAPACITY

Although ideal-type definitions and conceptions of states emphasize monopolistic control over the means and use of coercion within their territories, few states have been able to legitimately claim such complete control, especially in the early phases of state development.¹ Reflecting this reality, state seekers and state makers alike have employed various methods and strategies to build state-based authority, including the buying, subjecting, and outright elimination of private powers (Tilly 1986, 175).² This “weak-state argument” illustrates the situation when state actors, challenged with low levels of compliance inducing resources, sub-contract coercion to private entities in order to expand their forces, extend their reach, and otherwise solidify their control.

Historically speaking, of particular concern for political elites was the ability to control private forces that operated horizontally, as opposed to vertically, namely directly under state control. Thomson (1994) notes that privateers often formed the basis for organized piracy, that mercantile firms threatened to turn their guns against their home governments, and that mercenaries threatened to drag their governments into wars. In short, sub-contracting, while at times strategically advantageous, is subject to concerns over “agency slippage.” In turn, the potential for agency slippage forms the basis for Williamson’s argument (1975) as to why states should prefer public, instead of market-based, options for certain sovereign transactions.

The preference of state actors for professional, public forces that are directly subordinate to the government fits the empirical reality demonstrated in the historical and sociological scholarship of McNeill (1982) and Giddens (1985). *Ceteris paribus*, this pattern illustrates that as more compliance-inducing resources become available to state actors, and as the state actors become better able to utilize such tools—that is, as capacity increases—the need for them to rely on risky non-state sources decreases, causing a subsequent decline in the relative frequency of such collaborative arrangements. In other words, following the predictions of the weak-state hypothesis, states were largely prone to contracting the coercive services of non-state actors until they were effectively able to be replaced by more reliable state-based sources, that is, until state-based capacity was enhanced.

Although the weak-state supposition is robust in its explanatory power, this theory falls short of explaining such variance in state–non-state collaboration in environments wherein state actors have the requisite capacity to enforce its will, but instead choose to act through private proxy, as in the case of a strong Korean state that has enjoyed high degrees of coercive control over society since the establishment of militarist-authoritarian regime in the 1960s and even after democratization in the late 1980s (Cotton 1992; Mun 2014).

PRIVATIZING STATE COERCION FOR ECONOMIC EFFICIENCIES OR PROFITEERING

Another approach to the weak state argument largely collapses into two categories of claims, including the “contracting-out argument,” which emphasizes the economic rationale of state actors to maximize efficiency, and the “captured state argument,” which focuses on the influence of the capitalist classes. First, the former concept centers its arguments on the potential for economic efficiency gains by turning toward the market, as well as on the increases in various demands on a state as it expands. For example, Jones and Newburn (1998) explain that the growth of post-Cold-War private security follows a trend of government efforts to control the rate of the liberalization of markets, privatization, and contracting out—all discrete aspects of an ideological shift toward the market solution. This view thus underscores the collaborative and complementary nature of public and private sectors in collectively providing security services in the market for force (Johnston 1992; Garland 1996). Particularly with regard to the control of violence, private and public sources of protection predominately co-exist in complementary and supplementary patterns—with the vast majority of private sources of force operating in subordinate roles under the umbrella of publicly sourced frameworks, rules, and procedures (Landes and Posner 1975).

The next argument extends the economic story of contracting out, by claiming that states may contract out their coercive activities in circumstances when the state is manipulated by economic interests. Studies on private military companies (*e.g.*, Mandel 2002; Singer 2003; Verkuil 2007) demonstrate that the pursuit of efficiency by privatization is likely to create a principal–agent problem, which leads to mounting agency costs and, in many cases, to the “capturing” of the state by private interests. Marxist accounts (*e.g.*, Oh and Varcin 2002; S. Kim 2010) also view the privatization of security functions as primary evidence of a state–capitalist class coalition.

Although empirically we see a range of public–private cooperation in the market for force, we find clear differences in the types of roles that non-state groups play—and the extent to which they play them—within any given society depending on its political, economic, and social conditions (Stenning and Shearing 1979). Some contracted-out services, as illustrated in Singer (2003) and Verkuil (2007), may cost more than publicly provided services, contrary to the fundamental claim of the contracting-out thesis. Besides, the different types and levels of state–non-state collaboration *per se* indicate that the state should at least enjoy selectivity and control over when, with whom, and where to seek the market solution (see Button and John 2002). In other words, although states cannot enforce their will perfectly at all times and in all places, states may have control over how their resources are allocated, as opposed to being captured—or even

manipulated—by societal influences, which is exemplified by the case of Korea we will discuss in this article.

CONTRACTING OUT VIOLENCE AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY

In sum, state capacity alone cannot explain when, where, and with whom a state cooperates in the market for force. Nor can arguments that emphasize economic incentives or private interests. This warrants attention to state–society relationships in the exploration of political realities, because states are ultimately “parts of society” (Migdal 2001, 63). The ability of state elites to achieve their intended policies and substantive goals is not merely a function of the instruments available to policy makers, nor of the cohesiveness of decision-making structures, but, importantly, includes a level of insulation of the elites from societal pressures. In other words, the state’s varying autonomy that is subject to political changes may explain the motive behind the state’s outsourcing of coercion.

Although autonomy alone is not a sufficient condition for the optimization of policy outcomes, without it, “state elites would find it difficult to pursue politically sensitive policies associated with shifts in overall strategy” (Haggard 1990, 44). All else being equal, we assume that the more autonomy state elites have from societal forces, the freer they are to design and implement their desired policies, politically sensitive policies in particular. Inversely, the less autonomy state actors enjoy, the more they must calculate political consequences against policy preferences. Thus, under certain circumstances, both in non-democratic and democratic regimes, state elites may seek solutions in the private market for coercion as in the cases of popular opposition, external intervention, or democratic regime shift, all of which Korea experienced through the 1980s.

In terms of the market for coercion, Merom (2003) specifically argues that democracies—defined as those states in which citizens are able to exert influence over the political process—are at a fundamental disadvantage in fighting small and/or protracted wars. The mechanism affecting a state’s ability to wage war, according to Merom, is a variable he calls the “normative difference.” The normative difference (or normative “gap”) is defined as the distance between the position of the state’s preference and the preference of society concerning the legitimacy and toleration for violence, in conjunction with the degree of influence societal forces have over policy choices. When the normative gap is wide, and societal forces against a conflict are strong, the study argues, a state’s ability to engage—and succeed in engaging—in such conflicts is diminished.

Building on the above discussions, in addition to the literature that emphasizes the political aspects of the privatization process (see Starr 1989; Wolfe 1996; Dannin 2005), we posit that the calculus involved in a developed, democratic—or democratizing—state’s decision to turn toward the market for private force not only occurs for reasons of insufficient state capacity, pursuit of economic efficiency, or as a reflection of the state being “captured” by capitalist class, but also is a result of the state’s response to decreasing autonomy from societal preferences. In short, we suggest an alternative form of state–non-state cooperation in the market for force, which is a strategic tool utilized by political elites to avoid punishment by society for actions that the state deems necessary, but which are politically costly in terms of electoral performance, reputation, or other negative outcomes for the elites.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE OUTSOURCING OF COERCION IN KOREA

In establishing and illustrating our argument we employ a historical, process-tracing approach, in order to clearly identify the causal mechanisms behind the decision to act through private proxy. The use of government-sponsored shantytown redevelopment projects as our main units of analysis not only showcases the variance in key actors involved in the coercive side of such campaigns, but also illuminates the role that the state's withering autonomy from societal forces played in the decision during and following the tumultuous lead up to democratization in Korea. Importantly, we trace the strategic, politically determined timing and sectors of such transitions from public to private proxy *coeval* to the levels of politicization and society-wide backlash embedded within our cases.

Our approach involves the use of both primary and secondary source materials, including government documents, scholarly and journalistic publications, and other forms of empirical research, which are linked together to form a cross-temporal map that both details and helps to explain more accurately the evolution of Korea's turn towards the private market for forced evictions and protest suppression. Although our choice of methodology limits the reach of our theoretical conclusions beyond the cases stemming from Korea, our findings do offer some logical generalizations and hypotheses, and in doing so, contribute to the larger scholarship on some of the ill-studied consequences of democratization.

We assume that capacity affects preferences and preferences affect behavior: *i.e.*, political elites may favor state as opposed to non-state sources of coercion, but they are often forced to turn toward the private market when the occasion necessitates such a strategic move. Korea's history with private specialists in violence empirically fits this pattern. State seekers and state actors alike utilized private specialists in violence to expand their forces and/or extend their reach in order to gain supremacy (see Kim 2003; Porteux 2013). Once capacity was greatly enhanced and primacy obtained, state actors—especially under Park Chung Hee (1961–1979)—in turn attempted either to fully disband or to enlist their non-state forces under the formal state-sanctioned umbrella, doing so with relative success. Contrary to traditional explanations, however, beginning in the mid-1980s, in the midst of urbanization and the move toward democratization, systematic state–non-state cooperation in the private market emerged again, predominantly, though not exclusively, in the area of government-led development projects. The following sections trace these events chronologically.

DEVELOPMENTAL AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE SHANTYTOWNS

In the dynamic processes of state development following the popular ousting of Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee (1948–1960), Korea underwent a decades-long transition from a military junta (1961–1963) to quasi-democratic rule (1963–1971), and back to full-fledged authoritarianism in 1972, all under Park Chung Hee's leadership, which resulted in what Woo (1991, 116) refers to as a “state that was iron fisted at home and, therefore, capable of restructuring the domestic economy and supporting sustained growth.” With increased capacity and the enjoyment of autonomy from societal forces, political elites in Korea were quite successful in bringing about rapid industrialization and development (Oh 1999, 62).

Park's success at engineering the economic miracle was arguably the cause of his undoing. Over the course of his tenure, Park moved Korea from a state of weak capacity and low autonomy to a state with a tremendous amount of coercive capacity. The state's coercive forces, however, had to be employed at an ever-increasing rate in order to suppress the societal forces in favor of democratic concession. In other words, the balance of power was incrementally tilting toward those in favor of reform. Such was the environment that Park's would-be successor, Chun Doo Hwan (1981–1987), inherited.

Meanwhile, between the 1960s and 1980s, Korea transformed itself from an agrarian-based society to one that was overwhelmingly urban and educated. The majority of migrants took their first steps into urban arenas by moving into cheap, illegal housing or creating makeshift homes on land that was predominately government-owned. Shantytowns quickly came to dot Korea's landscape, and were often without running water, electricity, or mechanisms for removing garbage or human waste. In turn, such conditions exacerbated the spread of infectious disease (Ha 1987, 92–94). The fact that these makeshift communities were located next to hillsides and riverbeds did not help the situation, because these locations were subject to mudslides and annual flooding during the monsoon season and fires during dry periods (Hong 1990, 287). Korea's shantytowns were not only prone to dangers, they were aesthetically unpleasing and presented a challenge to the government's drive toward increased modernization. The fact that the shantytowns were illegal posed a further challenge to the legitimacy of the state in terms of its real and/or perceived ability to induce compliance. Regardless of the hazardous conditions and the opinions of the government, however, such settlements provided cheap and relatively convenient housing options to Korea's poor.

From its inception in 1961, the Park Chung Hee regime sought to limit the squatter settlements—if not to eliminate them outright—in the interest of development. Although local governments led the charge in implementing the policing of housing through methods that included forced evictions, the central government played a key role, often providing resources to bolster such projects (Mobrand 2008, 372). At the time, the standard procedure for clearing shantytowns was to demolish them, and, if need be, to forcefully remove the residents to locations outside the city (*ch'ölgö iju chöngch'ak saöp*). By the 104th relocation project, 69,844 households (327,194 residents) were removed from their residences between 1955 and 1981 (Hong 1990, 287–288).

Residents responded to the government's relocation policy by simply re-building in the same or neighboring locations, protesting at government offices, or bribing officials in return for not destroying their homes. In fact, between 1966 and 1970, when the relocation policy was at its peak, the number of illegal houses in Seoul greatly increased, from 137,000 to 187,500 (Chöng 1985, 127). Outright physical resistance against the police and district administrators was also popular (Choe 2009, 185). Scenes of bulldozers, water cannons, and tear gas utilized by police against residents were common. Thus were utilized intermittently, but police were unquestionably at the forefront of these coercive events (Davis 2011). Regardless, the government had to put an end to its massive relocation policy after the Kwangju Housing District Incident (*Kwangju taedanji sakön*) in 1971, during which 50,000 residents who had been relocated to an outskirts of Seoul rioted against the government (*Dong-A Ilbo*, August 10, 1971; August 11, 1971).

Subsequently, the redevelopment of substandard settlements (*pulryang chiyök chaegae-bal saöp*) became the primary policy for urban renewal (Chöng 1985, 129–130).

According to the new policy of redevelopment, “squatter-owners”—a group whose ownership rights had been recognized from 1972, ostensibly in order to mitigate inevitable protests—were offered a mix of cash and/or loans in exchange for vacating districts designated for redevelopment, while “squatter-tenants”—those whose ownership was unrecognized—were typically not provided with compensation to vacate. Thus, the redevelopment policies affected the two groups (squatter-owners and squatter-tenants) differently. Not only did squatter-owners stand to gain compensation from simply vacating a substandard area, they actually stood to gain a significant profit given that the redevelopment and upgrading of these areas was highly correlated with increasing land prices. Squatter-tenants, however, were left with a choice to either self-vacate or be forcibly removed. The policy effectively aligned the squatter-owners on the side of the government, pitting tenants against state forces, land speculators, and construction companies, and Seoul’s expanding middle class, who themselves were faced with rising prices due to housing shortages (Mobrand 2008, 380).

The rapid growth of the urban middle class population brought increased demand for affordable housing and the expansion of existing infrastructure. In addition to general societal demands, in 1981 Korea won its bids to host the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics, further incentivizing the political elites to expand development (Choe 2009, 187). Despite the common state–society goal of modernization and development, the methods by which the political elites brought about these outcomes shifted in the mid-1980s, which was a time of political volatility due to increasingly aggressive societal demands for democracy. Especially important to our discussion, the methods utilized to bring about development—which often entailed the use of public sources of force—became increasingly politicized. As the political, economic, and social environment changed, so too did the incentives for political elites to distance themselves from such actions. The observable implication of the change in incentives then, as we argue, is seen in the move toward the private market for force. This is succinctly demonstrated in the event described in the following section.

PROTEST AND POLITICIZATION: MOKTONG INCIDENT

The drive toward modernization entailed massive redevelopment, which was carried out under the large banner of “city beautification” projects. This phrase, notes Davis (2007, 19), “came to be understood widely as the removal of slums.” Arguably the most significant of such projects, marking the move toward the privatization of the development process, occurred in Seoul’s highly visible Moktong district (Su-hyön Kim 1998, 206).

In 1963, Moktong was sparsely populated, having 451 households and a population of 2,611 people. In addition, Moktong was largely agrarian, with 82 percent of the land devoted to the agricultural sector. By 1984, however, the population had expanded to 82,610 people. Indeed, many of the Moktong residents had been resettled there by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG hereafter) following early squatter-clearance campaigns. Although the majority of Moktong residents were residing in the area illegally and were without clear property rights, they had a sense of *de facto* legitimacy and right to be there, because many had been resettled there by the SMG. Moreover, only 38

percent of the residents were squatter-owners, leaving the vast majority of residents with a clear incentive to oppose redevelopment of the area (Lee 1990, 126).

As critical as the Moktong redevelopment project was to the squatters, it was just as important for the government to realize the benefits of rising housing stock and expected fiscal benefits (Chang 1990, 250–252). Redevelopment plans were eventually announced by the SMG in April of 1983. These plans were protested intensively by the squatter-tenants over the course of the next two years. Protests ensued in four distinct phases. Phase one entailed five months of protesting through official channels, either by direct petitioning of the district or through intermediaries such as the Catholic Church and other religious organizations working on behalf of the residents.

Having failed to obtain concessions by protesting within the boundaries of authority, the residents switched to the second phase of their protests, which included radicalized mobilization for direct, non-institutional action. On August 11, 1983, over 1,000 citizens joined an ongoing rally and surged toward the Moktong redevelopment offices in order to protest the development project. The rally attracted the attention of the Korean Church Social Ministry, an influential “social action” organization founded by prominent Catholics and Protestants, which attempted to negotiate with the government on behalf of both squatter-owners and squatter-tenants (Lee 1990, 143). Such negotiations and protests continued through the next year, but proved largely ineffective. Although there were instances of protests moving beyond Moktong, phase two was characterized by protests that occurred predominately within the confines of the area designated for redevelopment.

Phase three specifically focused on protesting beyond the boundaries of Moktong, to generate public visibility and to increase support and solidarity with other anti-government actors and causes. Protesters attempted to go to City Hall in Seoul in January of 1984, but were blocked by riot police. In the process of battling with the police, some protesters used firebombs and rocks. In subduing the protest, police ended up arresting 500 participants (Lee 1990, 143). Accordingly, over the next 15 months, increasingly violent protests of heightening intensity and widening scope occurred frequently at City Hall and the Myōngdong Catholic Cathedral in downtown Seoul, as well as on the campuses of Ewha, Yonsei, and Seoul National University. Protestors even occupied the Yanghwa Bridge on August 27 (Won 1986, 128) and the Seoul-Inch’ōn Highway on December 18, 1984 (*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 19, 1984).

During this phase the protests became more organized. The protestors organized a committee seeking proper compensation for eviction and demolition (*ch’ōlgō taech’aek wiwonhoe*) on August 15, 1984, as well as an association of squatter-tenants (*seipcha taech’aek wiwonhoe*) on October 21, 1984. A growing number of social organizations and democratic movement activists, including college students, joined the protests during this phase. This expansion transitioned the protests to a final phase, which involved five weeks of further, intensified protests in early 1985 (Davis 2007, 24–25; J. Kim 2010, 82–85). The protestors destroyed part of the construction site while fighting against the riot police with stones. They demonstrated in front of the government-run broadcasting company and occupied the District Office in March of 1985. Some protestors led a sit-in at the offices of the opposition party (Won 1987, 189). In the meantime, the flyers and posters protesting development began to include political slogans petitioning for concepts of “democratization” and “economic equality” (Kim 1999, 225).

STATE'S CHANGING OF TACTICS

The protests of the Moktong residents against the government's coercive implementation of an urban renewal project escalated into and became part of a larger ongoing movement for democratization and anti-authoritarian regime. Becoming aware of the increasing mobilization of society, the government had to find a more politically efficient way to carry out large-scale projects. Most notable was their move toward the private market to enhance their options regarding the use of force.

In 1982, the government amended the Urban Redevelopment Act (*toshi chaegaebal pŏp*) in an effort to encourage the participation of private investors in government-initiated development projects (Yun 1996, 249–250). The gist of the amendment was to encourage joint investment by the public and private sectors, as well as to give private developers the authority to exercise eminent domain, or to purchase property compulsorily for public uses (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, August 14, 1982). At the time of legislation, delegating the power of eminent domain to private developers was not a serious issue, but was simply a measure to attract private investment. “They [developers] are private persons so we need to give them public authority,” the Minister of Construction stated at the Committee on Construction. He continued, “I personally don't believe such an occasion [is likely] to occur but this measure is a preventive measure to the rarest case if [...] people [property owners] resist in large groups against the [government's] project” (National Assembly 1982, 22). In fact, this type of resistance is exactly what occurred in the public development project of Moktong.

The Joint Redevelopment Program (*haptong chaegaebal*, JRP hereafter) emerged as an alternative to the previous system, instituted by a revision of the Urban Redevelopment Act in 1982. This new system forms joint ventures between property owners and investors, either private or public, to carry out redevelopment projects with the authority to exercise eminent domain. At the time of implementation, these joint ventures were termed redevelopment associations (*chaegaebal chohap*, RAs hereafter). Exercising eminent domain to evict squatters and clear their dwellings is obtained either by a civil lawsuit of eviction (*myŏngdo sosong*), which is an indirect execution, or by a “vicarious execution” (*i.e.*, administrative execution by proxy; *haengjŏng tae jip'aeng*), which is a direct execution. The latter has been the preferred method because it can bypass onerous legal procedures while expediting development processes (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, January 18, 2006).

In either case, in the historical context herein, someone needed to get their hands dirty and to physically evict squatters and demolish their dwellings. The Administrative Vicarious Execution Act (*haengjŏng tae jip'aeng pŏp*, AVEA hereafter), which was enacted in 1954 and has been in effect without revision up to now, stipulates:

Article 2: In cases where a person liable for performing an act ordered directly under Acts (including any order issued by delegation of Acts, and any Municipal Ordinance of the local government; hereinafter the same shall apply), or by the order issued by the administrative agency under the Acts, and performable by means of a vicarious execution of another person, fails to perform such act, if it is difficult to secure the performance by other means, and it is deemed too detrimental to the public interest to leave the nonperformance, the administrative agency concerned may perform the act to be done by the person liable for it, or have a third person do it and collect the expenses therefor from the person liable for it.

In cases where developers file civil lawsuits to exercise eminent domain, the execution should refer to the Civil Execution Act (*minsa jip'aeng pöpp*), which stipulates that an execution officer “may, if deemed necessary for enforcing the execution, take adequate measures” and “may request assistance from the police or military forces if met with any resistance” (Article 5). Thus, it was mostly the police—the riot police in particular—who got their hands dirty during the Moktong incident in the 1980s.

Following the Moktong incident, police forces were almost always mobilized for eviction operations, even in cases where physical conflict was not likely to occur (*Kyungyang Shinmun*, April 10, 1986). However, the authoritarian regime was compelled to push on and complete massive eviction and city beautification projects to prepare for the Seoul Olympics, which were scheduled to take place in 1988.³ These projects were mostly implemented through the JRP after the Moktong incident, and the number of projects skyrocketed from 984 in 1984 to 7,703 in 1986 (J. Kim 2010, 138). Violent conflict between the evictees and the police occurred frequently, and in most cases escalated into political protests. Evictees of the Sadangdong redevelopment district occupied the offices of the local chapter of the ruling Democratic Justice Party (*minjuchöngüidang*), and college students and religious groups joined the protestors at the Sanggyedong demolition site where they threw stones and firebombs at the police (*Dong-A Ilbo*, October 18, 1985; April 14, 1987).

Facing the growing tension between the state and the protestors at redevelopment sites, however, police officers were under mounting stress. Some high-profile to question why police forces should handle violent disputes caused by private urban construction projects (*Dong-A Ilbo*, May 3, 1985). In fact, given that the JRP had become the main arm for redevelopment projects, the state sought to contract out exercising tasks with the potential for conflict and politicization. Building on the AVEA's clause of “[having] a third person do it and collect the expenses therefor from the person liable for it,” a growing number of private developers—authorized to exercise eminent domain by government agencies—began to hire groups of “errand men,” or *yong'yök*, to evict and demolish redevelopment sites instead of calling upon the police force.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE CONTRACTING OUT OF PHYSICAL FORCE

In June of 1987, the Korean people celebrated the transition to democracy after a series of popular protests against the authoritarian regime. The military junta conceded to popular demand and agreed to hold free presidential elections by revising the constitution. People's movement groups (*minjung undong tanch'e*) played a crucial role in the democratic transition, which vitalized the growth of civil society organizations (Kim 2000, 108–112). Evictees organized associations to protest redevelopment plans, and often impacted government policies by politicizing the issues, as in the cases of the Sadangdong and Sanggyedong redevelopment districts (Hong 1990, 351; Yi and Kwon 1990, 1292–1295). Almost immediately after the Declaration of Democratization on June 29, evictees formed the Seoul Center for Victims of Forced Evictions (*Söul ch'ölgömin hyöbüihoe*) on July 17, 1987 (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, July 19, 1988). Similar nationwide organizations, including the National Council for the Centers for Victims of Forced Evictions (*Chön'guk ch'ölgömin hyöbüihoe*) and the National Alliance for the Poor (*Chön'guk*

pinmin yŏnhap) were also established in the late 1980s (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, December 8, 1989).

While democratization was empowering evictees, the government was simultaneously under mounting pressure to implement massive urban redevelopment. First of all, the government had to complete the city beautification projects before the opening of the 1988 Olympics. More importantly, in an effort to garner popular support in the upcoming heated presidential race, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Justice Party, Roh Tae Woo, pledged to provide affordable housing to citizens by building 500,000 rental houses through redevelopment projects (*Dong-A Ilbo*, November 10, 1987). Physically ramming through squatters with riot police had become less and less feasible for many reasons, but particularly because of the growing international pressure before the major sporting event. In fact, Korea was already being shamed by international organizations, including the Habitat International Coalition, for its inhumane eviction practices (Hyung-Kook Kim 1998).

The changing state–society balance of power resulted in the rise of demolition service companies (*ch'ŏlgŏ yong'yŏk hoesa*, DSCs hereafter). The first company specializing in demolition services was established in 1986 (*Weekly Kyunghyang*, February 17, 2009). Initially, it was just a group of hired thugs used to scare off evictees. Gradually, however, the group developed into a firm, expanding their business to more comprehensive services of forced eviction, demolition, disposal of demolition waste, and guarding of construction sites.⁴

The government officially changed its stance on the dispute between evictees and developers in the late-1980s. Because a redevelopment project implemented through the JRP is basically a “civil” affair, the government posited, “civil disputes should be solved between civilians” (Kim 1999, 229). Police pursued policies of “non-intervention in civil affairs” (*minsŏ pulgansŏp wonch'ik*) when it came to conflicts over redevelopment sites, unless the conflicts became extremely violent (*Dong-A Ilbo*, November 12, 1988). As direct and effective support from government law enforcement organizations became less and less available, more and more private investors relied on DSCs to do the “errands” of forceful eviction and demolition.

In the cases of projects initiated by government agencies, the agencies also began to officially hire the DSCs. In 1989, the SMG announced that the city and the contracted service companies would carry out tasks of eviction and demolition for its housing redevelopment sites in reference to the pertinent clause of the AVEA. The city explained that the trend of contracting out for demolition and eviction tasks had increased in order to “prevent the image of public servants from being damaged by any ‘accidents’ that might occur” (Yi 1990, 138). Regardless of the government’s involvement in the redevelopment projects, exercising physical coercion—an innate task of the modern state—was being contracted out to private companies.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARKET FOR NON-STATE COERCION

DSCs flourished as the government undertook more redevelopment projects. From 1986 to 1992, 236 districts were designated for redevelopment (Choe 2009, 188). The Roh Tae Woo administration also announced the provision of two million housing units through the redevelopment of urban areas, as well as the development of new commuter towns on

TABLE 1 Housing stock in Korea, from 1980 to 2005

	1980	1990	2000	2005
Ratio of housing stock to households (%)				
Nationwide	71.2	72.4	96.2	105.9
City of Seoul	55.9	57.7	77.4	89.1

Data From: Ha (2010, 256).

the outskirts of Seoul. The subsequent administration of Kim Young Sam, who took office in 1993, also announced a construction plan for the provision of three million housing units, on the pretext of providing affordable housing options to city dwellers (Choe 2009, 189). The Kim Dae Jung government, which was in power in 1997 during the time of economic crisis, pledged to achieve a 100 percent housing stock ratio by 2002 by constructing 2.5 million housing units—*i.e.*, 500,000 units a year for five years (*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 20, 1997). Despite continued construction and development, Seoul in fact endured an ongoing housing shortage, as shown in Table 1.

An acute shortage of housing in Seoul increased the demand for urban redevelopment projects, along with causing real estate prices to soar (Ha 2010, 259–260). The Roh Moo Hyun government that came to power in 2002 initially attempted to curb the asset price hike without expanding the housing supply. Finally, in 2006, the administration proclaimed a policy change from demand management to supply expansion, by constructing 1.64 million housing units proposed for completion by 2010 (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, November 16, 2006). As a result, 63 zones in Seoul were newly designated as redevelopment districts between 2007 and 2008, which was roughly equivalent to the 61 zones appointed as redevelopment districts between 2002 and 2006 (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 23, 2009).

Since the mid-1990s, not only shantytowns but also old and low-rise apartment complexes have had to be demolished. Increasing demand for enterprise-level eviction and demolition services have turned groups of street “toughs” into established DSCs in pursuit of official contracts with government agencies, public corporations, and private developers (Kim 2012b, 240). For example, Chökjun, the largest company of this sort, was officially registered to the Seocho District Government as a security service provider and building-structure demolition company, establishing contracts with around 60 percent of all the redevelopment projects in Seoul in 1998 (So-hee Kim 1998, 89).

A number of companies have been bidding for demolition contracts since the late-1990s. Excessive violence has frequently been reported (see Choe 2012, 124–239).⁵ Although private developers are more likely to resort to violence in order to expedite redevelopment projects, public enterprises such as Korea Land Corporation, Korea Housing Corporation, and Seoul Housing Corporation have also often hired DSCs and have condoned violent evictions (Kim 2012a, 18–19). Historically, police and other state law enforcement agencies have been reluctant to intervene in those violent events because they have regarded them as “private” disputes between legal service contractors—authorized to use physical force—and illegal squatters (Yi 2012, 31).

TABLE 2 Private security industry in Korea, from 2002 to 2010

	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Number of companies	2,051	2,322	2,671	3,043	3,473
Number of employees (thousands)	107.9	105.7	127.6	142.5	142.7

Data From: *Segye Ilbo* (August 16, 2012).

However, public criticism of the violence committed by the street thugs during forced eviction and demolition processes was rapidly growing throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to mounting domestic pressures resulting from the expansion and consolidation of democratization, the Korean government was increasingly influenced by international law, which focused specifically on housing rights, as included within the Declaration on Human Rights put forth by the UN Commission on Human Rights (Ha 2001, 393–394). The Korean government thus needed to regulate the housing market by issuing licenses and legislating pertinent laws and regulations. The Security Industry Act (*yong'yŏk kyŏngbiŏp pŏp*) enacted in 1977, which had previously been deregulated on an ongoing basis, became re-regulated in the mid-1990s. By its revision in 2001, the qualifications of employees in the security business, as well as the requirements for business licenses, were heightened (Button, Park, and Lee 2006, 4–6). Regardless, the relocation services provided by DSCs were too comprehensive to be effectively regulated by the Security Industry Act (see Cho 2009, 10–11). Although squatters and evictees filed lawsuits against DSCs, the DSCs mostly ended up incurring minor criminal charges (Oh 2011, 174). Indeed, the physical violence exercised by these companies was pervasive throughout the 2000s, despite the constant efforts of civil society to curb the coercion. In fact, government agencies involved in the construction business have expressed concern about the regulations, and have even refused to acknowledge or accept the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission (Kim 2009, 239). Meanwhile, the private security industry in Korea has grown continuously throughout the 2000s (see Table 2).

The government also promulgated the Act on the Maintenance and Improvement of Urban Areas and Dwelling Conditions for Residents (*toshi mit chugŏhwan'gyŏng chŏngbi pŏp*) in 2003, which granted official status of administrative entities to RAs.⁶ In addition to the timely revision of the outdated Housing Construction Promotion Act into the Housing Act, which substantially streamlined the process of obtaining permission for redevelopment projects (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, November 28, 2003), the amount of physical force legitimately contracted out by government agencies increased. In 2002, then-mayor of Seoul, Lee Myung-bak, who would win the presidential election in 2007, announced the “New Town in Town Project” (*nyutaun saŏp*), which he expanded throughout his term (Ha 2010, 265). The government also enacted the Special Act on the Promotion of Urban Renewal (*toshi chaejŏngbi ch'okchin ūl wihan tŭkpyŏl pŏp*) in 2005, which launched similar redevelopment projects across the country (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, April 17, 2006). Finally, as the National Assembly election approached in 2008, easing regulations on urban redevelopment procedures and establishing new

land development plans became some of the most popular pledges among candidates (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, April 12, 2008).

All these factors contributed to the growing redevelopment business in tandem with the rise in violent conflicts between the contracted service companies—which were authorized to use physical force—and the mistreated evictees and squatters. These forces culminated in the well-publicized and tragic incident in the Yongsan redevelopment zone in 2009.

CONSEQUENCES OF STATE–NON-STATE COOPERATION IN THE MARKET: YONGSAN DISASTER

According to the Special Act of 2005, the SMG appointed the area surrounding the Yongsan Train Station as an Urban Environment Rearrangement Zone (*toshi hwan'gyōng chōngbi kuyōk*) in April of 2006.⁷ A development consortium composed of land and property owners, as well as large construction companies including Samsung, Daelim, and POSCO, was formed and acquired the legal status of an official RA. The Redevelopment Steering Committee of the Yongsan District government approved the redevelopment plan, and construction was set to launch in February of 2009. However, a number of tenants who were not satisfied with the compensation plan of the association formed a tenants' association to resist eviction. As the construction start date approached, the association attempted to forcibly evict the squatters, which escalated into a violent clash between the tenants and the association. The course of eviction at the hands of two DSCs, Horam Construction and Hyun-Am Construction, was violent and occasioned significant human right violations (Chu 2009). Finally, an estimated forty-plus tenants and their supporters occupied a four-story building. Police forces were mobilized to break up the protest on January 19, 2009, which claimed the lives of five squatters and one police officer when the building caught fire following the dropping of a Molotov cocktail onto containers of paint thinner during the police operation.

From the inception of the Yongsan redevelopment project, the district government and the RA maintained close contact because the project was vital to the interests of both organizations.⁸ Due to the economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis, the Korean government attempted to boost its economy by launching large-scale construction projects (Yi 2009, 23). At the same time, the then-mayor of Seoul was overzealous about the project because he was seeking a second term with the support of the Yongsan District mayor, an important land and property owner who had worked for construction companies (*Dong-A Ilbo*, March 15, 2013; *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, January 27, 2009).

The Yongsan eviction process was exceptionally violent because the stakes of redevelopment were particularly high (Yi 2009, 23). The DSCs forcibly evicted about 80 percent of the tenants residing in the redevelopment district because both the developers and the public offices were on a very tight construction schedule. Moreover, the compensation offered to evictees was far from satisfactory (Pak 2010, 38). Throughout the eviction process, law enforcement agencies did not actively interfere, on the pretext that the eviction was a legitimate execution of eminent domain—authorized by the district government—as well as a judgment of possession per the ruling of the court. On the day of the incident, employees of the DSCs were burning scrap tires and construction waste

to distract squatters who had occupied the rooftop of a building in protest. The DSCs also blockaded the building and cut all supplies, which were illegal means of eviction according to all regulations (National Assembly 2009a, 37). Regardless, the police overlooked such behavior, and even protected the employees of the DSCs by using water cannons and stone-slings to scare off the squatters (Minbyun 2009). When the National Alliance of Squatters and Evictees (*Chönych'ölyön*), an association of militant evictees, joined the protest in an effort to politicize the issue, the DSCs requested the support of the police. Accordingly, the building was raided by nineteen companies of riot police with ninety-nine special unit personnel at dawn on January 20, 2009.

During the fatal raid on January 19, as revealed later by court records, the police joined the employees of the DSCs in suppression of the squatters (*Kyunghyang Shinmun*, January 24, 2009). Police officers and managers of the DSCs kept in close contact with each other, talking frequently over their cell phones before the raid.⁹ It was also revealed that the DSC companies had not acquired proper licenses for providing security services, which was a required step in order to exercise eminent domain. The companies hired members of criminal syndicates and street thugs who had not completed required programs to work as security service personnel. The official investigation of the tragedy revealed that it was highly likely that the RA was aware of the licensing lapses on the part of the service companies when the association contracted with the companies (Chu 2009).

After the incident, twenty squatters were charged with special obstruction of public duty, while seven employees of the DSCs who had used water cannons and burned toxic materials were indicted, without arrest, on the charge of collective assault. Not a single law enforcement officer who had “overlooked” the service companies’ excessive use of force was indicted (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, February 10, 2009).

A journalist interviewed an owner of a DSC and asked his thoughts about the incident. “It’s somewhat strange this time,” he said, “the police generally sit back and look over while we complete the evictions. I’m not sure why the police directly intervened and worked on behalf of the company.”¹⁰ “The job of the police is to protect people from danger and threats,” a high-profile official of the National Policy Agency said in an interview, “not to confiscate illegal carts” (*Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2011). In other words, the task of using outright violence against civilians in contentious public projects has largely been contracted out to non-state private actors. Regardless, under certain circumstances, urgent political-economic pressures drive state agencies to directly intervene in violent processes of eviction, as illustrated in the Yongsan Incident. This demonstrates that the contracting out of state violence in Korea is not a simple result of weak state capacity, but hinges more on the state’s calculation of political costs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article takes a historical and process-tracing approach to make theoretical sense of the mechanisms that brought about cooperation between state and private actors in the market for forced evictions in a democratic, developed Korea. The analysis finds that, in contrast to previous studies, this type of state–non-state cooperation in the market for force cannot be simply explained by the weak state argument, or as part of a larger trend in the neo-liberal turn toward marketization. Nor, finally, is the level of Korean

state–non-state cooperation an outcome of a state that has been captured by private interests.

At the time that Korea privatized the entirety of the redevelopment process through the JRP, the state had a tremendous amount of coercive capability and other compliance-inducing resources. However, Korea specifically opted to exercise its power through private proxies instead. Capacity in this traditionally public-dominated market, thus, *purposefully* varied. As demonstrated by the events of history, the weak-state argument in the case of Korea’s turn toward the market option in the late 1980s—*i.e.*, in the wake of democratization—does not hold explanatory weight. Counter-intuitively, we find that the move towards democratization and associated decreased state autonomy from society was met with a strategic turn towards the private market for coercion.

The next line of reasoning typically exemplified in studies on the general practice of government outsourcing suggests that a state’s turn toward the market solution is best explained by the rationale of maximizing economic efficiency. Given that the JRP not only removed political actors from direct involvement, but also reduced the economic burden on the state, it is easy to see why this is a favorite explanation. This argument alone, however, while perhaps necessary, is insufficient. We have to remind ourselves that not only were the construction, planning, and financing of redevelopment projects privatized in Korea, but so too were the coercive aspects of the projects. By privatizing forced evictions, the state effectively ensured that conflicts occurred between the redevelopers (including tenant-owners) and the residents who were being forcefully removed from areas of redevelopment. Thus, by removing itself from the center of conflict, the state effectively reduced the level of politicization, and consequently, reduced the potential for political backlash surrounding the issue of redevelopment.

The squatters, however, have consistently responded with mass mobilization and politicization directly against the government, a strategy that they have learned from the protest movement repertoires, which has obviously become less effective and attractive to the general public. The privatized forced evictions are neither always beneficial to nor favored by the developers who prefer instant and direct government’s interventions in order to shorten construction period and maximize profit. In short, the state’s changing responses to forced eviction issues was primarily for political purposes rather than business interests.¹¹

Although the scope of analysis in this study is restricted to the issue of forced evictions in Korea, the general issue of collaboration between political elites and private forces in labor suppression campaigns can be interpreted through this lens. Groups referred to as *kusadae*—literally “save-the-company militant forces”—have worked hand in hand with public forces, often replacing riot police and taking the lead role in the suppression of protests and other “union-busting” activities (See Oh 2011; Yi 2012). Such an example demonstrates the difficulty of providing a public good—in the form of cheap labor—when the means for doing so potentially produces political backlash and further reveals the state’s resultant exploitation of the ambiguity between public and private specialists in coercion.

In conclusion, the type of state–non-state collaboration explained in this article highlights a largely understudied phenomenon of cooperation between two seemingly unlikely partners. In the cases presented herein, we clearly see political elites capitalizing on the ambiguity between legitimate state coercion and the illegitimacy of violent actions by non-state groups. We argue that such collaboration is a result of a set of strategic

choices on the part of the state—choices made to avoid the ramifications of actions deemed politically risky, despite being necessary.

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NOTES

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¹Reflecting this reality, scholars such as North (1981) and Tilly (1985) focus on the ability of state seekers to obtain a comparative advantage in coercion *vis-à-vis* would be competitors, rather than the unlikely attainment of perfect monopolistic control over violence.

²In Europe, for instance, large-scale private armies were quite prevalent during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, only to be replaced by state-harnessed mercenaries and other privateers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Tilly 2003). Not dissimilar from the European experience, in the process of the consolidation of power during the Edo period in Japan (1603–1868), the ruling regime began to utilize organized “ruffians” to both obtain and maintain order in locations where the state’s reach was weakest or otherwise ambiguous (Ikegami 2003; Siniawer 2008). Lastly, studies of violence throughout Latin America also illuminate clear patterns of cooperation between states and private forces (see Holden 2005; Koonings and Kruijt 2005; Auyero 2007).

³720,000 squatters were evicted, often violently, between 1985 and 1988 in Seoul (Ha 2004, 137).

⁴See the report of the Catholic Human Rights Commission (1998, 13–15). See also Choe (2009, 187–188).

⁵Since the introduction of the JDS in the mid-1980s, at least 37 have people died during violent conflicts in redevelopment zones (*Kyungghyang Shinmun*, January 23, 2009).

⁶After some dispute over the interpretation of the law, the Supreme Court finally upheld it in 2009 (*Hankyoreh Shinmun*, October 12, 2009).

⁷SMG Notification no. 2006–142, April 20, 2006.

⁸See Yō, Choe, and Choe (2011, 140–141) for collaborative relationships between public agencies and RAs.

⁹Based on the suspect interrogation dossiers of the Seoul Central District Prosecutors’ Office, cited from National Assembly (2009b, 89–93).

¹⁰Interview by Hō Chae-hyōn, reporter for *Hankyoreh Shinmun*. The full text is available on his personal website at <http://blog.hani.co.kr/catalunia/18486> (accessed on July 3, 2014).

¹¹With respect to what we have termed the captured-state argument, which emphasizes the ability of capitalist forces to shape both policy creation and implementation, we do see differences in the use of force by state and non-state actors alike, which illustrates that even if the state was “captured,” the methods utilized in the complex processes of redevelopment and consequent forced evictions shifted over time in the face of societal changes. Indeed, such shifts in strategically employed coercion cannot be fully explained by state–business collusion or class-based Marxian arguments.

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