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# Environmental Protest and Policy Change in Korea*

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* Prepared for Presentation at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) International Conference on "Environmental Policy: A Multinational Conference on Policy Analysis and Teaching Methods," Seoul, Korea, June 11-13, 2009.

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## I. Introduction

Like other governments around the world, the current Lee Myung Bak government of Korea is placing great emphasis on the environment. In August 2008 in his speech commemorating Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, Lee proposed "low-carbon green growth" as Korea's new policy paradigm (*Kukmin ilbo*, 8/16/08). Government ministries, spearheaded by the Ministry of Strategy and Finance, have since then competitively drafted and announced "green New Deal policies." According to the Lee administration, the paradigm of "low-carbon green growth" will help Korea overcome the current economic downturn and realize economic growth that is environmentally sustainable.

Concurrent consideration and pursuit of economic development and environmental sustainability, however, is a very recent arrival in Korea. During the previous few decades since the early 1960s when the Korean economy began to pick up, environmental issues and concerns were consistently ignored, neglected, and sidelined. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the developmental state in Korea accorded utmost policy priority to economic growth and paid little attention to environmental degradation. Environmental Impact Assessment, introduced and implemented during the developmental era, was more often than not misused to defend or justify development.

Such relative inattention to environmental issues began to change with Korea's democratic transition in 1987. The democratic transformation and the subsequent opening of political and social spheres prompted citizens to raise wconcerns about environmental degradation and pollution-caused diseases. During the 1990s, environmental movement grew dramatically, along with other citizens' movement groups. In general, the post-1987 period has witnessed proliferation of social movement groups that were devoted to those issues and concerns of citizens that had been suppressed during the previous authoritarian period.

The rapidly grown environmental movement, in the late 1990s, began to challenge and clash with the state on major developmental projects. The environmental movement demanded a complete rethinking of the developmental paradigm and pressured the government to make its economic development plans compatible with and friendly to the environment. Prominent confrontations between the government and the environmental movement include the controversy over the Dong River Dam, legal battles regarding the Saemangeum Reclamation Project, and the eventually abandoned plan to locate a nuclear processing site in Buan. Unlike during the developmental era when mass resistance to development had been either prevented or repressed, popular protests during the post-1987 period often led to notable results such as the government's decision to cancel planned constructions.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the relationship between environmental protest and policy change. The environmental movement, which grew vigorously during

the 1990s, is supposed to have had considerable impact on policymaking. Yet, there has been very little empirical research on the correlation between protest and policy in Korea. Specifically, we divide the post-1987 period into two decades, i.e., 1988-1997 and 1998-2007, and investigate whether and how environmental protest has effected policy change. Section II reviews the relevant theoretical literature. Section III introduces the database and elaborates on the methodology. Section IV offers three sets of analysis: frequency analysis, simple correlational coefficients, and multiple regression. Section V concludes the paper with a summary of research findings and contributions to the literature.

## II. Policy Change: A Theoretical Overview

### 1. Determinants of Policy Change

Analysts classify different types of policy change, according to the extent to which the existing policy changes. Hogwood & Peters (1983) distinguish policy maintenance, policy termination, policy succession, and policy innovation. Hall (1992) differentiates between "first order," "second order," and "third order" policy changes. "First order change in policy" is "the process whereby instrument settings are changed in the light of experience and new knowledge, while the overall goal and instruments of policy remain the same." In "second order change," policy instruments undergo modification—but not policy goals. "Third order change" refers to the overall transformation of policy environment, goals, and instruments. According to Hall, the British experience of 1970-1989, featuring a radical shift from Keynesian to monetarist modes of macroeconomics regulation, represents simultaneous changes in all three components of policy, i.e., the instrument settings, the instruments, and the hierarchy of goals behind policy. Lowry (2006) distinguishes between major change, episodic change, gradual change, and isolated change according to the scope of policy change and the duration of time.

In this paper we distinguish two kinds of policy change, depending on the degree of change: "policy modification" means changes largely in the domain of the existing policy, and "policy change" refers to a situation in which policy switches its type from one policy to another.

Scholars have identified and analyzed a variety of determinants of policy change. One of the most popular and dominant variables in explaining policy variation has been institutions. For example, Immergut (1993) underscore institutions as a main explanatory variable accounting for differences in welfare policymaking in Sweden, France, and Switzerland. Other works have also focused on institutional variables to explain policy differences across cases (March & Olsen 1976, Thelen & Steinmo 1992, Weir 1992).

However, institutionalist frameworks have not been particularly effective in explaining policy change *over time*. This is why scholars have highlighted the roles of individual and collective actors—described often as "policy entrepreneurs" (Kingdon 1984)—in preventing, challenging, modifying, terminating, and changing policy. Moreover, some works have attempted to combine institutionalist/environmental and actor-centered

perspectives. For instance, the Advocacy Coalition Framework developed by Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1999) explicates how, under the influence of various external factors and through incremental policy learning, diverse advocacy coalitions with different beliefs and values interact with each other and with institutional settings to bring about policy formation, mutation, and change. Since its invention, ACF has been applied to numerous empirical cases (Davis & Davis 1988, Mawhinney 1993, Nohrstedt 2008).

This paper builds on the recent tide of actor-centered and integrative frameworks. But as compared with the previous works that focused on elite actors (e.g., movement leaders, policy entrepreneurs) or expert groups (e.g., policy communities or issue networks), this paper pays greater attention to the general public and civic groups that are engaged in mass protest activities. The focus on protest activities is especially pertinent in probing policy change in Korea, because political and policy changes in Korea have historically been initiated and propelled by civic mobilization and popular protest before, during, and after the democratic transition in 1987 (Kim 2000).

## 2. Social Protest as a Determinant of Policy Change

The existing literature on social protest is increasingly interested in the comparative efficacy of protest in affecting and changing public policy. In particular, scholars have been interested in finding out what characteristics of social protest are more closely related with policy change. Some works conclude that the level of resource mobilization, such as the extent to which supporting groups and individuals become organized, determines policy outcomes. Other works underline the choice of protest strategies as the main determinant of successful policy impact (Gamson 1980, Fowler & Shaiko 1987, Metz 1986, Snyder & Kelly 1976, Steedly & Foley 1979).

Although students of social protest generally agree that resource- and strategy-related variables are major determinants of policy efficacy, they have not yet reached a definitive consensus on the specific contents of those variables that affect policy change. In other words, the existing literature is unsure whether greater or smaller resource mobilization increases policy efficacy or what type of movement strategies is more likely to lead to policy change (Giugni 2004).

As far as resource mobilization is concerned, greater mobilization—i.e., more protest participants, stronger civil society groups, or longer protest days—is postulated to correlate with a greater probability of policy change. As protesting groups or individuals successfully mobilize more time, money, and supporters, it may be hypothesized that the impact of the protest on policy change becomes larger. On the other hand, it can also be equally plausibly hypothesized that as protest becomes longer in duration, they may exhaust and eventually lose public support, media attention, and political momentum, thereby failing to bring about policy change accommodating protesters' demands and grievances. We need empirical test to check which of these conflicting hypotheses stands valid.

Protest strategies are also crucial. Protesters' choice of campaign strategies and methods —violent or nonviolent, legal or illegal—considerably affects the final policy outcome.

Some previous works have concluded that violent strategies are positively correlated with policy change. However, this might not always be the case. Violent strategies are effective in threatening the targets of the protest. But they may also scare the supporters away. Also, whether the protesting groups change their protest method in the middle or consistently adhere to their original method might also correlate with the ultimate policy outcome. Moreover, the legality/illegality of protest strategies is also an important determinant of policy efficacy. It can be hypothesized that using legal strategies will help increase supporters, thus increasing the likelihood that the demands and grievances of the protesting groups are met with accommodative policy change.

The contents of the protest demands/grievances also affect policy outcome. By and large, the substantive acceptability of protest demands/grievances determines whether policy change takes place or not. But the number of raised demands/grievances also affects policy outcome. Focusing on a few key issues might be more likely to lead to policy change, because protesters can use those issues as a rallying point around which they maintain mobilizational coherence and organizational unity. On the other hand, it is also arguable that if protesting groups bundle a greater number of issues bundled together, it would be more likely for the public authorities to "pick and choose" and thus accommodate protest demands and grievances.

In summary, different aspects of protest—scope, strategies and methods, the contents and number of demands/grievances—are supposed to affect the likelihood of policy change. This paper focuses on these variables to test their effects on policy change.

## III. The Dataset and Methodology

To examine the correlation between environmental protest and policy change since Korea's democratization in 1987, we use a recently compiled database called Protest Event Data Archive Korea (PEDAK). PEDAK is a database constructed on 7,432 protest events that took place and were reported in newspapers between 1988 and 2007 in Korea. It is drawn from two daily newspapers (*The Joongang Daily* and *The Hangyoreh Daily*) and two weekly magazines (*The Chosun Weekly* and *The Sisa Weekly Journal*). All protest events covered and reported in the four selected media sources were collected and coded by trained coders according to a pre-set data collection protocol.

The data collection protocol ("questionnaire") was originally designed and developed by Grzegorz Ekiert at Harvard University and Jan Kubik at Rutgers University. Ekiert and Kubik used the data collection protocol in their previous projects to code protests in several new democracies in Eastern Europe (Ekiert & Kubik 1998 & 1999). In these projects, they compared and accounted for different patterns of protests in Poland, Hungary, former East Germany, and Slovakia. After the successful completion of intra-regional comparison, the project is now being ambitiously expanded to conduct inter-regional comparison, between Eastern Europe and East Asia. The data collection protocol is being used to collect protest data in four countries, i.e., South Korea, Taiwan, Hungary, and Poland, for a comparative project entitled *The Logic of Civil Society in New Democracies*. PEDAK, complete with the 20-year data from 1988 to

2007, represents the South Korean portion of this international collaborative project. The data collection protocol used to compile PEDAK collects the following data by analyzing and coding newspaper reports on post-transitional popular protests.

1. Number of protests per year;
2. General measures of protest activities: duration, scope, type, and location of protest event;
3. Sociovocational category of protest participants;
4. Forms of organizations leading or sponsoring protest actions: civil society groups, political parties, etc.;
5. Repertoires of contention I: general protest strategies: violent, disruptive, nondisruptive, etc.;
6. Repertoires of contention II: specific protest strategies: street demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, statements, etc.;
7. Types and contents of protest goals, demands, grievances, and demands: economic, political, etc.;
8. Targets of protest actions: direct and ultimate targets of protest;
9. Reactions to protest actions: police intervention, sanction, negotiation, accommodation of demands, etc.

Of these numerous items collected by PEDAK, in this paper we focus on four items, which constitute our independent variables. The first is the *scope* of protest (Item #2). The second is protest *strategies* (Items #5 and #6). The third is the sociovocational category of protest *participants* (Item #3). The last item is types and contents of protest *demands and grievances* (Item #7).

Protest scope is measured in terms of the duration of protest and the number of protest participants. Protest strategy is measured in terms of the types of the strategy chosen, consistency/continuity of protest methods, and the legality/illegality of the chosen methods. Types of strategy are broken down into 1) violent, 2) nonviolent but disruptive, and 3) nondisruptive. Consistency/continuity of protest methods is distinguished between 1) no change, 2) original methods combined with new ones, and 3) original methods replaced by new ones. Legality/illegality of protest activities is a binary variable, i.e., "legal" treated as "0" and "illegal" as "1." Sociovocational background of protest participants is roughly divided into 1) blue-collar working (e.g., workers in heavy industry /construction, workers in light industry), 2) white-collar professional (e.g., employees in the public sector, education/science, culture/arts, mass media), and 3) unspecified (e.g., students, local residents, movement activists).

Contents of demands/grievances are divided into 1) economic demands (e.g., material compensation, change in specific domestic economic policies, or the removal of individuals responsible for economic decisions), 2) political demands (e.g., increased influence in decision making, greater participation in the political process, change in specific domestic policies, or removal of certain members of national political bodies), and 3) ecological demands. Different types of demands are sometimes combined. For example, when local residents criticize environmental destruction caused by development and demand policy change of the government, ecological restoration, plus

monetary compensation, we may say that political, economic, and ecological demands are combined in the protest.

The dependent variable is policy change. The question about policy change in the PEDAK questionnaire is phrased as: "Did the demands and/or grievances of protesters result in any long-term policy changes? Response to this question is divided into 1) no policy change, 2) policy modified, and 3) policy changed. A "modification" is a change "within" a given policy, and a "change" is a change in the type of policy. For example, raising the wages of childcare workers' is a "modification." On the other hand, handing over control of childcare centers to self-governing bodies is a "change of policy."

## IV. The Analysis: Environmental Protest and Policy Change

### 1. Frequency Analysis

We first analyze how the protest scope, strategy, participants, and demands have changed over the two decades since 1987. <Table 1> shows the changes in the scope of environmental protest measured in terms of duration and the number of participants.

**Table 1: Protest Scope**

| Duration | | | Number of Participants | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1988-1997 | 1998-2007 | | 1988-1997 | 1998-2007 |
| Less than 7 days | 78.5% | 77.5% | Fewer than 200 | 52% | 48.6% |
| 8 days-1 month | 21.4% | 2.0% | 201-2,000 | 40% | 37.8% |
| More than 1 month | - | 20.4% | More than 2,001 | 8% | 13.6% |

In terms of protest duration, short-term protests of less than 7 days outnumber long-term protests of 8 or more days. However, in the second decade, i.e., 1998-2007, has far more long-term protests as compared with the first decade, i.e., 1988-1997. In terms of the number of protest participants, both decades are dominated by small-sized protests of under 200 participants and medium-sized protests of 201-2,000 participants. It is notable, however, that during the second decade the proportion of large scale protests of more than 2,001 participants increased from 8% to 13.6%.

One explanation for the increased scope of environmental protest in the latter half of the 1990s is that most environmental movement organizations in Korea grew in size and became institutionalized during the same period. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, environmental organizations mushroomed in Korea. Korea Anti-Pollution Movement

Association (KAPMA) was created in September 1989. In 1991, major citizens' movement groups including Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice and Seoul YMCA established centers dedicated to environmental issues. In 1994, KAPMA was expanded into Korea Federation for Environmental Movement. As Korean environmental associations underwent organizational expansion and institutionalization during the mid- and late 1990s, their augmented organizational and mobilizational capacity apparently increased the scope of environmental protest.

<Table 2> summarizes different movement strategies protest participants used. Nonviolent but disruptive and nondisruptive strategies constitute the majority of protest strategies. Also, protest changes tended not to be changed. During 1988-1997, nondisruptive protests accounted for 48.5%, and disruptive 46.5%. In total, 95% of the environmental protest was nonviolent. Similarly, during 1998-2007, nondisruptive and disruptive protests accounted for 97% of the total environmental protest.

**Table 2: Protest Strategies**

| Protest Strategies | | | Change in Protest Methods | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1988-1997 | 1998-2007 | | 1988-1997 | 1998-2007 |
| Nondisruptive | 48.5% | 33.6% | No change | 84.7% | 96.7% |
| Disruptive | 46.5% | 63.4% | Old + new methods | 8.2% | 3.3% |
| Violent | 5.0% | 3.0% | New methods | 7.1% | - |

One notable difference between the two decades though is that in the latter decade, nondisruptive types decreased from 48.5% to 33.6%, while disruptive ones increased from 46.5% to 63.4%. This seems to indicate that although mostly nonviolent, environmental protesters began to utilize more often disruptive methods such as strike, occupation of public buildings, demonstration, march, rally, blockade of road or public place (e.g., square), picketing, and cyber-actions (e.g., blocking web-pages, sending viruses, flash mobs, etc.). Meanwhile, protest strategies tended to remain stable over time, not changing from one strategy to another in the middle of the protest. The stability and durability of protest strategy is particularly evident after 1998. This might indicate that environmental activists had already undergone political learning during the first half of the 1990s and realized comparative effectiveness of respective strategies.

In terms of the sociovocational categories of protest participants, as <Table 4> shows, most belong to the category of "unspecified" than either white-collar/professional or blue-collar/working categories. The proportions of the "white-collar/professional" category were 13.9% (1988-1997) and 18.9% (1998-2007) respectively, while those of the blue-collar/working category were 12.9% (1988-1997) and 14.4% (1998-2007) respectively. The proportions of these sociovocational categories did not show any considerable changes over the two decades. This seems to suggest that environmental protests have been organized and led not by specifiable categories of professionals or

workers but rather by students, local residents, or civic activists, whose sociovocational categories are not as specifiable as the others.

**Table 3: Sociovocational Categories of Protest Participants**

| | 1988-1997 | 1998-2007 |
|---|---|---|
| White-Collar Professionals | 13.9% | 18.9% |
| Unspecified | 73.3% | 66.7% |
| Blue-Collar Workers | 12.9% | 14.4% |

In terms of the demands and grievances raised in the environmental protest activities, as <Table 4> shows, many protests were obviously about environmental issues. However, a greater proportion of environmental protests raised political demands and grievances. For example, protest against environmental degradation in a local area expanded to eventually demand the closure of a US military shooting range in Maehyangni. In Korea, most environmental protests end up with demanding policy change. This is because environmental degradation in the previous decades was mostly a result of state-led economic development. Environmental protests quickly become anti-government protests, against existing policies.

**Table 4: Protest Demands and Grievances**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Contents of Demands/Grievances</td><td colspan="3">Number of Demands/Grievances</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>1988-1997</td><td>1998-2007</td><td></td><td>1988-1997</td><td>1998-2007</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ecological</td><td>28.4</td><td>38.1</td><td rowspan="4">1 or 2</td><td rowspan="4">98.0</td><td rowspan="4">97.3</td></tr>
<tr><td>Political</td><td>39.2</td><td>51.5</td></tr>
<tr><td>Economic</td><td>13.7</td><td>3.7</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ecological/ Political</td><td>6.9</td><td>3.0</td></tr>
<tr><td>Political/ Economic</td><td>2.0</td><td>1.5</td><td rowspan="3">More than 3</td><td rowspan="3">2.0</td><td rowspan="3">0.7</td></tr>
<tr><td>Economic/ Ecological</td><td>7.8</td><td>2.2</td></tr>
<tr><td>Political/ Economic/ Ecological</td><td>2</td><td>-</td></tr>
</table>

During 1988-97, environmental demands accounted for 28.4%, while political demands accounted for 39.2%, exceeding 50% taken together. In 1998-2007, political demands increased to 51.5%, indicating that politicization of environmental protest increased in the latter decade. Meanwhile, in terms of the number of issues raised in environmental

protests, one or two issues constituted the predominant majority. Most environmental protests have been focused on one or two key issues.

**2. Simple Correlational Coefficients**

Before running a regression on main variables (e.g., protest scope, strategies, participant characteristics, and demands/grievances) and policy change, we first conduct a simple correlational analysis of environmental protest characteristics and policy change. <Table 5> summarizes the result of the analysis.

**Table 5: Simple Correlational Coefficients**

| | | | Policy Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scope | Duration | | .000 |
| | Number of Participants | | .025 |
| Strategy | Violence | | -.059 |
| | Consistency/Continuity | | .008 |
| | Illegality | | -.197** |
| Participants | Sociovocational Categories | | .153 |
| Demands/ Grievances | Contents | Political | .058 |
| | | Economic | .007 |
| | | Political/Ecological | -.159* |
| | | Economic/Ecological | -.192* |
| | | Political/Economic/Ecological | .100 |
| | Number | | .134 |

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

What seems to be significantly correlated with policy change include the legality/illegality of protest strategy, political/ecological and economic/ecological demands/grievances. First, illegality of protest strategies is negatively correlated with policy change. In other words, illegal protest strategies seem less likely to lead to policy change. Explanation for this is that legal protests tend to receive broader public support and favorable media coverage, thus increasing the likelihood of positive and accommodating policy change.

Adding political or economic demands to ecological demands seems to be counterproductive in terms of effects on policy change. As compared with situation where only ecological demands are made, political and economic demands are generally more difficult to calculate and accommodate, thus decreasing the likelihood of corresponding policy change.

Although statistically not significant, several other correlations deserve brief discussion. Protest scope is positively correlated with policy change, indicating that longer protest

duration and larger participant number are more likely to result in policy change. Violent protests are correlated with no or little policy change. Nonviolent strategies are correlated with increased policy change. On the other hand, as the number of working class participants in environmental protest increases, policy change becomes more likely.

### 3. Multiple Regression Analysis

We ran a multiple regression to examine the effects of protest variables on policy change. $R^2$ of our model is 26.4%, and the significance level is 0.1. <Table 6> summarizes the results of the regression.

**Table 6: Multiple Regression**

| | | | Policy Change | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | B(S.E) | Beta |
| Constant | | | .194(.822) | |
| Scope | Duration | | -.105(.089) | -.164 |
| | Number of Participants | | .036(.069) | .062 |
| Strategy | Violence | | .785(.439) | .458 |
| | Consistency/Continuity | | .109(.284) | .047 |
| | Illegality | | -1.278(.529)** | -.613 |
| Participants | Sociovocational Categories | | .366(.198)* | .225 |
| Demands/ Grievances | Contents | Political | .125(.252) | .068 |
| | | Economic | .109(.504) | .027 |
| | | Political/Ecological | -1.455(.920) | -.186 |
| | | Economic/Ecological | -1.311(.600)** | -.328 |
| | | Political/Economic/Ecological | -.112(1.015) | -.014 |
| | Number | | .705(.350)** | .287 |
| F-Value<br>$R^2$ | | | 1.733*<br>0.264 | |

What seems statistically significant include the legality/illegality of the protest strategies, sociovocational categories of protest participants, economic/ecological demands/grievances, and the number of demands/grievances. In terms of protest strategies, illegal protest strategies are less likely to lead to policy change. Legal, nonviolent strategies are more likely to generate favorable public reception, leading to eventual policy change. Meanwhile, when ecological demands are combined with economic demands, it seems to decrease the likelihood of policy change. As compared with responding abstractly to ecological demands, accommodating economic demands entail budgetary complications, thus making it difficult to generate corresponding policy change.

As the number of protest demands/grievances increase, it is more likely that those

demands/grievances are met with policy change. More protest demands/grievances, however, are not necessarily the same as adding economic or political issues to ecological issues. Combining economic or political issues with ecological issues does not significantly increase the likelihood of policy change. Rather, increasing the number of purely ecological issues has the effect of increasing and reinforcing the pressure put on the public authorities, thus increasing the possibility of policy change.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, we examined the relationship between environmental protest and policy change in Korea. We focused on the scope, strategy, participant background, and demands/grievances of the protest to investigate the policy impact of environmental protest. The research results show that the policy change is significantly affected by protest strategies and demands/grievances, not by protest scope. This suggests that not the objective/absolute size of resource mobilization but the subjective/relative usage of strategies and framing of demands/grievances are far more closely correlated with policy change. More specifically, legal protests are more likely to lead to policy change. As well, protests led by working class participants seem more likely to lead to policy change. The contents and number of protest demands/grievances also appear to be significantly correlated with policy change. Specifically, the greater the number of demands/grievances raised by protesters, the more likely policy change results.

The existing literature has overly focused on institutions to explain policy variations and largely failed to explain why policy changes over time. Along with more recent actor-centered frameworks such as ACF, this paper will contribute to a more integrative understanding of the interactive dynamics between institutions and actors in determining policy change. In this paper we have focused on popular protest and showed how diverse aspects of social protest—especially those voluntaristic variables dependent on actors' choices—affect and determine policy outcomes. In this regard, our research sheds light on how environmental movement can be better designed and framed to have greater policy impact and on how governmental actors can manage environmental protest more effectively.

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