South Koreans protest government's lift of ban on US beef, 2008

- (mainly or initiated by) people of color [1]
- (mainly or initiated by) student participants [2]
- included participation by more than one social class [3]

Timing
May 2008 to: August 2008

Location and Goals
Country: South Korea
Location City/State/Province: Seoul
View Location on Map
Goals:
Prevent US beef from being imported into South Korea

Methods
Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions ›online petition calling for the impeachment of the South Korean president
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 034. Vigils
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:
• 034. Vigils
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 016. Picketing
• 020. Prayer and worship
• 038. Marches
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 097. Protest strike

Methods in 5th segment:

• 016. Picketing
• 038. Marches
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 081. Traders' boycott

Methods in 6th segment:

• 081. Traders' boycott

Segment Length:
Approximately two weeks

Classifications
Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Economic Justice
Environment
Human Rights

Group characterization:

• Labor unions
• religious officials
• students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites
Leaders:
People's Association Against Mad Cow Disease (PAAMCD)

Partners:
Catholic Priests' Association for Justice (CPAJ)

Korean Confederation of Labor Unions (KCLU)
External allies:
Not known
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

**Joining/exiting order of social groups**
Groups in 1st Segment:

- Students

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:

- CPAJ
- KCLU
- PAAMCD

Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length:
Approximately two weeks

**Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**
Opponents:
South Korean Government
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not known
Campaigner violence:
There were reports of clashes between protesters and police forces
Repressive Violence:
There were reports of clashes between protesters and police forces

**Success Outcome**
Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
1 point out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
3 points out of 3 points
Total points:
5 out of 10 points
Notes on outcomes:
The campaign exhibited incredible, growth, energy, and endurance, but it ultimately failed. There were some minor successes with the delaying of resumption and with some businesses refusing to use U.S. beef.
In 2003, the government of South Korea announced a ban on beef imported from the United States. Prior to the ban, South Korea had been the third largest purchaser of U.S. beef product. The decision to ban the product came after an animal in Washington was discovered to suffer from mad-cow disease. All together, more than fifty countries decided to ban U.S. beef imports after the incident, and consequently, the value of U.S. beef exports declined by $2.4 billion dollars over a three-year period.

Five years later, the South Korean government determined U.S. beef product to be safe and agreed to resume the beef imports. The decision came in April as the United States and South Korea were in the process of signing a free trade agreement between the two nations. Protests began only two weeks after the announcement.

On May 2, 2008, hundreds of South Korean students gathered for a candlelight vigil on the streets Seoul. The students, mainly secondary school and college students, organized themselves via text messages and the Internet. By May 6, the number participating in the candlelight vigils had reached over 10,000. The government warned that the demonstrations would be deemed illegal if political slogans or signs were displayed. An online petition calling for the impeachment of the South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, had reached 1.2 million signatures by May 6 as well.

With time, the demonstrations became daily occurrences on the streets of Seoul. Protests also began to spread to other major South Korean cities like Busan, Gwangju, Daegu, and Chuncheon. By the end of May, South Korean police had begun to arrest crowds of protesters. Going against the warning of the government, protesters waved banners and shouted political slogans at the demonstrations. Consequently, 211 protesters were arrested in a four-day period near the end of May. Anti-riot police were also employed when over 1,000 women and children marched to the U.S. embassy.

In response to the mass demonstrations of May, the South Korean government announced on June 3 that it would be delaying its efforts to resume importing U.S. beef. The mass demonstrations on the streets of Seoul and other cities continued into June and nearly shut down traffic at times. A week after the government's announcement, violence broke out between a handful of protesters and police officers, resulting in eleven more arrests. That same day, the number of demonstrators climbed to over 100,000, according to modest estimates by the police force. It was becoming clear to the government that the South Korean people were not happy with the decision to bring back U.S. beef; the demonstrations organized in opposition became some of the largest that South Korea had ever seen.

During the third week of June, president Lee's cabinet announced its resignation due to intense pressure from demonstrators. Lee also reached a new agreement with the United States, lifting the ban on U.S. beef from cattle less than 30 months old. The new agreement was then greeted by another demonstration on June 25, organized by the People's Association Against Mad Cow Disease. Ninety-one protesters were arrested, but not before a placard that read "Don't knuckle down to the US but yield to the people" was placed on a police vehicle. Other protesters marched to the president's office, before being detained by police. President Bush of the United States decided to cancel his visit to South Korea after the negative reactions to the new agreement.

With all the excitement surrounding the campaign, South Koreans continued to act. Over a hundred members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) continued their blockades of U.S. beef product at piers around the country. New marches began on June 30, ending with minor confrontations with the police. KCTU members agreed to a two-hour work stoppage in protest against U.S. beef. The Catholic Priests Association for Justice offered support by holding an outdoor mass. As a result, priests and nuns began to show up at demonstrations.

Korean businesses, conscious of the massive opposition to U.S. beef, started advertising their use of beef from
places outside the United States. Among the businesses running new ad campaigns were large supermarkets and the American company, McDonald's. Resumption of beef imports officially began in July and the American beef quickly became popular among South Korean consumers. The economic success of the imports solidified the American beef's presence in South Korea, leaving the campaign against it largely unsuccessful.

Research Notes
Sources:
Agence France-Presse. "US beef popular in South Korea despite protests." Agence France-Presse, 19 August 2008
----- "SKorean workers vow to stop US beef imports, police clamps down on protests." Agency France-Presse, 28 May 2008

Associated Press. "Bush plans South Korea trip despite furor over U.S. beef - American produce returns to nation's shops amid protests." Houston Chronicle, 2 July 2008
----- "Beef fight will go on, South Koreans vow." New York Times, 20 June 2008
----- "South Korea negotiates limited U.S. beef imports - Seoul can also inspect sampling of slaughterhouses." New York Times, 22 June 2008
----- "South Korea to allow US beef, but critics may stand in its way." New York Times, 26 June 2008
----- 'Beef protest turns violent in South Korea." New York Times, 30 June 2008

Herman, Burt. "Students' beef with US spirals into larger crisis in South Korea." Orlando Sentinel, 11 June 2008
----- 'U.S. beef goes on sale in South Korea, protests continue." Rutland Herald (VT), 2 July 2008
Kim, Kwang-Tae. "South korean delays resumption of beef imports." Independent Record (Montana), 3 June 2008

----- "Mad Cow Scare." Korea Times, 2 May 2008
Sang-Hun, Choe. "South Korea will lift its ban on American beef." New York Times, 19 April 2008
Thai Press Reports. "South Korean, US Presidents discuss beef uproar, as protest continue." Thai Press Reports,
10 June 2008

---. "Boned US beef makes first arrival in South Korea since 2003." Thai Press Reports, 30 July 2008

Turkish Daily News. "South Korean cabinet offers to quit as beef protests intensify." Turkish Daily News, 11 June 2008

USA Today. "Mad cow watch goes blind." USA Today, 3 August 2006

Weisman, Steven R. "U.S. said to compromise on beef for South Korea." New York Times, 20 June 2008


---. "Over 10,000 South Koreans stage vigil in protest over US beef imports." Yonhap News Agency, 6 May 2008

Additional Notes:
Edited by Max Rennebohm (21/07/2011)
Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Julio Alicea, 09/05/2011

Back to top