

# Why Has There Been No People's Power Rebellion in North Korea?

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## Abstract

One scenario put forward by researchers, political commentators and journalists for the collapse of North Korea has been a People's Power (or popular) rebellion. This paper analyses why no popular rebellion has occurred in the DPRK under Kim Jong Un. It challenges the assumption that popular rebellion would happen because of widespread anger caused by a greater awareness of superior economic conditions outside the DPRK. Using Jack Goldstone's theoretical explanations for the outbreak of popular rebellion, and comparisons with the 1989 Romanian and 2010–11 Tunisian transitions, this paper argues that marketization has led to a loosening of state ideological control and to an influx of information about conditions in the outside world. However, unlike the Tunisian transitions—in which a new information context shaped by social media, the Al-Jazeera network and an experience of protest helped create a sense of pan-Arab solidarity amongst Tunisians resisting their government—there has been no similar ideology unifying North Koreans against their regime. There is evidence of discontent in market unrest in the DPRK, although protests between 2011 and the present have mostly been in defense of the right of people to support themselves through private trade. North Koreans believe this right has been guaranteed, or at least tacitly condoned, by the Kim Jong Un government. There has not been any large-scale explosion of popular anger because the state has not attempted to crush market activities outright under Kim Jong Un. There are other reasons why no popular rebellion has occurred in the North. Unlike Tunisia, the DPRK lacks a dissident political elite capable of leading an

opposition movement, and unlike Romania, the DPRK authorities have shown some flexibility in their anti-dissent strategies, taking a more tolerant approach to protests against economic issues. Reduced levels of violence during periods of unrest and an effective system of information control may have helped restrict the expansion of unrest beyond rural areas.

**Key words:** North Korea, popular rebellion, marketization, unrest

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Predictions of the collapse of North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) have arisen repeatedly over the last thirty years. Such predictions followed the 1989 demise of Eastern European communism, the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, the 1994 death of Kim Il Sung (Kim Ilsŏng, 김일성), the widespread North Korean famine of 1996–7, and the death of Kim Jong Il (Kim Chŏng'il, 김정일) in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Possible scenarios for collapse have included a military coup, external intervention and the assassination of Kim Jong Un (Kim Chŏng'un, 김정은). Another scenario put forward by researchers, political commentators, journalists—and in November 2017, by T'ae Yong-ho, the former DPRK deputy ambassador to the United Kingdom—has been a People's Power (or popular) rebellion.<sup>3</sup> Such a rebellion might follow the pattern of the 2010–2011 Arab Spring events that overthrew entrenched dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, or the 1989 overthrow of Ceaușescu in Romania.

The term People Power was first used to describe the 1986 Philippine protest movement that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos' government and became the inspiration for mass rebellions against dictatorships in South Korea in 1987 and in Eastern Europe in 1989.<sup>4</sup> Street protests against dictatorships erupted in major cities, and opposition movements led by disenfranchised elites emerged from these protests, swiftly accumulating widespread followings. In each of these cases, the military refused to suppress the demonstrations, made pacts with the opposition and helped overthrow dictatorships.

Following the succession of Kim Jong Un, the third leader of the DPRK's Kim dynasty, scholars of North Korea have taken an interest in the possibility of People's Power-type rebellions in North Korea. In particular, Lankov<sup>5</sup> argues that greater awareness by North Koreans of the affluence of the South will lead to anger about conditions and attempts to overthrow the Pyongyang regime.<sup>6</sup> Hazel Smith<sup>7</sup> claims that 'popular uprisings' are prevented by the fear of punitive sanctions from the authorities, and because people prioritize their

own survival. Hunger and poverty may generate anger, but more often than not inhibit popular mobilization against the regime.<sup>8</sup>

South Korean journalists and political commentators have speculated for many years about an imminent popular rebellion against the DPRK leadership, with spikes in such journalistic speculation following the Arab Spring<sup>9</sup> and the introduction of tougher sanctions by the Trump Administration.<sup>10</sup> Victor Cha, former North Korean advisor to President George W. Bush (2001–2009), predicted in his 2013 political commentary *North Korea: The Impossible State* that the DPRK is a ‘ticking time bomb’ and the leadership will soon face their own ‘Ceașescu moment,’ referring to the historical moment in December 1989 when a crowd turned on Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceașescu as he gave a speech.<sup>11</sup> The direction of such political commentary and journalistic speculation is notable because many of the assumptions that popular rebellion can be engineered from the outside appear to have filtered into US Government policy towards the DPRK. Lankov<sup>12</sup> argues that the unstated aim of recent economic sanctions—ostensibly aimed at forcing Pyongyang into renouncing its nuclear and ballistic missile development programs—is in fact to starve North Koreans into rising up against their regime.<sup>13,14</sup>

It is seven years since the events of the Arab Spring, and five years since Lankov and others made their predictions, yet the DPRK state stands firm.<sup>15</sup> Its population is apparently no nearer to rising up against it, which invites speculation as to why no popular rebellion has occurred. As a historian I am more used to explaining reasons for the occurrence of rebellions in premodern Korea than I am in speculating about why rebellion has *not* occurred in modern North Korea. In this paper, however, I will provide an explanation for why a People’s Power type rebellion has not happened since the start of Kim Jong Un’s rule (2011–present). Not all political commentary and scholarship has predicted the imminent demise of the DPRK through a popular rebellion, and McCoy and Grice have attempted to explain why no rebellion has occurred. McCoy contends that poor telecommunications means we have never seen the type of social-media fuelled rapid spread of protests that led to the overthrow of Arab dictatorships in 2011.<sup>16</sup> Grice argues that the conditions are in place for a popular rebellion but this has been prevented by total, brutal state suppression.<sup>17</sup> While I agree with the conclusion of both McCoy and Grice, both arguments fail to account for the complex dynamics that can result in popular rebellion, as well as the regime actions that can prevent it. Most problematically, Grice’s analysis takes no account of the massive changes that have occurred in DPRK society since popular marketisation began in the wake of the late 1990s famine (see below).

This changed social reality complicates our understanding of the dynamics that can cause popular rebellion in the DPRK.

To overcome these limitations, I will be using the prism of analytical and sociological literature on rebellions, scholarship on North Korea and a comparative analysis of other historical rebellions. Many of the scholarly and journalistic claims about popular rebellion in the North are based on particular assumptions about how such events start and how they spread. I argue that while many of these assumptions are not inherently wrong, they only provide a partial explanation for why mass rebellions occur. My account aims to expand our understanding of the type of conflict that may have been going on in the DPRK under Kim Jong Un's rule in the context of widespread popular marketization, and why this conflict has not exploded into the type of rebellion predicted by researchers, political commentators, politicians and journalists.

### *Theoretical Framework*

'Revolutions'<sup>18</sup> as Jack Goldstone<sup>19</sup> argues 'do not arise simply from mounting discontent over poverty, inequality, or other changes.' Revolutions are 'complex, emergent processes' produced by a variety of social factors which are themselves reliant upon both contingency and the mobilization of different groups within society.<sup>20</sup> In order to account for its inherent complexity, Goldstone argues that popular rebellion occurs at the rare intersection of seven essential elements:

1. Mass rebellions occur in societies in a state of 'unstable equilibrium' or at a point where social orders are so frayed that even small disorders can accelerate a movement towards the overthrow of the existing regime.<sup>21</sup>
2. Widespread discontent can lead ordinary citizens to join in protests, and this anger arises when people feel they are 'losing their proper place in society' because of government policy.<sup>22</sup> Unstable social equilibrium and anger are caused by structural problems such as uneven economic development, patterns of exclusion, sudden demographic change or discrimination against specific groups.<sup>23</sup>
3. Critical to the eruption of rebellion is the emergence of an ideology offering 'a persuasive shared narrative of resistance' that links the discontent of disenfranchised elites to the rest of the population. Ideology and its impact upon popular rebellion is a contentious area since 'ideology is highly fluid' and although we hope it would provide a 'clear guide to the intentions and actions' of participants of rebellion, in actual

fact, ideologies are often not shared by all participants, and rebel leaders shift policies according to changing circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

4. Popular rebellions are seldom exclusively domestic; they are also international affairs. Rebel movements, for example, often depend upon favorable international support to guarantee a victory.<sup>25</sup>
5. Goldstone's formulation also acknowledges the vital impact of unintended or unforeseen forces upon complex processes like rebellion.<sup>26</sup> He calls these contingent forces 'transient causes', and they include sudden events like massive rises in inflation or riots and demonstrations challenging state authority. Countries with the resilience to handle crises may deal with such events many times over the course of a decade, but states in 'unstable equilibrium' stand a greater chance of breaking down into a revolutionary crisis.<sup>27</sup>
6. Essential to the coordination of mass mobilization into a nationwide movement is the leadership of elites—current, former or out-of-favour power-holders in government. Without the leadership of political elites, spur-of-the-moment protests are more likely to dissipate,<sup>28</sup> and without military elite participation, demonstrations are likely to be suppressed.<sup>29</sup>
7. Goldstone's theoretical framework stresses the actions of the state and its security forces within the conflict process.<sup>30</sup> The state, even in 'unstable equilibrium', is not a passive entity waiting to be seized by the people, but is actively engaged in its own survival.<sup>31</sup> When threatened by a political movement, state security forces often modify strategy in an attempt to ensure regime continuity. Such choices can successfully defend regime interests or even hasten its demise. State decision making is a vital part of our understanding of contingency, because many regime choices within a revolutionary situation are unpredictable.

Goldstone's formulation is an amalgam of elements of the most influential theories of rebellion. For example, notions of 'social equilibrium' closely resemble Chalmers Johnson's systems/value-consensus theories, while the theory of mass discontent follows Ted Gurr's frustration-aggression hypotheses.<sup>32,33</sup> Notions of group-focused mobilization derive from the political conflict perspectives of Charles Tilly and Anthony Oberschall.<sup>34</sup> Goldstone has also drawn on the work of Skocpol and Halliday in highlighting not just international but domestic influences on the causation and expansion of popular rebellion.<sup>35</sup> Goldstone, like Skocpol<sup>36</sup> and Wood,<sup>37</sup> stress that unintended consequences and multiple motivations of participants help shape revolutionary processes.

Current explanations for popular rebellion in the DPRK are theoretically grounded in frustration-aggression theories of revolution. Lankov sees anger arising from the recognition of inequities of wealth between North Koreans and the outside world.<sup>38</sup> He argues that an influx of heterogeneous ideas and above all 'knowledge about available alternatives' like Chinese or South Korean style capitalism will spread anger and enhance the impetus for change.<sup>39</sup> Gurr argues that the catalyst for discontent leading to revolution is 'relative deprivation',<sup>40</sup> a notion implicit in Lankov's assertion of the realization of an unbridgeable lifestyle gap for the populations of the two Koreas.<sup>41</sup> However, within Lankov's assumption lies a limitation common to the frustration-aggression hypothesis. As an explanatory tool for political change, Gurr's theory treats society as 'a passive structure'<sup>42</sup> upon which particular variables (like discontent because of raised expectations) act.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the DPRK, if sufficient information from the outside enters the DPRK, then enough anger will be generated to initiate a popular rebellion. Theories like the frustration-aggression hypothesis also treat mass rebellion as a linear process. If enough anger is generated, then state collapse is inevitable. As Lankov states: 'Once North Koreans come to the conclusion that they have no reason to be afraid of the usual crackdown, they are very likely to do what the East Germans did in 1989.'<sup>44</sup> Theorists like Gurr (or Johnson and Tilly) viewed

revolutions as purposive movements of an opposition that sought to wrest control of the state. They explained revolutions mainly by explaining the origins of the opposition and its recourse to violence. Yet often revolutions began not from the acts of a powerful opposition but from internal breakdown and paralysis of state administrations which rendered states incapable of managing normally routine problems.<sup>45</sup>

Goldstone accounts for a complex revolutionary process using a combination of theoretical constructs like discontent and unstable social equilibrium. He also factors in the impact of ideology, the international situation and contingency to create a formulation that translates across different temporal and cultural contexts.

In this study I speculate on why no popular rebellion has occurred in the DPRK under Kim Jong Un using Goldstone's framework and comparisons to the overthrow of Ceaușescu in Romania and Ben Ali in Tunisia<sup>46</sup> (hereafter, referred to as 'transitions'). Theda Skocpol has argued that: 'Revolutions can be treated as a 'theoretical subject ...' but

There should be included in any study both positive and negative cases, so that hypotheses about the causes of the phenomena under investigation can be checked against cases where that phenomena did not occur.<sup>47</sup>

Through a comparative approach of positive cases in Tunisia and Romania, I hope to better explain why no popular rebellion has occurred in the DPRK, using the key elements identified by Goldstone.

As cases for comparison, there are of course essential differences between the DPRK and Romania in 1989 and Tunisia in 2010, above all in the international dimension stressed by Goldstone. The Romanian transition, like that in Tunisia, came as part of a wave of change in the former Eastern Bloc during which popular movements challenged and overthrew their communist governments. Knowledge of the collapse of regional communist hegemony conditioned the decision making of the Romanian leadership in their handling of the popular challenge because they were concerned with preventing contagion from abroad.<sup>48</sup> In the period since Kim Jong Un took power in December 2011, however, the East Asian region has seen no comparable wave of challenge to authoritarian rule, and little that could inspire a popular movement against the DPRK authorities. In addition, in a swiftly fluid international environment in which former friends became hostile to the authoritarian character of the regimes in Romania and Tunisia, neither Ceaușescu nor Ben Ali could rely on many of their traditional foreign allies for support against domestic opposition movements. This has not been the case in the DPRK. Although Beijing has applied sanctions to punish Kim Jong Un's government for its nuclear brinkmanship, the People's Republic of China (PRC) appears to value the continued existence of the DPRK as a buffer state against South Korean and US regional domination.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, the 1989 Romanian and 2010 Tunisian transitions are particularly pertinent examples to compare with the DPRK. Tunisia and Romania both maintained extremely politically intransigent and repressive regimes that used substantial violence to suppress dissent,<sup>50</sup> the media and oppositional political discourses.<sup>51</sup> Most importantly, the Tunisian and Romanian transitions also throw up vitally important counterpoints to the DPRK case in specific areas: changes in ideological control and information flow from abroad, sources of popular anger, unrest as transitional causes, elite participation and regime decision making during domestic threats. Comparison of these areas will help to show why widespread rebellion has not occurred in the DPRK.

## Negative and Positive Cases: The DPRK, Tunisia and Romania

It is important to consider why there has been no rebellion in the DPRK under Kim Jong Un in the context of marketization from below in the DPRK, since the type of market activities that exist under Kim Jong Un have become a vital

feature of North Korean daily life. The social changes wrought by marketization and the fluctuating policy of the DPRK regime under Kim Jong Un provide vital insights into the causes of popular anger and the impact of new ideas from abroad.

### *The Context of Marketization*

Marketization has increased rapidly since the 1990s, brought on by that decade's economic collapse, the failure of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the 1996–7 famine, all of which forced people to find survival mechanisms that do not depend upon state support. Until the mid-1990s, the state exerted almost total economic and considerable political control over North Koreans through its domination of the food supply system. Following the collapse of the PDS, marketplaces have emerged in which labor, foodstuffs, raw materials and consumer goods are traded on a for profit basis.<sup>52</sup> North Koreans who are not actively trading in markets have also become part-time merchants, or have developed cottage industries cooking food or producing goods in their homes to sell at market. In addition, farmer's markets have flourished. Travel has become easier thanks to opportunities to bribe officials.<sup>53</sup> During periods when the border with the PRC has been porous, people have been able to bring in goods from abroad to trade. Thanks to marketization, many North Koreans have experienced a level of 'economic independence'<sup>54</sup> hitherto unknown in the North.<sup>55</sup> State officials and party members are as susceptible to want as other parts of the population, so turn a blind eye to private enterprise for a cut even though such economic activities are deemed anti-socialist in the DPRK.<sup>56</sup> Since the 1990s, corruption has become endemic.<sup>57</sup> Much of the legislation outlawing private economic activities has never been lifted, rendering most market transactions illegal<sup>58</sup> and leaving ordinary North Koreans to eke out a living susceptible to exploitation from officials seeking bribes.<sup>59</sup> Overall, marketization has greatly improved the living standards of the population in comparison to the period of economic collapse and famine of the 1990s.

But such economic changes do not mean that popular rebellion was less likely. On the contrary, as has been observed by theorists, it is often not when economic conditions are at their worst that rebellions occur but when conditions are improving.<sup>60</sup> The same can be seen in the Tunisian case. In the period of Ben Ali's rule (1987–2011), the national GDP quadrupled, wealth in the country increased, life expectancy increased by 10 years, literacy doubled, and the absolute poverty headcount halved.<sup>61</sup> Yet deeper structural problems remained that provoked popular anger and unrest as will be seen below. One



other potential problem in both the North Korean and Tunisian context was the influx of ideas heterodox to the regime.

### *Ideological Change*

Marketization in the DPRK has helped bring about other profound ideological changes to the population. As goods have come in from abroad, so has information about the reality of life beyond the borders of North Korea. Peddlers trading goods smuggled from the PRC also bring in media (movies and TV dramas) depicting life in South Korea and China.<sup>62</sup> This self-imported information about lifestyles beyond the borders of North Korea has been supplemented by increasingly active human rights and religious groups who have found ways to transmit data into the country using balloons carrying literature or USBs or by smuggling.<sup>63</sup> Political commentator Jieun Baek claims that much of this information has revealed to North Koreans what they lack in social, political and economic terms and how inferior life in the DPRK is in comparison to other countries, an implication that will be discussed below.<sup>64</sup> As well as an explosion in awareness about the outside world, the ability of the DPRK authorities to impose ideological training on the population has been reduced since many officials, themselves reliant upon market activities for survival, have no longer been able to devote all their time to ideological education.<sup>65</sup> The indoctrination of North Koreans has been severely curtailed by marketization since many workers are no longer dependent upon attending official workplaces—important sites of political education—in order to receive their ration card.

Research by Smith,<sup>66</sup> Hassig and Oh<sup>67</sup> and Choi<sup>68</sup> appears to indicate that the combination of marketization and new information has resulted in a shift in values and norms of people forced to fend for themselves to survive and a hardening of attitudes of the population towards their rulers. Smith argues that North Koreans are fully aware of their position and their poverty in comparison to the South Koreans and the Chinese.<sup>69</sup> The DPRK population was previously encouraged to see themselves as more fortunate than their neighbors but has realized that in fact the complete opposite is the case.<sup>70</sup> Ordinary people have embraced a new-found right to make decisions based on self-interest while increasingly questioning the principle of self-sacrifice for the greater good of a state which appears incapable of providing for its population.<sup>71</sup> Hassig and Oh argue that ordinary people pay no notice to official ideology and pronouncements and treat officials with barely concealed contempt.<sup>72</sup> The changes brought by marketization has therefore been dangerous for political elites because they have been 'accompanied by the disassociation of the population from the government.'<sup>73</sup>

While the social changes wrought by an influx of new ideas and marketization in the DPRK are profound, they are still a far cry from mass rebellion seen in Tunisia. Lynch<sup>74</sup> argues that a radically new regional information environment had a profound catalytic impact on the Tunisian transition. Although Ben Ali controlled the media and internet strictly, the regime considered Facebook to be innocuous, allowing activists the opportunity to build up connections with a diaspora community of migrant workers in France, providing an outlet for the discussion of issues.<sup>75</sup> This group of Facebook activists, armed with new links and ideas about novel methods of resistance, went onto play significant roles in the Tunisian transition. Discussion and negotiation helped unite young Tunisian workers abroad and activists in Tunisia.<sup>76</sup> A shared sense of regional identity was also formed thanks in part to social media but also to the experience of watching Al-Jazeera, the Arab region's satellite channel. According to Lynch, the Al-Jazeera generation developed a common experience of protest over the decade prior to the Arab Spring—against the US invasion of Iraq and in support of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.<sup>77</sup> This radically new regional information environment helped shape the 2010 Tunisian popular movement with a pan-Arabic rather than a national identity that 'shared heroes and villains, common stakes, and a deeply felt sense of shared destiny.'<sup>78</sup> The North Korean case is very different. The information flows sent into the DPRK by activists and brought in by peddlers have not acted as a unifying ideology, nor have they revealed a shared sense of suffering, common values, or a pan-Korean identity. Instead they have highlighted differences to North Koreans. This information may have increased cynicism, but it has not unified people and brought them onto the streets.

As a result of its reduced ideological control, the DPRK government has generally had an ambivalent attitude towards marketization. On one hand, the regime has tolerated its existence as a mechanism for social stability and the generation of income, but on the other it has periodically attempted to reassert state control over economic activities so it can more fully control the indoctrination of North Koreans, an implication discussed in the next section.<sup>79</sup>

### *Sources of General Discontent*

Despite the many positive economic impacts of marketization, there are still many potential sources of discontent within the country. There is a great deal of poverty and inequality as well as cleavages between different parts of the country. In 2012, the World Health Organisation reported that levels of malnutrition were 'worrysome' but 'acceptable', suggesting that there are still shortages of basic foodstuffs, especially in certain seasons and in particular areas of the

country.<sup>80</sup> Much of the population also suffers from a lack of housing, electricity and clean water, and the shortages appear to be worse in the countryside where transport links are less reliable.<sup>81</sup> Marketization has brought extreme income inequality, and a *nouveau riche* class of entrepreneurs has emerged on the back of private trade in larger cities.<sup>82</sup> Such disparities in wealth are not the only problems, especially for the majority who are unable to buy their way out of compulsory service. There is the onerous requirement of ordinary North Koreans to participate in service on behalf of the state. Soldiers, students and office workers are required to engage in construction projects and also help out with harvests.<sup>83</sup> Such a culture of mobilisation means that an increasingly burdened workforce has to give up family time or opportunities to engage in market activities and spend it in service to the state instead. In addition, for the vast DPRK armed forces, conscripts face the possibility of a decade in military service with few opportunities for leave, and may even fall victim to malnutrition.<sup>84</sup> Corruption amongst state officials and party members is rampant due to the opportunities offered to them by marketization.<sup>85</sup> Since March 2016 increasingly stringent international economic sanctions have been imposed upon the DPRK by the UN Security Council and the Trump Administration in response to a series of missile launches and nuclear tests. It is unclear what impact these sanctions have had on the finances of state and society but UN resolution 2375 outlawing fishing, coal and other imports will probably have hit the activities of those ordinary people engaging in private economic activities particularly hard.<sup>86</sup> The DPRK has also experienced a significant growth in the population from 21 million in 1993 to 24 million in 2008,<sup>87</sup> which has the potential to stretch already limited state resources.

Goldstone argues that many of the same type of issues suggested above contributed to the systemic unstable equilibrium and anger resulting in the overthrow of Ben Ali in Tunisia. The Arab states saw some of the highest population surges of any area in the world. Although the economy had improved and overall poverty levels had dropped in Tunisia, there were severe pockets of poverty in the interior away from the capital. Perhaps the most serious result of the population increase and uneven development was a large surplus of well-educated young people who were unable to find full time employment.<sup>88</sup> Blocked employment opportunities, a lack of political choice, an increasingly coercive state security service, and official corruption helped fuel angry protests that led to the overthrow of Ben Ali. Despite such similarities with Tunisia as demographic change, inequality, uneven economic development and rampant corruption, we have not seen the same scale of popular anger in the DPRK, except during times of market unrest.

The largest explosion of anger in the DPRK in recent years came with the most sustained state attack on private economic activities on November 30, 2009. The government introduced a sudden reevaluation of the North Korean won in an attempt to wipe out the earnings of those who had engaged in private trade. The reforms created mass panic and hyperinflation as market activities were temporarily curtailed.<sup>89,90</sup> Although precise details are sketchy, there is some evidence that the reevaluation also resulted in largescale but disorganized outbursts of discontent in January and February 2010.<sup>91</sup> According to Lankov, this was the greatest public display of anger since a previous attempt to curtail private trade in December 2007—a ban on market trade for women under 50 which reportedly led to riots in Ch'öngjin.<sup>92</sup> Both the currency reform and ban was eventually undermined by ordinary people and lower ranking officials, whose survival depended on private trade and the markets gradually reemerged.<sup>93</sup>

It is probably because of the general level of anger that followed the 2007 and 2009 attempts to clamp down on market activities and revive the PDS that there has been no repeat of these policy shifts under Kim Jong Un. Kim Jong Un's administration has ceded the management of companies to individuals, permitted entrepreneurship to develop and shown a greater tolerance of market activities than previously.<sup>94</sup> According to Choi,<sup>95</sup> popular perceptions common amongst many ordinary North Koreans who actively engage in private trading is that the Kim Jong Un administration is no longer attempting to restrict market activities and has tacitly accepted the indispensability of a market system that can provide subsistence that the state cannot. Lankov concurs with this point, arguing that while the Kim Jong Un government will never fully legalize private economic activities completely, it quietly accepts marketization.<sup>96</sup> However, the unrest in markets has not stopped completely under Kim Jong Un, providing further clues to the sources of discontent within the DPRK.

### *Market Unrest Under Kim Jong Un*

There is evidence of market unrest directed against the excessive bribe-taking of officials. Over the past few years South Korean newspapers have carried reports of a number of violent and non-violent protests within North Korean markets. Three incidents were reported in 2011; one in Chongsöng (North Hamgyöng Province), another in Sinüiju, and a final cluster of incidents that allegedly spread between Chöngju, Ryongch'ön and Sönc'hön (all in North P'yöngan Province). Three further incidents were reported in 2015 in Hamhüng (South Hamgyöng), Ch'öngjin and Musan (both North Hamgyöng).<sup>97</sup> Two non-violent

verbal protests occurred more recently against excessive demands for payment from officials, with incidents happening in Ryanggang province in 2017 and 2018.<sup>98,99</sup> This kind of market unrest is important because it precisely reflects Goldstone's transient cause—protests that can escalate into a popular challenge to state rule. As Michael Kimmel observed, large scale rebellions often start in seemingly insignificant events.<sup>100</sup> The fall of Tunisia's Ben Ali started with the suicide of a market trader, while the fall of Ceaușescu began with the attempted eviction of a pastor in the regional town of Timișoara. The reason why such unrest often leads to wider conflict historically is because of the inherently politicized nature of public and private life under many authoritarian (especially communist) regimes, where even smaller public protests take on a deeper symbolic significance and become a greater threat to the regime.<sup>101</sup>

There are reasons to be skeptical over whether these incidents occurred in the way newspapers have reported them. They were first publicised in newspapers associated with human rights organisations or the South Korean right such as the *Chosun Ilbo*, with a vested interest in promoting North Korean collapse. Many of these reports were first published in South Korea and then broadcast directly into the North to promote dissent.<sup>102,103</sup> Most of the journalists received their data from so-called unidentified informants embedded within the DPRK called *sosikt'ong* (literally: source) who allegedly relay news from local eyewitnesses to South Korean journalists via unregistered Chinese satellite phones. However, there are also reasons to believe market disturbances have indeed been occurring under Kim Jong Un. First, similar outbreaks of disorder were reported in South Korean newspapers in 2006, March and December 2008, December 2009.<sup>104</sup> Second, there are also defector accounts of market disorder in 2006 and 2008.<sup>105</sup> Finally, given the widespread growth in private trade, the importance of markets as a livelihood for ordinary North Korean citizens and the widespread corruption of state officials that has arisen as a consequence of marketization, it is fully plausible that the alleged market disturbances occurred as reported.

The participants in the market unrest appeared to be responding to local abuses of power. George Rudé<sup>106</sup> (1981) has observed of the revolutionary crowd in history, the slogans of participants in protest provide some insight into their motivations. In the 2015 unrest in Ch'ŏngjin, Ministry of Public Security (Anjŏnbu, MPS) agents prevented an elderly vendor from hawking old middle-school textbooks alongside secondhand books. Onlookers complained about the arbitrary nature of the decision and allegedly shouted: "You're all the same—living off the money of those struggling to get by!" Thereupon protestors attacked the agent, who fled.<sup>107</sup> The 2011 unrest in Chongsŏng, North

Hamgyŏng Province and Sinŭiju, North P'yŏngan Province also appear to have been related to disputes over bribe taking.<sup>108,109,110</sup> The most recent incidents in October 2017 and July 2018 did not result in violence, but angry words were exchanged between vendors and officials. During the 2017 incident, an alleged impromptu protest arose in a market in Hyesan, Ryanggang Province, when security agents<sup>111</sup> demanded 'contributions' to prepare for the Party Foundation Day (10.10) and vendors protested shouting: 'How many times is this that you've come (for money)?'<sup>112</sup> In the July 2018 protest in Hyesan (Ryanggang Province) Ministry of People's Security officials were alleged to have conducted house-to-house searches of vendors, confiscating hard currency.<sup>113</sup> This latest incident may well be part of a concerted effort to raise funds for state coffers that have been stretched by the impact of economic sanctions since March 2016. None of the incidents appear to have been attempts by the state to stamp out market activities indefinitely, and the response of protestors has mainly been directed against individual officials rather than the regime. In 2017 and 2018, comments by protestors indicated they believed that their right to trade privately had been tacitly accepted by the Kim Jong Un regime.<sup>114</sup> People involved in this unrest appear to have distinguished between how state officials should be acting according to the regime's current attitudes towards marketization and the reality of how they were in fact acting. It is this reality that has caused anger.

In addition, the issues raised during the unrest concerned economic factors (excessive payouts) rather than regime policy (the elimination of market activities). This is perhaps why such protest is attempted and apparently tolerated in the DPRK—a country with a reputation for crushing all dissent mercilessly. Smith argues that the 1990s economic crisis and resultant marketization has resulted in a separation of economic and political spheres—in other words, officials allowed people greater freedom than in previous periods to engage in economic activities in order to survive, but still curtailed political freedoms to criticize the state.<sup>115</sup> The result is that certain criticisms of officials' actions have been tolerated as long as they were understood to be non-political.<sup>116,117</sup> The grievances of the participants in the market unrest have been directed against individual security agents, particular official actions, and local abuses. The outbreaks appear to show an awareness by the participants in the unrest that there would be some limited regime tolerance of this type of protest.

The North Korean market unrest also appears to have been largely defensive, with participants defending rights and protecting incomes that were threatened. Such actions are not an anomaly, as James Scott has argued:

the great majority of peasant movements historically, far from being affairs of rising expectations, have rather been defensive efforts to preserve customary rights or to restore them once they have been lost.<sup>118</sup>

In other words, North Korean market protesters are not trying to get what they don't have, they are trying to keep what they believe is rightfully theirs. This is significant because it suggests that researchers and political commentators alike have misidentified an important source of discontent in North Korean society. When such defensive grievances are 'widely shared', and also 'widely directed' against the same target, they have the potential to expand into greater national unrest.<sup>119</sup> However, Kim Jong Un has not attempted to clamp down on market activity on the scale of his father in 2005–9, and this may explain why more widespread and destructive unrest has not been directed against the regime.

This situation in the DPRK stands in some contrast to the transitions in Tunisia and Romania. While initial incidents of unrest in the Tunisian rebellion occurred in provincial towns, the participants always sought wider political change—they were not trying to rectify local abuses or defend economic rights, and this can be seen in the slogans. Early protesters in Tunisia shouted: 'The people want to overthrow the regime' or 'leave!'<sup>120</sup> In other words, the demonstrations were responding to a local event but directed their anger against the regime from the outset. In Romania, the participating protesters came from minority religious and ethnic Hungarian groupings who identified allegiance to their respective churches as defenders of their Hungarian culture and rights. These groups saw the decision to evict Pastor Tóké as a direct assault on their collective interests by the state.<sup>121</sup> Richard Hall argues that within two days of the initial protests, the unrest took on a wider anti-regime character, and there was a political motivation from the demonstrators from the outset.<sup>122</sup>

Overall, the corruption of North Korean officials and attempts by the local DPRK authorities to generate revenue by extracting profits from vendors has generated discontent under Kim Jong Un, and market unrest is evidence of this. The grievances remain localised and economic, rather than political challenges to the leadership in Pyongyang. Choi argues that the DPRK government is able to maintain its rule by achieving 'dominance without hegemony.'<sup>123</sup> The state recognizes that marketization has been a stabilising force in the DPRK, and that this is the reason why systematic state attacks on the market in the manner of the 2007 and 2009 crackdowns have never been attempted under Kim Jong Un. The regime knew that such measures would result in fiercer anti-regime sentiment, and that 'its dominance would fall apart' perhaps even tipping the DPRK into unstable social equilibrium.<sup>124</sup>

However, there may be other reasons why catalytic events like these market disturbances failed to escalate into larger unrest. We must also consider the question of mobilization and state responses to protest.

### *Elite Participation and Mobilization*

Accounting for the rapidity of revolutionary mobilisation, Oberschall argues that movements are not formed ‘through the recruitment of large numbers of isolated and solitary individuals’ linked by a common enemy or grievance, they emerge instead from ‘pre-existing associations.’<sup>125</sup> In other words, popular rebellion does not cause people to form *new* anti-government groups. Patterns of prior organizational coherence based on kinship, region, ethnicity, political, work, religious or educational affiliation are vital to the rapid expansion of protest.<sup>126</sup> Groups essential to the escalation of limited unrest into a wider popular rebellion leading to state collapse include elite-led political and military organisations.<sup>127</sup> These theoretical points regarding elite participation and mobilization are well-illustrated by the Tunisian case, in which elite groups—particularly human rights organizations, lawyers, academics and journalists—played a vital part in the challenge to Ben Ali by joining protests despite the regime’s previously harsh treatment of dissidents.<sup>128</sup> Middle-class professional participation in the demonstrations illustrated the broad appeal of the grievances and helped legitimize the protests. In terms of mobilization, it was trade unions, particularly the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGGT) which was central to marshalling a greater cross-section of society against the government. The UGGT had had years of experience of blue- and white-collar labor disputes, and by organizing solidarity strikes in the major cities and the capital played a key part in moving the protests from the periphery to the center of government power.<sup>129</sup>

Compared to Tunisia, where there was a history of group and elite participation in protests, especially in peripheral and marginalized coastal areas, the situation in Kim Jong Un’s DPRK has been very different. Research suggests there is a total absence of any oppositional political elite capable of coordinating a movement from the mass demonstrations. Lankov concludes that there is no ‘second society’ political opposition within the North to coordinate post-collapse Korea in the way that dissident Eastern Europeans helped lead post-Communist rule.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, there are no institutions independent of the state—churches, trade unions, student and intellectual groups—that could have provided the leadership for dissent.<sup>131</sup> Hassig and Oh<sup>132</sup> argue that organized or semi-organized groups working against the regime are unlikely to exist in the



DPRK, and that by the time any such group became known outside the North they would already have been eradicated.<sup>133</sup> This does not mean that there is no intellectual dissent. Smith cites evidence of the plethora of official pronouncements that continually castigate intellectuals for not following the dictates of the party according to previous pronouncements as a manifestation of heterodox thinking.<sup>134</sup> However, evidence suggests that most elite groups within the DPRK are largely co-opted into the state and are 'bound together by a common awareness that they stood to face ruin and reprisals from home and abroad if the regime were to collapse.'<sup>135</sup>

It is not just political elites that are linked by a unifying force to rally to the regime in times of domestic or international threat. Despite internecine factional struggles,<sup>136</sup> military elites also share this characteristic, which may explain the continued loyalty of military units. Terence Lee<sup>137</sup> examines cases in which the military supported authoritarian regimes against mass protests (Tiananmen Square, 1989; Burma, 2007) and cases where the military joined the rebels and collectively overthrew dictatorships (The Philippines, 1986; Indonesia, 1998), arguing that military units stayed loyal in regimes with a greater degree of institutionalized power-sharing.<sup>138</sup> In times of crisis the military help to create and maintain a ruling coalition of political and military elites that generates incentives to keep the coalition committed to the survival of authoritarian rule.<sup>139</sup> In the DPRK, policy delineates the role of the military (rather than the party) in leading the country and securing the regime.<sup>140,141</sup> Military First politics appears to suggest a more power-sharing form of political leadership at present—one in which the role of the military is to secure regime continuity by merging the interests of the Kim dynasty as an institution with those of the military.<sup>142</sup> The military played a central role in ensuring DPRK regime continuity through the greatest economic crisis it has ever faced—namely the late 1990s economic collapse and famine. In other words, under Kim Jong Un there appear to have been no elite-led political or military groups capable of helping to spread the type of market protest from peripheral rural towns and throughout the DPRK.

### *Regime Decision Making*

Another factor that may have inhibited more widespread mobilization from initial market unrest is an overall fear of state repression and improved strategies of the authorities towards the containment of unrest. Decisions made by regimes when faced with protests are vital in revolutionary outcomes. Above all, indiscriminate state violence against collective protest is one critical way by

which initial disturbances can escalate against the regime. Evidence suggests that the DPRK has reconsidered the way it suppresses protest. Testimony from defectors with military experience, indicates that at least until the early 2000s, standard procedure was to dispatch military units, including forces especially trained to suppress internal unrest, to crush all public unrest by shooting ‘participants indiscriminately’ with ‘live ammunition.’<sup>143</sup> Such accounts appear to confirm newspaper reports of brutal and overwhelming use of military force to crush workers’ protests in both Sinŭiju in 1983<sup>144</sup> and in Songrim (Hwanghae Province) in 1998,<sup>145</sup> and the suppression of riots amongst border crossers attempting to enter China to trade in October 1999.<sup>146</sup>

If the testimony of defectors is to be believed, the regime had a zero-tolerance policy towards public manifestations of dissent at least until the late 1990s. However, a shift in the method of suppression of collective protest appears to have begun sometime around the mid-2000s. South Korean newspaper reports indicate that in 2010, DPRK authorities formed units called Special Riot Forces (T’ŭkbyŏl kidonda), which were attached to the MPS, the body charged with monitoring internal dissent.<sup>147</sup> The T’ŭkbyŏl kidonda were created to suppress disturbances in lieu of military forces, and to also engage in unrest prevention activities. Members of the T’ŭkbyŏl kidonda would act as spotters in public places such as markets where unrest might occur, identifying potential troublemakers and bringing them to police stations to nip possible unrest in the bud.<sup>148</sup> Suspected troublemakers brought to police stations were subsequently fined or imprisoned.<sup>149</sup> It may be that the DPRK authorities continue to torture or execute those involved in unrest, but if this is occurring it is beyond the public view, and visible violence against unarmed protestors can impact the spread of protests.

Other data appear to support an overall drop in the use of violence against unrest. Lankov notes that from the early 2000s the DPRK authorities seem to have developed a more restrained approach to the suppression of unrest, especially in markets.<sup>150</sup> Lankov’s assertion is backed by the testimony of one internal informant for *Radio Free Asia*, who claimed that demonstrations occurred in markets ‘frequently’ and that the shootings that occurred at 2011 unrest in Sinŭiju were an anomaly.<sup>151</sup> In addition, after the 2011 Arab Spring, DPRK authorities engaged in high-level meetings in which officials from the PRC briefed DPRK officials on the effective maintenance of public security.<sup>152</sup> After this meeting, the DPRK allegedly began to import riot shields, helmets and tear gas from the PRC (Ibid).

The absence of reported onsite casualties in the market protests in Chŏngju, Ryongch’ŏn and Sŏnch’ŏn in 2011, and Musan, Hamhŭng, and Ch’ŏngjin in 2015;

the consultations with security agencies in the PRC; the use of specially trained forces; the importation of riot gear; the development of new strategies like spotters to preempt collective protests—all this indicates a shift in approach in dealing with collective unrest in the DPRK. The move has been towards preventative measures, fines for troublemakers and more moderate levels of state violence. It is unclear what prompted the regime to move in this direction. It is possible that the move came about in recognition of the market unrest and the economic complaints of protestors. The move may also have been in response to a very public incident of unrest that occurred around 2005 and impacted public order rather than specifically posing an open ideological threat to the regime: a riot at a televised international football match between North Korea and Iran.<sup>153,154</sup>

The aforementioned changes are significant because statistically, demonstrations have a greater chance of spreading if security forces use indiscriminate violence when demonstrators remain non-violent.<sup>155</sup> In such cases, bystanders are more likely to sympathise with the protestors, security forces and civilian bureaucrats are likely to shift their loyalty to the demonstrators and, if news does manage to filter out, international intervention is more likely to turn against the regime.<sup>156</sup> The same thing happened in 2010 in Tunisia when the bloody police suppression of demonstrators protesting the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid helped to inflame further protests in the Tunisian capital and turn Tunisia's traditional allies in France and the US against the Ben Ali regime.<sup>157</sup> In addition, early on during the Romanian transition, army units dispersed crowds after killing hundreds of demonstrators in Timișoara, but the following day crowds had gathered again. The refusal of the demonstrators to be cowed by state brutality appears to have been key to the army's defection in Timișoara.<sup>158</sup> Within two days of the massacre, demonstrations continued while generals withdrew military units to the barracks fearing troop desertions.<sup>159</sup> The net effect of the regime's choices of action greatly impacted military defection from the regime and caused an exponential increase of mobilization to the rebellion.

If the evidence suggests a shift in responses, DPRK authorities under Kim Jong Un appear to have been avoiding the kind of indiscriminate state violence against collective protest that escalated disturbances in Tunisia and Romania. Instead, they have been using state representatives with local knowledge, who at least in public have employed moderate levels of violence to contain unrest at local levels. This may have impacted the prospects for any escalation of protest in the DPRK. In contrast to the Romanian regime of 1989, the DPRK under Kim Jong Un has demonstrated a certain flexibility in terms of their decision

making about unrest. It is able to tolerate limited local protests unconnected to criticisms of the regime and able to shift its suppression tactics from massacre to prevention and limitation. Such a regime approach may explain why unrest has never escalated beyond the marketplaces in the North under Kim Jong Un.

One final factor that can increase the size of protests is information control. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Romanian transition, where the Ceaușescu regime broke with standard practice to restrict public access to information about unrest. Two years prior to the 1989 disturbances, workers' demonstrations in Brașov had been brutally crushed, and the regime had imposed a total media blackout on the events.<sup>160</sup> However, in December 1989, Ceaușescu's regime sought to police public consumption of the Timișoara disturbances by making public announcements condemning 'traitors' and 'foreign terrorists' both at a local level and on state media.<sup>161</sup> Ceaușescu's ill-fated attempt to put his own spin on regional demonstrations in 1989 ended up increasing the size and spread of unrest.<sup>162</sup> Hall calls this the 'boomerang' effect.<sup>163</sup>

The DPRK, however, has been careful to restrain the spread of information.<sup>164</sup> For example, rather than making announcements on national media, local authorities in the DPRK publicly condemned alleged cases of arson, illegal leafletting and graffiti in 2010 and 2015 to encourage citizens to betray the perpetrators. Meanwhile regional state representatives also attempted to contain news about such events spreading beyond the immediate locality by imposing temporary blanket travel restrictions.<sup>165</sup> Local authorities did not appear to report some cases of unrest at all. For approximately ten days after market clashes in 2011 in Sinŭiju, the authorities allegedly attempted to stem the spread of news about the incidents by restricting regional travel and even attempting a 'crackdown' on mobile phone use.<sup>166</sup> Restricting information flows can deeply impact the scale of mobilisation and the possibility of the type of social media type 'contagion' witnessed during the Tunisian transition.<sup>167</sup>

In the DPRK, the potential for the spread of information via social media outlets is uncertain. The government has worked hard to restrict the free flow of information into and around the country, controlling the telephone network and use of mobile phones and restricting access to the Internet and to social media forums.<sup>168</sup> North Koreans are anything but uninformed, but social media in the DPRK does not have the degree of penetration that Tunisians enjoyed, which may account for the lack of contagion in North Korea.<sup>169</sup> In addition, in the Romanian case, the impact of individual official decisions made by a regime desperate to defend itself by any means within a rapidly changing revolutionary situation had a profound impact upon the rapidity of military defection and rebel mobilisation—and its disastrous decision to publicise protest in national

media is a prime example. However, in the DPRK, there is no evidence that the regime has made any such miscalculations in terms of their media policy when market unrest occurred.

## Conclusion

This article has cited numerous factors to explain why no People's Power rebellion has occurred in the DPRK using Goldstone's theoretical framework and examples of state breakdown in Romania and Tunisia. Goldstone argues that popular rebellions occur at the rare intersection of essential elements: a unifying ideology, unstable social equilibrium, widespread discontent, a favorable international environment, military and political elite participation and contingent or transitional causes such as sudden protests or poor regime decision making when faced with a political challenge.

In the DPRK under Kim Jong Un, continued marketization from below has transformed society as the population engages in private economic activities in order to survive. Marketization has led to changes in the values of ordinary North Koreans, improved conditions, a loosening of the ideological control of the state and to an influx of information about conditions in the outside world. In the Tunisian transition, a radically new information environment shaped by social media, the Al-Jazeera network and an experience of protest helped create a sense of pan-Arab solidarity amongst young Tunisians which was critical in their challenge to the Ben Ali regime. In the DPRK marketization, a loosening of ideological control and greater awareness of the outside world has not led to an explosion of popular anger against the government in Pyongyang. Instead it has resulted in cynical attitudes towards authority. The new information flows into the DPRK have not unified the people into radical action against their rulers; the information has confirmed their continued mistrust of officialdom.

Tunisia in the years leading up to the transition saw rapid economic growth and demographic change, but also unemployment and pockets of poverty severe enough to threaten social stability and cause widespread discontent. The DPRK under Kim Jong Un in many ways faced a similar situation. Positive economic impacts of marketization have been accompanied by extreme disparities in income, poverty, occasional malnutrition, rampant corruption, the onerous duty of conscripted service to the state and demographic growth. However, these problems have not resulted in any popular attempt to overthrow the regime. There is evidence of discontent over market activities, and this market unrest is a potential transient cause of wider rebellion. The market unrest between 2011 and the present have largely been defensive in character, as North Koreans

have been protecting their right to support themselves through the private trading activities they believe have been tacitly sanctioned by the Kim Jong Un government. Most of the anger has been directed by vendors towards state officials demanding bribes or a cash-starved state seeking to extract greater amounts from a lucrative domestic private market. The largest explosions of anger came after major attempts by the state to outlaw market activities and reestablish state control of food supply under Kim Jong Il. The message of the Romanian and Tunisian authorities at the time of their transitions was that there was to be no change in policy and more of the same. In the DPRK, the Kim Jong Un regime's tacit acceptance of marketization offers ordinary people some hope for survival. The authorities have not tried to outlaw market activities outright under Kim Jong Un, and this is the prime reason why there has been no large-scale explosion of popular anger against the regime.

There are some other key differences between the DPRK and the Tunisian and Romanian transitions which help explain the absence of a more serious challenge to the North Korean authorities. Tunisian political elites and groups with a history of activism helped coordinate the expansion of smaller provincial protests into a nationwide challenge; military elites in both Tunisia and Romania defected from the regime, and this was essential to the opposition victory. The DPRK does not have the type of dissident elite or organizations capable of engineering the defection of disenfranchised military or of leading mass protests to victory.

Finally, the decision making of the regime when faced with protests has been both flexible, reflexive and effective in preventing the expansion of unrest. The inflexibility of the Ceaușescu regime to deal with protest other than through extreme violence inflamed unrest, and its decision to publicize dissent proved fatal. The DPRK authorities appear to have been more tolerant of economic complaints as opposed to political protests, and the DPRK regime has developed new strategies for dealing with disorder using counteractive methods targeted at individuals rather than by opening fire on groups of protestors with live ammunition. The DPRK still tightly controls social media and media outlets, and restricts information about market unrest, thereby helping to limit the flow of information that may fuel contagion. This latter point about the flexibility of regime decision making is particularly salient because of a general assumption, shared by Grice that currently the DPRK population is angry enough to overthrow the regime, but is prevented from doing so by state violence.<sup>170</sup> This assumption is misleading, since widespread grievances don't always lead to popular rebellion, and overwhelming violence doesn't always successfully deter

unrest. If my analysis is accurate, then the DPRK authorities under Kim Jong Un appear to understand this.

The popular overthrow of dictators like Romania's Ceaușescu and Tunisia's Ben Ali look inevitable in retrospect, and this is why it may be tempting for researchers, journalists and politicians alike to predict mass rebellions in states like North Korea. But to make such predictions is to ignore the complexity of the processes that lead to revolutionary transitions. The 'paradox of revolutions' as Goldstone observes is that they look obvious in hindsight, but no one ever sees such events coming.<sup>171</sup> North Koreans will not simply come to their senses and overthrow their rulers, no matter how despotic they may be. Neither can ordinary people be *sanctioned* into rising up. The relative stability of Kim Jong Un's North Korea since 2011 should be a reminder of that fact.

## Notes

1. This work was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2017-OLU-2250002). Thanks to Gregory Kailian, Ji-yong (Jay) Song, Elizabeth Wertheim, Perry Iles, Robert Winstanley-Chesters, Adam Cathcart and the two anonymous peer reviewers for their help with this paper.
2. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).
3. BBC News, 'North Korea defector urges US to use soft power.' November 2, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41840866>.
4. Terence Lee, *Defect or Defend: Military Responses to Popular Protests in Authoritarian Asia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 6.
5. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114, 194.
6. Regimes are defined as 'basic informal and formal rules that determine what interests are represented in the authoritarian leadership group and whether these interests can constrain the dictator.' (Barbara Geddes *et al.*, 'Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set.' *Perspectives on Politics* 12(2) (2014): 313, 331, 314). Regime change can also mean a coup (*Ibid.*, 315).
7. Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 257.
8. *Ibid.*, 258.
9. Yonhap, 'Puk, ch'oeryut'andŭng siwi changbi chungsŏ taeryang kuip' [北, 최류탄 등 시위진압 장비 중서 대량 구입/North Koreans have purchased in bulk tear gas and other demonstration suppression equipment], 2011, quoted in *Daily NK*, June 21, <http://dailynk.com/korean/read.php?cataId=nk09000&num=91133>.
10. Mi Jin Kang, 'North Korean authorities increase protection of Kim idolization objects.' *Daily NK*, October 25, 2017, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/%5bphoto%5d-north-korean-authorities-i/>.
11. George W. Bush quoted in Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea Past and Future* (London: Vintage Books, 2013), 422.

12. Andrei Lankov, 'As new sanctions bite, they'll hurt North Korea's few entrepreneurs, Resolution 2375 represents a major blow to the DPRK's private sector.' *NK News*, November 22, 2017, <https://www.nknews.org/2017/11/as-new-sanctions-bite-theyll-hurt-north-koreas-few-entrepreneurs/>.
13. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 207.
14. Mi Jin Kang, 'North Korean authorities increase protection of Kim idolization objects.' *Daily NK*, October 25, 2017, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/%5bphoto%5d-north-korean-authorities-i/>.
15. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
16. Robert McCoy, 'Why a Civilian Uprising in North Korea is Unlikely—For Now.' *NK News*, October 31, 2017.
17. Francis Grice, 'The Improbability of Popular Rebellion in Kim Jong Un's North Korea and Policy Alternatives for the USA.' *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 4(3) (2017): 263–293, 263–264.
18. For consistency, I will use the terms 'People's Power rebellion' or 'popular rebellion' and 'mass rebellion' synonymously. Goldstone (2014) and Skocpol (1994) more frequently use the term 'revolution'. 'Demonstrations' or 'street protests' take place when multiple individuals gather simultaneously to protest local or national abuses. 'Unrest' and 'disturbances'—by which I mean food riots, street protests; while 'clashes' between security forces and groups of ordinary people indicate that protest has turned violent.
19. Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 15.
20. *Ibid*, 13.
21. *Ibid*, 15.
22. *Ibid*, 17.
23. *Ibid*, 21–22.
24. Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).
25. Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19.
26. *Ibid*, 110.
27. *Ibid*, 24–5.
28. Terence Lee, *Defect or Defend: Military Responses to Popular Protests in Authoritarian Asia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), 50.
29. *Ibid*, 18.
30. Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24.
31. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115–116.
32. Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
33. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 106.
34. *Ibid*, 108. See Charles Tilly, 'Town and Country in Revolution.' In John Wilson Lewis (ed.), *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 271–302.
35. Fred Halliday, 'The Islamic Republic of Iran After 30 Years.' (Lecture delivered at The London School of Economics, 23 February 2009).
36. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111,112.



37. Gordon Wood, 'The American Revolution.' In Lawrence Kaplan (ed), *Revolutions: A Comparative Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 113–148, 129.
38. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
39. Ibid, 194.
40. Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971), 21.
41. Relative deprivation is the 'perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities' where expectations are 'the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled' and capabilities are 'the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining' (Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 101). North Koreans supposedly see images of South Korea and believe they are rightfully entitled to those goods and conditions of life and rise up (Jieun Baek. *North Korea's Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground is Transforming a Closed Society*. [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016], 49).
42. Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24.
43. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100–104.
44. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114.
45. Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994), 6.
46. Ibid, 19.
47. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 114.
48. Andrew Hall, 'Theories of Collective Action and Revolution: Evidence from the Romanian Transition of December 1989.' *Europe-Asia Studies* 52(6) (2000): 1069–1093.
49. Stephen Blank, 2018. 'American Illusions and Korean Realities: Preventing Conflict on the Korean Peninsula.' *38 North*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.38north.org/2018/01/sblank011818/>.
50. Andrew Hall, 'Theories of Collective Action and Revolution: Evidence from the Romanian Transition of December 1989.' *Europe-Asia Studies* 52(6) (2000): 1069–1093, 1069.
51. Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 74–5.
52. Peter Ward, 'What is Marketization and When did it Begin in North Korea?' *NK News*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.nknews.org/2016/08/what-is-marketization-and-when-did-it-begin-in-north-korea/>.
53. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 68–9.
54. Yong Sub Choi, 'North Korea's Hegemonic Rule and its Collapse.' *The Pacific Review* 30(5) (2017): 783–800, 791.
55. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 111–117.
56. Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 221.
57. Andrei Lankov, 'The Resurgence of a Market Economy in North Korea.' Carnegie Moscow Centre. Moscow: Carnegie Endowment, 2016, 7.
58. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 71.

59. Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 328.
60. Anders Karlsson, *The Hong Kyôngnae Rebellion 1811–1812: Conflict between Central Power and Local Society in 19th-century Korea* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2000), 23.
61. Ian Hartsholm. ‘Corporatism, Labor Mobilization, and the Seeds of Revolution in Egypt and Tunisia,’ Ph.D. Thesis. The University of Pennsylvania, 2015, 163–164.
62. Yong Sub Choi, ‘North Korea’s Hegemonic Rule and its Collapse.’ *The Pacific Review* 30(5) (2017): 783–800, 792.
63. Jieun Baek. *North Korea’s Hidden Revolution: How the Information Underground is Transforming a Closed Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).
64. *Ibid.*, 83.
65. Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 223.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).
68. Yong Sub Choi, ‘North Korea’s Hegemonic Rule and its Collapse.’ *The Pacific Review* 30(5) (2017): 783–800.
69. Hazel Smith, *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 330.
70. *Ibid.*, 224.
71. *Ibid.*, 231.
72. *Ibid.*, 191.
73. *Ibid.*, 331.
74. Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012), 74.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, 8.
78. *Ibid.*, 8–11.
79. Yong Sub Choi, ‘North Korea’s Hegemonic Rule and its Collapse.’ *The Pacific Review* 30(5) (2017): 796.
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81. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 71.
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83. Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 71.
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85. *Ibid.*, 7.
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