INCENTIVIZING SOLIDARITY:
THE KIM REGIME’S EMPLOYMENT OF MAFIA TACTICS

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Asian Studies

By

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Washington, DC
April 18, 2016
INCENTIVIZING SOLIDARITY: THE KIM REGIME’S EMPLOYMENT OF MAFIA TACTICS

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ABSTRACT

With the predominance of seemingly continuous instability due to unconventional power shifts, devastating famines, and pervasive human rights violations, speculation of collapse within North Korea has abounded in the international community for decades. With similar occurrences bringing about the collapse of authoritarian regimes throughout history, it is inconceivable to the international sphere that the North Korean regime can continue to rule over a country stricken by decimating famine, suffering extreme human rights conditions, and subject to seemingly erratic and haphazard mass arrests, purges, and public executions. However, despite each of these occurrences which should seemingly lead to a toppled regime or mass uprising, the Kim family has maintained control of the northern half of the peninsula. This paper will break down the power structure of the Sicilian and the American Italian Mafia to create a progression of steps which the organizations have used to maintain power. This structure will be used to dissect which tactics and techniques the Kim family has employed in order to found, build, and maintain power through three generations, despite exceptionally unfavorable ruling conditions.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,
Chelsea Gannon
# Table of Contents

- Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1
- Criminal Organization Structure .............................................................................. 2
- The Creation of Loyalty ............................................................................................ 3
- Development of an Organizational Ideology ............................................................. 6
- Establishment of Expected Rules of Behavior .......................................................... 8
- Decision Making Structure and the Control of Information .................................... 11
- Reinforcement of the Established Rules .................................................................. 14
- Structure for Power Transitions .............................................................................. 17
- Result: Unchallenged Regime .................................................................................. 19
- Alternate Explanations ............................................................................................ 20
- Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 22
- Bibliography ........................................................................................................... 24
INTRODUCTION

Motivations for solidarity come through a variety of means, but the Kim family employs a tried and true method found in the annals of crime. Many have come to know North Korea through its state sponsored illicit activities following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, famine of the 1990s, and provocations against the South and the United States. Blatant employment of illicit activities ranging from counterfeiting currency to producing methamphetamine, which became a primary source of income for the North Korean regime, warranted its title of “Soprano State” in 2005.¹ While superficial allusions to the state’s mafia-like habits have bolstered this image, in this paper I argue that the North Korean state is far more intricately analogous to a criminal organization than merely its corruption, ruthlessness, and economic dependence upon and employment of illicit activities and international crimes. Rather, I argue that the very nature of the North Korean state’s power maintenance techniques is comprised of proven tactics employed by a number of crime-families.

In this paper, I will outline each step of the framework through which criminal organizations, namely the Sicilian Mafia and its successor, the American Italian Mafia, progress in order to found, build, and maintain power. Each step of this structure’s applicability to the Kim regime’s creation and maintenance of power will be tested in order to draw comparisons between the organizations. Finally, I will examine prevalent alternate solutions to the question of an unchallenged Kim regime in order to fully understand how it has been capable of maintaining power through three generations of rule, despite obvious roadblocks to leadership

¹ Sheena Chesnut, “The ‘Soprano State’? North Korean Involvement in Criminal Activity and Implications for International Security.”
support such as unconventional power shifts, widespread famines, and pervasive human rights violations.

**Criminal Organization Structure**

Criminal organizations such as the Sicilian and American Italian Mafia are founded through a progression of tactics, which begins chiefly with the establishment of power through the cultivation of loyalty. As each step outlined below is established, the organizations increasingly cultivate power and eliminate rivals around a central figure. While the leadership remains reliant on successful administration of this progression, the process itself works to strengthen the leadership and ultimately results in a regime structure which allows the leader to continue his rule unchallenged. This progression is represented by the following chart.
Each of the steps outlined above work together to perpetuate the rule of a single leader. The continuation of the organization itself becomes wholly reliant on said individual therefore spurring each member to work to maintain the security of the leader by upholding each of the components above.

**THE CREATION OF LOYALTY**

_Mafia:_

At inception, the criminal organization is established with a priority placed upon ensuring loyalty amongst those who aid in operation. This is achieved through two main tactics: incentivizing loyalty and the removal of rivals. Primarily, the organization cultivates the preexisting loyalty found between those with familial ties and close associates. Familial connections remain a consistent source of stability and loyalty for the leadership beyond the initial formation of the organization. As the top leader’s power grows, rival centers of power simultaneously arise which must either be assumed into the organization or eliminated. Due to the nascent organization’s relative weakness, larger forces must be used to in order to eliminate rivals to the kingpin. The Mafia has often employed this technique, using stronger, more legitimate forces to dispose of those threatening the leader and therefore in need of removal. The police were often used by the Mafia to remove rivals, either by pulling strings through corruption or by informing on outsiders to orchestrate an arrest.² By having the muscle of a strong, legitimate force, the Mafia was able to effectively eradicate those who stood to threaten the cultivation of loyalty and power by the kingpin, even when he himself was effectively incapable. This proved to an excellent tactic to grow one’s power, before one could carry out such removals himself.

² Antonio Nicaso and Marcel Danesi, _Made Men_, 17.
The second method of cultivating loyalty is the incentivization of conformity. Perhaps one of the most well-known tactics of the Mafia, the administering of lavish gifts and monetary support was an effective tool to grow one’s popularity and respect. The Gambino family was notorious for rewarding those who supported the family, not only with recognition, but extensive payoffs. With the distribution of fur coats, jewelry, or simply cash to those who remained loyal, mafioso quickly understood the physical incentives to loyalty. Moreover, the more a mafioso contributed to the organization and supported the kingpin, the higher he could progress in the ranks, accumulating steadily more wealth. Together, these two techniques ensure that the kingpin acquires power through both respect and fear, both of which are necessary as individually neither would be sufficient.

Kim Regime:

The creation of loyalty has been essential to the continuation of the Kim regime and the two methods of incentivizing conformity and disincentivizing rivalry have been employed by all three Kim generations. First, upon the foundation of the regime, Kim Il-sung was markedly weak with no significant power base or domestic support. In direct contrast to the history which kimilsungism implores, in actuality Kim was considered too young and uncharismatic to act as a successful leader of the North Korean people. Too weak to eliminate rivals to his power through his own means, Kim used larger, more legitimate powers, notably the Soviet Union, to arrest or kill those who threatened his position. One unfortunate example of this is the elimination of Cho Man-sik. Highly respected and supported by the masses, Cho was thought to be an apt leader for

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the North Korean people. By manipulating the Soviet’s intentions for the nation, Kim was able to orchestrate Cho’s arrest and ultimate demise. Kim used the Soviet forces to eliminate numerous rivals, clearing a path for his own accumulation of loyalty disparate from the USSR through which he could handle future challengers. Additionally, the Supreme Leader has relied upon familial connections as guaranteed loyalty to uphold controversial or difficult policies, such as public crackdowns of rebellious factions in the population following the 1990s famine and economic stagnation. “The pattern was always the same. It was generally a member of Kim’s immediate family like his sister, Kim Kyong-hee, or his son, Jong-nam, or brother in law, Chang Song-Taek, who led investigation task forces backed up by troops.”

The Kim family also employs the second Mafia tactic of loyalty cultivation: the administration of lavish gifts and economic incentives. Perhaps the most famous example is Kim Jong-il’s “gift politics.” In the 1970s Kim aimed to increase his power relations with the elite through the administration of extravagant gifts, most famously Hennessy Cognac, which Kim was reported as importing up to $800,000 worth per year, and other gifts as expensive as Mercedes Benz automobiles. As described by a former North Korean official:

Kim Jong-il attend[ed] the opening of a foreign currency shop in Pyongyang… Kim told his subordinates to pick out whatever they wanted as a gift from him. At first, the shoppers were cautious, choosing items like ballpoint pens or mirrors. Kim told them to behave like real men by choosing something of value worthy of being a present from him; in less than an hour the officials emerged loaded with television sets, refrigerators, and the like.

This reward-induced solidarity was practiced on a smaller scale for the lower ranks of society as well through the distribution of food. Those who demonstrated heightened loyalty, such as the military, were given larger rations of food before the general public. Kim Jong-un is now

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6 Scalapino, 339.
7 Jasper Becker, Rogue Regime: Kim Jong-il and the Looming Threat of North Korea, 191.
8 Isaac Stone Fish, Hennessy Responds to the Loss of its Best Customer.
9 Ralph C. Hassig and Kongdan Oh, North Korea Through the Looking Glass, 88.
attempting to do the same, although with considerably less capital. Thus, unlike his father and grandfather, Kim Jong-un must administer verbal expressions of thanks or undertake larger scale projects, such as ski slopes or water parks, to satisfy the elite’s expectations.¹⁰

**DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL IDEOLOGY**

*Mafia:*

With the establishment of an organization and the foundation of power through incentives and disincentives, the next critical step in establishing power is the creation of an organizational ideology. This ideology is vital to creating both a sense of loyalty to the organization and kingpin as well as a sense of empowerment through the organization.

In order to join the Mafia, a *mafioso* was required to undertake a series of rites and rituals forever binding him to the organization. Once the oath of loyalty was uttered, it was required by all members to be devoted to the Mafia above all else.¹¹ This devotion extended even into the family, where the ties of the Mafia family were expected to take precedent over ones literal household.¹² This commitment is demonstrated through a variety of rituals, evident in daily life. One such example is the typical Mafia funeral rite. In such a scenario, the wife or mother of the passed *mafioso* is expected to display signs of grief such as crying, praying, and wearing black. A high-level *capo* is then required to attempt to comfort her through a hug, which she must initially reject violently as the ultimate expression of grief. However, with his insistence of

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¹⁰ Ken Gause, personal interview. May 1, 2015  
¹¹ Nicaso, 62.  
condolence, she must eventually submit to the hug, demonstrating her acceptance of the mafioso’s death and her surrender to the Mafia family.\textsuperscript{13}

The second task which the organizational ideology accomplishes is the sense of identity for its members. This identity, by means of exclusion, is something unique which only select men can claim. The organization itself is thought of as something larger than any one man, but a collective which is able to complete extraordinary tasks and amass immeasurable power through its members. Due to his connection to the organization, participation therefore creates a sense of specialness for the individual members.\textsuperscript{14} Because of this connection, the mafiosi are able to feel superior to the average citizen, since his actions are not simply petty crimes, but part of something larger, a contribution to the family.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Kim Regime:}

As in most organizations, the ideology associated with them plays a considerable role in enhancing the loyalty of its members. North Korea is no different and has taken this concept to an entirely new level. From its foundations in the Soviet style, the North Korean cult of personality has developed throughout time to be more pervasive than any counterpart.\textsuperscript{16} This intensity of ideology leads to an ever more effective control of perception by the population and enhancement of a sense of interconnectedness. Just like the Mafia, Kim Il-sung created the image of the North Korean people as a family;\textsuperscript{17} he even symbolically adopted all of the war orphans,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{13}{Nicaso, 68.}
\footnotetext{14}{Nicaso, 28.}
\footnotetext{15}{Ianni, 40.}
\footnotetext{16}{Gause.}
\footnotetext{17}{B. R. Myers, \textit{The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters}, 106.}
\end{footnotes}
enlisted them in schools, and asked them “to think of themselves as his children.”¹⁸ In this, North Koreans accept a role of both loyalty, but ultimately submission to the regime. Like the Mafia, this submission is expected to take precedent above those of the literal family or even one’s own life. In order to instill this lesson in the public, the North Korean government often rewards those who have demonstrated, either in reality or fiction, such devotion. For example, a secondary school in South Hamgyong Province was renamed to honor a fourth year girl who died during a flood, reportedly attempting to save the portraits of the Supreme Leader.¹⁹

Not only does North Korean organizational ideology create the image of a familiar unit, tied together through shared bonds, but it also works to empower the individual through a sense of uniqueness or superiority. Like the Mafia differentiated itself from mere criminals, North Korea works to instill a sense of betterness due to their heritage and continued support for the regime. Unlike the “morally corrupt” South Koreans, North Koreans can take comfort in their moral supremacy.²⁰

**ESTABLISHMENT OF EXPECTED RULES OF BEHAVIOR**

*Mafia:*

Upon admittance into a Mafia family, one is required to not only complete certain rituals, but the *mafioso* must also accept *omertà*. *Omertà*, simply defined, is a code of silence, but acts as a much more pervasive oath of loyalty to the Mafia and is a prerequisite for any member.²¹ By undertaking this oath and completing the initiation rites, all *mafiosi* were instructed on the proper

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¹⁸ Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Father Leader*, 186.
²¹ Ianni, 34.
rules of behavior, as well as the punishment which would be warranted should one betray the family. Once initiated, all mafiosi are considered to be knowledgeable in the guidelines and limitations as a member of the Mafia. In this, the mafiosi are each bound together in an “internalized code of implicit rules of behavior.”

The mafioso accepts his position within the family, the need to respect those of higher rank, especially the capo, as well as to protect his fellow mafiosi from outside forces. Additionally, this oath creates a sense of finality. Once sworn into the family, there is no leaving the organization. With this comes the creation of a sense of shared guilt. As a sworn member of the organization, there is no way to break away from the Mafia structure without forfeiting one’s own position and power. If one were to give up a fellow mafioso to the authorities, it would be impossible to do so without also admitting his own guilt. Therefore, once one becomes part of the Mafia, each member shares in mutual guilt which acts to reinforce the organization’s strength of loyalty.

One of the key established functions of the Mafia is its role within society. The origins of the Mafia center in an era where the Italian state was too weak to protect its citizens, leading to challenging and dangerous living conditions for the peasantry and average citizens. From this weakness of state, alternate actors arose, providing the protection and security which the government could not guarantee. These actors, the very inception of the Mafia, served as Robin Hood-eque figures protecting the peasants and fighting the “oppression by the state, the police, or the rich.”

However, as these protection syndicates grew into what is recognizable as the sprouts of mafie, hefty, near crippling fees became required in exchange for this protection.

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22 Ianni, 9.
23 Ianni, 21
24 Ianni, 36
While pre-war Mafia tactics, largely extracting payouts from landlords and business owners, continued into the post-World War II era, the Mafia expanded into alternate, often illicit businesses and worked to infiltrate the political system. Due to this, the Mafia became heavily invested in the status quo and worked to resist any changes which would displace those who were working in conjunction with the Mafia. The Mafia therefore practiced “repressive crime,” working to maintain the power of elites within society. Thus the model of Mafia protection racketeering was born. By using the existence of a constant threat, either a weak government unable to provide protection or an unfavorable shift in the status quo perhaps caused by the family itself, the Mafia was able to justify their actions to the general population. Therefore, society accepted the existence of the Mafia, acquiescing to the “black hand” when needed either through material compensation or restriction of activities, in order to stave off a harsher alternative.

*Kim Regime:*

Ideology within North Korea also acts to instruct on the expected rules of behavior. With the constant threat of an imminent American or South Korean attack found in propaganda, the North Korean population both unifies against the aggressor and accepts the status quo, however difficult, in order to ward off a possible worse alternative. Therefore, the North Korean government is able to use this threat of imbalance to justify poor living standards, heavy policing,

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25 Ianni, 37.
28 Ianni, 50.
29 Gause.
and high payoffs through crop quotas. This employment of protection as repression is notably similar to the Mafia among the Sicilian peasantry.

North Korea also practices racketeering on the international scale, using the Mafia tactics of increasing the perceived threat in order to extort “pay outs,” largely in the form of investment or food. Like the Mafia, North Korea is willing to go beyond what is internationally accepted as law to carry out this task, attempting assassinations, such as the Blue House Raid of 1968,\textsuperscript{30} taking hostages, such as the crew of the USS Pueblo in 1968,\textsuperscript{31} or detonating bombs, such as that in Rangoon in 1983.\textsuperscript{32}

The elite are also targeted by the organizational ideology, as the regime’s existence is contingent upon their loyalty. This loyalty is largely cultivated through a shared sense of guilt among all elite. Essentially, the North Korean elite understand that the structure of the regime relies upon supporting the Kim family in order for the whole organization to continue to function. Any attempt to break away from this model would result in the destruction of the entire system, stripping the elite of their positions, respect, and economic advantages which they currently enjoy.\textsuperscript{33}

**DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE AND THE CONTROL OF INFORMATION**

*Mafia:*

As mentioned above, the oath of *omertà* stipulates that by entering the Mafia, one accepts the structure of power and respect within the organization on pain of death. Most primary to this

\textsuperscript{31} Oberdorfer, 154.
\textsuperscript{32} Oberdorfer, 140.
\textsuperscript{33} Gause.
requirement is the respect of the *capofamiglia*, the boss of the family, often referred to simply as *capo*. Respect for each progressively lower rank of leadership was also stipulated, ranging through the *sottocapo* (underboss), the *consiglieri* (counselor), the *capodecina* (lieutenants), to the *picciotti* (low-ranking enforcers) in progressively diminishing extents. Each of these members ultimately respect the *capo*, as he acts as the highest authority, solely capable of appointing each of the lower ranks and making all final decisions. Additionally, while it is allowed for individual *mafiosi* to solicit bribes from the population through racketeering, it is required that all lower ranking members provides a generous “cut” for the *capo* of any income that is accumulated. The *capo’s* power is exercised through his control of the members below him. Each of the lower ranks must report back to the *capo* before any final decision can be made. Additionally, each individual member is responsible for their own duties, which rarely overlap and cannot be traced back to the *capo*. In order to avoid such a direct connection to and therefore endangerment of the *capo*, the Mafia uses a system of “family messengers” which delivers messages between the leadership and the middle management. The use of family messengers creates a “fall guy,” ensuring plausible deniability by the *capo*, and therefore continuation of the organization, should one of his men be arrested.

Second only to the need to respect the *capo* in the oath of *omertà*, is the necessity for silence, or rather, specifically withholding information from rival gangs or the authorities. In order to uphold this oath, it is required that a *mafioso* “endure[s] any pain or temptation rather
than divulge information to the authorities.”

This oath of noncooperation, and submission to execution if violated, is the very essence of what distinguishes the Mafia from standard crime and is upheld as a matter of pride. One Sicilian legend tells of a *mafioso* who upon his arrest “feigned dumbness for five years to prevent any possibility that he would compromise his fellows.” Additionally, it was expected that this oath of *omertà* extended to the general population, or *società*, as well. While silence could be attributed in part to fear, it was also considered to “[stem] from the sociocultural forces of the area.”

*Kim Regime:*

Like the *capo*, the reigning Kim exercises the highest level of authority and is in control of all final decisions as well as all appointments beneath him. The Kim regime is famous for its stove piping of information, essentially operating through a separation of duties, allowing no one but the Supreme Leader to grasp the full image. Similar to a kingpin, this both serves to empower and protect the Supreme Leader, giving him the ultimate power of information over every situation and the ability to create “fall guys” to take the blame in the event of a failure. While the examples of this technique are rampant in North Korea, one specific case is the admittance of failure by Premier Kim Yong-il and the reported execution of Finance Chief Pak Nam-gi following the failure of the 2009 currency reform.

Hand in hand with this division of duties is the ability for individuals to pursue economic gains through independent means. This was especially true in North Korea following the collapse

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41 Ianni, 34.
42 Nicaso, 39.
43 Ianni, 34.
44 Ianni, 34.
of the economy and the advent of famine, when the elite were essentially instructed to fend for themselves. Those within positions of favor, especially the military, are granted the ability to solicit bribes from the general population. However, because the Supreme Leader is expected to be respected above all else, he must be given a “cut” of whatever financial ventures he allows the elite to undertake. Therefore any financial gain, even independently procured, is dependent upon the Supreme Leader’s allowance of such activity.

**REINFORCEMENT OF THE ESTABLISHED RULES**

*Mafia:*

As the Mafia established clear rules for its members, it too has a clear, prescribed punishment for violations of “the implicit rules of behavior” established in the oath of *omertà.*

Often this punishment is death and the Mafia has maintained a specific tactic for elimination. An archetypal Sicilian Mafia killing requires two essential characteristics: it “must be publicized as well as untraceable. Everybody must know why it was done and on whose behalf.” Overall, with the acceptance of the code of honor, one acknowledges that he has forfeited his life to the Mafia. Therefore, should a *mafioso* violate this code, his death is considered something that “had to be done.”

This mentality also extends to others within the larger *società* whose interference with or resistance to the operation of the Mafia deems them a threat. One such example is that of a clerk who attempted to limit the Mafia’s involvement in his region in 1948. His actions led to his kidnap and murder, which served a dual purpose: eliminating a possible threat and setting an

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46 Ianni, 9.
48 Ianni, 20.
example for any others who might be inclined to resist. An additional, more famous but ultimately less practical, Mafia tactic for threat removal is that of “cement shoes” or “sleeping with the fishes.” The first known case of cement shoes, where one is made to sit as cement hardens around his feet before being thrown into a body of water, euphemistically referred to as “sleeping with the fishes,” is kingpin Carl Rettich’s elimination of Rhode Island bootlegger Danny Walsh on June 3, 1935. This unusual tactic for murder served to simultaneously eliminate a rival and deter future competition.

Elimination of a single threat has not always been the boundaries of punishment. Rather, the concept of extensive punishment has also been practiced by the Mafia, where entire families are eliminated due to the actions of one. The most direct example of this is the Sicilian interpretation of vendetta. In such a scenario, in response to a challenge to a man’s honor, or that of his family, all male members of the aggressor’s family must be eliminated regardless of age.

Kim Regime:

As with the oath of omertà, North Koreans are expected to uphold the organizational ideology and established rules of the Kim regime, and violation of these expectations could result in death. Like the Mafia, punishments are dealt in a highly publicized manner with a clear understanding of the individual’s transgression. The elite are purged and executed in this manner,

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49 Ianni, 36.  
50 Dig into Concrete for Slain Gangsters.  
51 Ianni, 20.
with well documented faults to serve as a lesson for the greater public. In often cases, “the punishment for militating against the state seems to have been swift, and often deadly.”

Elimination of threats to the regime extends beyond those within North Korea, to the greater international community. Considered a threat to the organizational ideology due to his involvement distributing leaflets across the DMZ, Park Sang-hak was the target of a North Korean assassination plot. The nephew of one of the Supreme Leader’s mistresses was shot in Seoul, following the publication of his exposé. This can easily be interpreted as a betrayal of the royal family, notably similar to speaking to the authorities once under the oath of *omertà*.

One of the most striking examples of the reinforcement of the established rules of behavior is the arrest of Kim Jong-un’s uncle, Jang Song-taek. During an enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea on December 8, 2013, Jang was seized by soldiers and taken into custody. He was charged during a military tribunal on December 12, 2013 for crimes including disobedience to and betrayal of Kim Jong-un, independent accumulation of wealth and resources, forming a powerbase in order to challenge Kim Jong-un, and ultimately, plans to stage a coup against the leadership. By accumulating power and wealth independently, he came to rival the Supreme Leader in authority, but failed to demonstrate the necessary submission by giving Kim a sufficient “cut.” The KCNA announcement indicated intolerance for such dissent and resolution through execution in the statement: “The revolutionary army will never pardon all those who disobey the order of the

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52 Becker, 199.
53 Maryanne Vollers, *The Woman Who Faces the Wrath of North Korea*.
55 Gause.
Supreme Commander and there will be no place for them to be buried even after their death.”

Jang was subsequently executed, reportedly by anti-aircraft gun. Jang’s highly public removal from power, clear outline of crimes committed, and violent execution serve the dual purpose of eliminating a possible rival to the leadership, as well as warding off future such attempts at wealth or power accumulation.

Along with the expectation of loyalty by the elite, the general population is also subject to this reinforcement, as is demonstrated by mass incarceration, executions, and the extensive punishment of the Three Generation rule, similar to the Sicilian vendetta. Should an individual dissent, he risks not only his own safety, but that of his extended family as well.

**STRUCTURE FOR POWER TRANSITIONS**

*Mafia:*

Once an organization as complex as the Mafia has been established, certain steps must be taken to prevent its demise should the capo become incapacitated. Due to the family-centered nature of the organization, it is only logical to assume that the transition would remain within the family. Thus if the capo anticipated his own death, such as through illness, he would have cultivated an heir-apparent who was expected to take over the family business. For example, upon the worsening of his diabetes, Stefano Bantade was groomed to succeed his father, Paolino. In the Lupollo family, a successful transition of power was given from Giuseppe to his son Joe. There are several other cases of such familial succession, and although the appointed

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56 “Traitor Jang Song Thaek Executed”
58 Ianni, 173.
leaders must prove their ability, it is ultimately the structure of the organization which allows for their survival.

The structure created through the oath of omertà, where members share a sense of guilt, allowed for the continued function of the organization despite a fault in leadership. Therefore, should an appointed leader be selected, rather than a challenge in leadership by a more qualified individual, the appointment is accepted to allow the continuation of the organization.

Additionally, should the capo be temporarily incapacitated, the structure of actors allows for the organization to continue to function. In this scenario, the sottocapo (underboss) or consigliere (counselor), a retired regent-like figure, would step in to maintain the power structure of the organization. As demonstrated in the popular culture film “The Godfather,” a scene depicts the power vacuum and vying for positions following the semi-retirement of the Don. In this scene, Hagen, the consigliere, steps in to maintain the ranking of power and enforce the necessity to recognize the new capo.\(^59\) Due to the shared guilt and strong loyalty to the organization, each individual has a stake in the maintenance of the status quo and therefore will work to preserve stability rather than allow the organization to crumble due to a single individual’s attempt to seize power.

**Kim Regime:**

The entire structure of the North Korean state is constructed in a manner which upholds the continuation of the singular leader rule. Like the Mafia, a sense of shared guilt acts as the main factor in stability. In a series of remarks given to officials following the height of the 1990s famine, Kim Jong-il is reported as stating “Be tough. No uprising will be allowed. I will control

military power. Have a strong heart. If the people revolt they will hang us, and if they don’t the South Koreans will.” ⁶⁰ Due to this perception of mutual culpability, the elite will be unlikely to take advantage of any opportunities for change, acting instead to preserve the status quo rather than risking the end of the regime. Therefore, the organization is able to continue even if the leader becomes incapacitated. This dedication to the status quo is also critical in an unchallenged succession of power. While there may have been more qualified leaders among the elite, it is accepted that the appointed leader must be supported in order to avoid a regime collapse. ⁶¹

**RESULT: UNCHALLENGED REGIME**

As outlined above, a myriad of parallel tactics link the organizational power structures of the Mafia and Kim regime. However, unlike *mafie* which typically survive only years to decades, the North Korean regime has been able to secure one aspect most critical to its continuation over 60 years: the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. ⁶²

While the Mafia remains outside the law as an illegitimate center of power and subject to deconstruction by police forces, in structural organization and ultimate power held by the *capo*, it is clear that the kingpin’s control extends far beyond that of a typical crime lord. The kingpin’s power comes to more resemble “the most autocratic corporate leader or dictatorial head of state,” ⁶³ while “the closest comparison would be with the leader of a military or paramilitary

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⁶⁰ Becker, 206.
⁶¹ Gause.
⁶³ Ianni, 111.
guerilla band.”  

With this employment of unfettered power, but the lack of monopoly on the legitimate use of force, the Mafia remains an incredibly powerful, single leader-led organization.

Should the restrictive illegitimacy hindering a kingpin’s grasp of ultimate power be lifted, however, the Mafia would arguably function as a state. When no longer denied the monopoly on the legitimate use of force, a Mafia-like state would be created unlike any in history, except perhaps, the authoritarian, guerilla-founded Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Therefore, the simultaneous employment of Mafia power maintenance tactics coupled with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force granted by statehood, the Kim regime has been able to remain in power through three generations despite seemingly unconventional power shifts, famines, and pervasive human rights violations.

**ALTERNATE EXPLANATIONS**

In contrast to my proposed solution there are several alternative explanations for the Kim regime’s survival. Two such alternate explanations are: (1) The conception that North Koreans are fundamentally prone to authoritarian rule due to Confucian values, and (2) The effectiveness of North Korean propaganda causing whole-hearted belief of the ruling Kim regime as divine leaders. While these are valid considerations and demonstrate aspects which are necessary for the continuation of the regime, as a complete explanation they are insufficient.

It has been argued by many scholars that the North Korean people are unique in their cultural predisposition to accept strict authoritarian leadership without question. As Lucian Pye stated, “[Koreans] appear to be ready champions of authoritarianism,” stating that there is an

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64 Ianni, 111.
innate “Korean craving for dependency.”” Similarly, Donald MacDonald argued that while shifts toward democracy seemed to be happening in South Korea, “even in revolutionary times, there is likely to be more cultural continuity than cultural change.”

While this argument of cultural predisposition to authoritarian rule may be attractive, it is in essence insufficient. With the advantage of hindsight, one can observe that numerous Confucian states have successfully undertaken the transition to democracy. Arguably most pertinent to rebuking the concept of a culturally dependent North Korea is the success of democratic South Korea. While it did take several decades to end authoritarian rule in South Korea, the ultimate success of democracy disproves the concept of cultural predisposition limiting North Koreans from achieving the same.

It has also been stated by many scholars that the pervasive propaganda within North Korea effectively brain washes all citizens into blindly following the regime’s will. Descriptions of the regime’s inescapable national rhetoric abound, with the education of kimilsungism beginning upon entrance into the childcare system at the age of three months. As described by former North Korean propaganda poet Jang Jin-sung, any work which could be viewed by more than three people requires the oversight of the Propaganda Department. Therefore, nearly every aspect of life is controlled by the North Korean government.

However, it is becoming increasingly known that while North Koreans are subjected to constant propaganda, they do not blindly believe each of its stories. Thus is the argument of Brian Myers in “The Cleanest Race.” Additionally, South Korea was also subjected to heavy propaganda and information control in earlier regimes, but despite this still transitioned into a

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67 Donald S. MacDonald, *Recent Political Change in Korea*, 63-64.
68 Jang Jin-sung, *Separate and Divisible: North Korea’s Supreme Leader and the North Korean People.*
democratic state. Beyond these two counterarguments, the most condemning is the attempted assassinations within North Korea. If the North Korean people truly thought of the Supreme Leader as a god-like entity, no one would harbor the desire or audacity to attempt his removal. As recalled by a former North Korean official referred to as Mr. K, during his tenure two attempts were made on the Supreme Leader’s life: an attempted shooting by a gunman armed with an automatic weapon and a deliberate crash of a twenty ton lorry into the Supreme Leader’s motorcade.\footnote{Andrew Salmon, \textit{North Korean Intelligence Official Tells of Aborted Coups and Assassination Plots}.} Other such attempts are thought to have been thwarted throughout the regime’s history. As recently as March 2013, traffic officer Ri Kyong-Sim was awarded an extremely prestigious title of “hero of the republic” due to her “death-defying” actions in an “unexpected situation.”\footnote{Chad O’ Carroll, \textit{Pyongyang Traffic Girl Given Mystery Hero Award}.} It is speculated that she in some way prevented the Supreme Leader’s assassination while on duty. Therefore, while North Korean propaganda may indeed serve a specific function in the continuation of the regime, it alone is not a sufficient explanation for the Kim family’s continuation.

**CONCLUSION**

As demonstrated through application of each step of the criminal organization flow chart, uncanny resemblances between the Sicilian and American Italian \textit{Mafie} and the Kim regime’s employment of these tactics abound. Both structures necessitate complete loyalty, devotion, and subservience to a single, authoritarian leader. These leaders require complete control of information, maintaining a separation of duties, and are willing to sacrifice lower ranks in the name of their continuation. Each of these lower ranks acquiesces to this necessity, burdened by a
sense of shared guilt and ensured mutual demise, and therefore is motivated to maintain stability rather than crumbling the status quo. It is through this employment of Mafia tactics of rule by both respect and fear coupled with the monopoly on the legitimate use of force granted to states that the Kim regime has been capable of maintaining power through three generations of rule, despite obvious roadblocks to leadership support such as unconventional power shifts, widespread famines, and pervasive human rights violations. Ultimately, through the meticulous cultivation of a structure similar to that of a criminal organization, the Kim family has not only solidified its power and loyalty but removed any potential grounds for a challenger to arise. The result of this incentivized solidarity: an unchallenged Kim regime.
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