

Authoritarian Audiences:

Theory and Evidence for Subnational Propaganda Targeting in North Korea

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How do authoritarian regimes choose and deploy propaganda messages? All regimes use public messaging and information to influence audiences toward particular political views or behavior, offering narratives that justify their leadership at home and abroad. In recent years, scholarship in comparative politics has focused renewed attention on authoritarian propaganda and its use in the toolkit of regime survival. Variations in the specific strategies and tactics used by different regimes under different conditions, however, remain both undertheorized and empirically underexamined.

Recent work on authoritarian propaganda argues that regimes use it either to persuade citizens to support the regime—a legitimation function—or to signal strength and thereby deter citizens from mobilizing opposition. Huang, for example, finds that exposure to propaganda in China diminishes students' propensity to protest and argues that this effect is driven by the signals that propaganda offers about regime strength, rather than by persuading citizens to support the regime.¹ Similarly, Carter and Carter find that propaganda coverage decreases citizens' short- and long-term propensity to protest and propose that autocrats' electoral constraints shape the balance between persuasive and deterrence-oriented propaganda.²

A substantial subset of the literature focuses on propaganda's role in authoritarian efforts at persuasion and legitimation. As Dukalskis and Gerschewski note, "Some autocracies are more talkative than others, but all regimes say something about why they deserve power."³ Treatments of legitimation range from conceptual definition to cross-national and comparative historical work to in-depth case studies.⁴ Gerschewski, for example, refers to legitimation as one of the "three pillars of authoritarian stability" alongside repression and co-optation.⁵ This body of literature typically distinguishes

between legitimation (claims made by an autocracy) and legitimacy (the acceptance of those claims by ordinary citizens).⁶ Dukalskis and Gerschewski focus on four mechanisms by which autocracies can pursue legitimation—indoctrination, passivity, performance, and democratic-procedural legitimation—while Dukalskis offers six messaging elements, including concealment, framing, blaming, inevitability, mythologized origin, and promised land elements.⁷ Gehlbach and Sonin, along with Stukal et al., find that propaganda is most credibly persuasive when it mixes “spin” and pro-regime messaging with factual reporting (including some negative information), suggesting conditions under which regimes might be more or less successful in their legitimation efforts.⁸

While this literature is valuable and important, it nonetheless contains several gaps and shortcomings. First, most scholarship focuses on cross-regime variation: how strategies differ from one regime to another. There is relatively little analysis of how propaganda strategies might differ within regimes across space, time, and demographic sectors, despite a robust literature on comparative authoritarianism that suggests that authoritarian regimes must manage different domestic audiences to stay in power. Second, limiting the discussion to “persuasion versus deterrence” of citizens, or “legitimation versus strength-signaling,” leaves out a range of other possible motivations, especially the “third pillar” of authoritarian stability: co-optation.⁹ Additionally, recent literature suggests a fourth potential motivation for authoritarian propaganda: authoritarian regimes may employ propaganda to encourage citizens to actively *mobilize* in support of the regime and/or its policies. When and how a regime might use these approaches, either separately or in combination, and how approaches might vary across different domestic constituencies, has yet to be systematically explored.

This article adopts a different approach, focused on subnational variation within authoritarian regimes. It argues that autocracies vary the subnational distribution of propaganda in ways that are intended to enhance the regime’s political survival. In the next section, we develop our theory of subnational propaganda targeting by authoritarian regimes. We then evaluate the empirical evidence for this theory using the case of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea), drawing on a unique set of visual and textual propaganda messages collected on the ground inside the DPRK.

Our analysis demonstrates that Pyongyang does engage in subnational propaganda targeting, tailoring messages to elite and mass audiences in a manner consistent with the pursuit of political survival. North Korean propaganda varies subnationally in its use of three major strategies: legitimation, co-optation, and mobilization. Propaganda messages targeted at elites are more likely to employ a co-optation strategy by highlighting themes of economic development and modernity. Meanwhile, messages targeted at rural mass audiences are more likely to employ mobilization strategies, exhorting citizens to engage in agricultural labor and production. (Where elite audiences in Pyongyang do receive mobilizational messages, they are somewhat different: oriented around the traditional-familial and security themes that bind the North Korean elites to each other and to the regime, with the apparent intention to promote elite solidarity and prevent defection.) Legitimation strategies are employed for both audiences, but legitimation efforts targeted at elites in Pyongyang are more likely to emphasize the party (as the

primary mechanism of elite co-optation and rent distribution), whereas security-related messaging that justifies economic hardship is more common in legitimation messages directed at the rural masses.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that authoritarian regimes' efforts to hold onto power lead them to target different propaganda messages at different internal constituencies. While we advance our theory in the specific context of North Korea, the theoretical logic of subnational propaganda targeting is generally applicable, and case studies from other regimes suggest that this phenomenon is occurring on a broader comparative basis.

The Political Economy of Authoritarian Propaganda

Our theoretical framework begins from a foundational point in studies of comparative authoritarianism: autocratic regimes must manage different internal threats in order to survive. These threats are often divided into threats posed by the elites and the masses. Under selectorate theory, for example, regimes are distinguished from each other primarily by the size of their winning coalitions: authoritarian regimes have small winning coalitions, and it is that winning coalition's support that the leader must retain to stay in power.¹⁰ Because these smaller winning coalitions are often satisfied by private goods provision (i.e., patronage), the elites who constitute the winning coalition are most likely to challenge an incumbent dictator when they become dissatisfied with their rents. The masses, on the other hand, pose a threat only when they are able to overcome large-scale collective action problems and credibly threaten revolution. Regimes typically manage mass threats through surveillance and repression, while simultaneously mobilizing mass participation in economic rent production. Although selectorate theory is principally about the political economy of dictatorship rather than propaganda per se, its core argument—that authoritarian regimes perceive different threats from elites and masses and pursue different strategies to manage these threats—has found traction across the literature on comparative authoritarianism.¹¹

The core implication of this argument for our purposes is that regime management of elite and mass audiences will shape the internal distribution of authoritarian propaganda. In contrast to current theories that emphasize cross-regime variations in propaganda, we predict subnational variation in the use, context, and content of propaganda delivery, following the logic of political survival. Specifically, regimes should, in order to advance their survival, select different strategies and themes for different domestic audiences. Based on the existing literature, we outline four core strategies of propaganda use by authoritarian regimes.

1. **Signaling Strength:** This strategy of authoritarian propaganda aims to signal strength and inculcate fear to deter challengers from protest or anti-regime activity. Huang and Carter and Carter empirically document the Chinese party-state's efforts to use propaganda to signal strength and deter opposition.¹²

2. Mobilization: Authoritarian regimes may also seek to mobilize citizens to support regime goals or policies.¹³ For example, Adena et al. and Yanagizawa-Drott document the Nazi German and Rwandan Hutu nationalist regimes' use of propaganda to exhort citizens to support racist policies and commit violence on the regime's behalf.¹⁴
3. Co-optation: Co-optation, commonly described as a pillar of authoritarian rule, is the incentivization of individuals to acquiesce to the incumbent regime's continued rule in exchange for the economic benefits, rents, or political privileges it provides.¹⁵
4. Legitimation: Legitimation entails messaging that justifies a regime's hold on power.¹⁶ While Dukalskis identifies different types of legitimation, we create, as will be discussed below, one category for this strategy, acknowledging that it can utilize a variety of themes.¹⁷

Beyond strategy, propaganda may also differ in terms of the *content/theme* of the appeal that it makes. Previous studies of authoritarian propaganda identify five basic topic-categories: traditional (familial); economic performance; ethno-nationalism; security; and procedural legitimation. Existing literature emphasizes these as legitimation tools, but we find that these themes also appear in other strategies. We add a category for ideology and split economic performance into two categories, distinguishing between agricultural production and industrial development themes.

1. Traditional-Familial: Some regimes rely on traditional culture or family lineage as a form of legitimation, especially those that depend on hereditary succession. Scholars have, for example, cited traditional-familial legitimacy to explain the comparative durability of monarchies during the Arab Spring.¹⁸
2. Ethno-Nationalism: Some scholarship in comparative authoritarianism suggests that ethnic nationalism can bolster regime durability.¹⁹ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), for example, mobilizes nationalism through state-sponsored "patriotic education" that often produces anti-foreign protest; it also engages in "cultural positioning," embedding regime legitimacy into long-standing notions of ethno-nationalism or national culture.²⁰
3. Economic Performance: Modernization and Industrial Development: Many authoritarian regimes use economic growth, economic performance, or provision of economic/welfare benefits to citizens to justify their rule.²¹ Positive economic performance can help stabilize and prolong authoritarian rule; economic crisis, on the contrary, can be destabilizing.
4. Economic Development: Agricultural Production: Authoritarian regimes may also emphasize agricultural productivity. Food shortages and famines have proved politically consequential for numerous regimes.²² Agricultural productivity can facilitate popular satisfaction and generate export revenue, both factors conducive to regime stability.
5. Security: Some regimes frame performance in security terms, emphasizing their role in defending the polity from external or internal enemies. The CCP,

for example, claims legitimacy partly on the basis of having ended a “Century of Humiliation” by colonial powers; Esberg finds that repression in Chile may not only have deterred opposition, but bolstered public support for the regime in dealing with internal enemies.²³

6. Procedural: Some nondemocratic regimes adopt a veneer of seemingly democratic institutions to bolster domestic and international legitimacy.²⁴ When directed internally, propaganda messages emphasizing quasi-democratic procedures may pursue legitimation or signal electoral strength to deter anti-regime mobilization.²⁵ We expect this less in closed authoritarian regimes than hybrid or electoral ones.
7. Ideology: Regime messaging may also emphasize a particular ideology. Scholars have particularly noted the centrality of ideological messaging in communist and single-party regimes, such as the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.²⁶

These categories are not exhaustive, and in many cases, themes and topics may be regime-specific. We find, nonetheless, that these categories are consistent with the existing literature on propaganda, both in North Korea and beyond.

In short, authoritarian regimes may utilize different strategies, draw on different themes, or select different combinations of themes and strategies when distributing propaganda internally. Variations will not be black-and-white: we expect most categories to appear, at least to some degree, across elite and mass audiences. Nonetheless, we believe that authoritarian regimes have strong reasons to vary propaganda strategies to appeal to the different audiences whose support or acquiescence they need to stay in power.

We argue that regimes should rely more on co-optation strategies when designing propaganda messages for elites, reminding them of the wealth and power they attain (and retain) in exchange for political allegiance. While it might seem that regime insiders are in little need of indoctrination, the fact that two-thirds of autocrats are removed by regime insiders suggests to us that regimes should not take their elites for granted. The regime should target such propaganda at the geographic regions or media outlets where elite audiences are most likely to receive them.²⁷

Conversely, the regime will more often employ propaganda directed at the masses that exhorts them to mobilize in service of the regime, to fulfill an obedient/compliant role, or to engage in economic production to produce rents that the regime can capture and deploy for patronage and elite co-optation. Mass-directed propaganda might also seek to remind people of the regime’s power to enforce subservience, employing a strategy of outright threat. This propaganda should be concentrated in geographic regions with fewer regime supporters and elites, and in media outlets or delivery channels intended for broader populations.

In addition to varying strategies by domestic audience, regimes should also emphasize different themes. They might do so to mobilize audiences toward different objectives, or to offer different reasons why they should support the regime. This may mean: 1) implementation/adoption of different policies that advance regime goals, but are only (or mostly) carried out by a particular subpopulation; 2) fulfillment of different sets of

regime-compatible societal or ideological roles; or 3) mobilization of support for the regime among certain subpopulations.

We, therefore, expand on the claim that almost all authoritarian regimes say something about why they deserve power by noting that they often explain their deservingness to elites and non-elites differently. Elites are more likely to be cognizant participants in a regime-sustaining Faustian bargain wherein they benefit from its continued survival via power-sharing or distribution of political and material benefits. The regime should, therefore, provide messages to assure elites that this bargain is secure. Legitimizing messages targeted toward elites might feature themes that speak to the regime's commitment to maintaining elite power and privilege, such as industrial development or party ideology. By contrast, messages directed toward the masses are likely to justify deservingness in terms of external security, overall ideological validity, or improving the lot of ordinary people.

Emphasis on the subnational targeting of propaganda means that even within ostensibly similar regime types, propaganda targeting strategies may differ based on the nature and features of whatever cleavages separate elites from the masses.²⁸ The above is a general logic of how authoritarian regimes might employ certain tactics or themes for different audiences, but specific predictions about variations in regime propaganda should depend on the specific political economy and social cleavages of that regime.

Existing case studies provide some evidence of these practices. For example, Schnieder, in her study of short-film propaganda produced under military rule in Brazil, cites official documents commissioning targeted propaganda efforts.²⁹ Landsberger describes similar tailoring efforts by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): "Specific propaganda subjects were designed in the 1980s for most of the demographic and occupational groups that comprise the Chinese population."³⁰ Other studies document more recent CCP efforts to target propaganda toward specific audiences. Liu and Ma find that the CCP emphasized patriotic education more in areas that experienced larger anti-regime protests in 1989, suggesting that subnational dispersion of nationalist propaganda sought to suppress popular unrest and facilitate regime survival.³¹

In sum, single-country studies provide plausible evidence that this dynamic may be at work in a range of authoritarian political contexts, but there is, as yet, little research that systematically tests theoretical propositions about the use of subnational propaganda targeting under authoritarianism. We aim to develop a general logic of such practices, along with a classification schema of propaganda strategies and themes suitable to test for the presence and use of subnational propaganda targeting. We propose that authoritarian regimes will utilize different strategies, themes, and combinations of the two, targeting certain propaganda messages at certain subnational groups or audiences while downplaying them to other audiences, in an effort to facilitate their political survival.

Designing an Empirical Test: Propaganda Targeting in North Korea

Our theory faces a key challenge in terms of research method and empirical strategy: how can we identify which messages are distributed to which domestic audiences? If the

above categories are too broad to detect distinctions in the lingual content of messages targeted to elites and masses, the theory will remain empirically untestable. Moreover, the propaganda categories outlined above must align with the political and economic cleavages that undergird a particular regime's political survival, and that alignment must be measurable to external observers. In other words, we need to be able to observe whether specific messages are in fact targeted in different ways to different audiences in ways that are consistent with the logic of our theory, whether that distribution is measured via geographic location, medium of delivery, or specific media outlet. Gathering such data on the delivery of authoritarian propaganda is a serious challenge, given the non-transparency of many authoritarian research environments, including limits on immigration and domestic travel by foreigners.³²

North Korea, however, offers an unusual opportunity to test our theory's empirical implications. Below, we explain North Korea's political economy and social structure and use these to deduce specific expectations for subnational propaganda targeting. We demonstrate that particular features of the North Korean regime offer a plausible, measurable, empirical test of our theory.

Propaganda, ideology, and mythmaking have been central to the North Korean regime since its founding. Kim Il Sung first outlined their importance in a December 1955 speech, and North Korea's second leader, Kim Jong Il, rose to power through the propaganda apparatus.³³ In autumn 2010, an editorial in *Rodong Sinmun* reemphasized the centrality of ideology under Kim Jong Un, who had recently emerged as heir apparent. As an established autocracy of long duration, North Korea has had decades to consider and craft its propaganda strategies, employing many of the strategies outlined above.

Studies of North Korea note the presence of many of the messaging appeals we schematize. Scholars agree that the Kim family plays a central role in regime mythology, with leaders frequently portrayed in parental terms.³⁴ Koreans on both halves of the peninsula claim a single Korean nation defined by blood, and scholars describe the utility of shared Korean ethnicity for the North Korean regime's "defensive attempt at national identity mobilization."³⁵ Rhetorically, the regime positions itself as defending the people against foreign-induced military threat and enforced economic deprivation, especially during the period of "military-first" (*songun*) politics under Kim Jong Il.³⁶ Accordingly, traditional-familial, ethnonationalist, and security messaging are all quite plausible propaganda.

Two other, less obvious themes could also plausibly be present in North Korean messaging. Economic performance may seem unlikely, given North Korea's dismal economic conditions, but Kim Jong Un, in particular, has placed a great deal of emphasis on the *byungjin* line, which signals simultaneous prioritization of both national defense (including nuclear weapons) and economic development.³⁷ Finally, with regard to procedural legitimacy, even North Korea, one of the world's most closed and long-lasting authoritarian regimes, holds elections for the Supreme People's Assembly every five years.³⁸

Specific features of North Korea's social and political system offer an opportunity to test whether authoritarian regimes target and tailor propaganda in ways that vary systematically across different domestic audiences. Geography in North Korea is tightly associated with the "elite-mass" cleavage that plays a critical role in our theory.

This close correlation makes an empirical test of our theory's key predictions unusually straightforward.

As a classic, "small winning coalition" autocracy, North Korea employs a durable, inflexible social classification system called *songbun*. Every citizen is assigned to one of fifty-one sociopolitical tiers, which are broadly grouped into "core" (*haeksim*), "wavering" (*dongyo*), and "hostile" (*choktae*) classes. These classifications determine where citizens are allowed to live, work, and study; mobility within the country is tightly controlled.³⁹ Only citizens with highly favorable *songbun* are allowed to live in, or even travel to, Pyongyang; residents of the capital live a much more economically privileged, modernized life than non-Pyongyang residents.⁴⁰

North Korea's innermost party elites, who reside in Pyongyang, are a group of tightly connected families whose forefathers fought with Kim II Sung in Manchuria. Many hold military positions, and the military's role was elevated under Kim Jong Il's slogan of "military-first politics."⁴¹ North Korea's relatively tight coupling between physical geography and socio-political status means that Pyongyang residents can reasonably be treated as elites, while rural populations proxy reasonably well for "mass" audiences.⁴² The geographic location of a particular North Korean propaganda message thus tells us a lot about its intended audience.

What kind of propaganda targeting might we expect from North Korea? As noted, most of the strategies and themes outlined above could be employed by Pyongyang, but certain features of North Korean authoritarianism suggest that the regime is likely to employ some themes more than others. Our first set of empirical predictions, therefore, emerges from North Korea's regime type: a hereditary personalist autocracy whose elite is defined by guerilla-military connections to the Kim family. Regime identity suggests that propaganda will emphasize traditional-familial and security themes more than others. Given Kim Jong Un's emphasis on *byungjin*, we also expect to see messaging around economic development.

H1: Overall, North Korean propaganda will focus on traditional-familial, security, and economic themes.

Our theory is most useful, however, in generating a set of hypotheses about how propaganda strategies and themes might vary between two distinct subnational audiences: the elites in Pyongyang and the masses outside the capital.

Our theory suggests that autocratic leaders will target elite audiences with co-optation propaganda. Research has shown that elites in Pyongyang, who hold a higher *songbun* status, control the key means of revenue generation, and thus enjoy a higher standard of living, including special access to luxury goods procured from abroad. Therefore, we expect that North Korean propaganda aimed at elite audiences in Pyongyang will employ co-optation strategies more than mobilization.

By contrast, ordinary citizens, whose *songbun* keeps them outside Pyongyang, live in relative deprivation and conduct most of the country's agricultural, industrial, and other hard labor.⁴³ Historically, the regime has needed to mobilize these rural masses for

agricultural production and has asked them to endure high levels of material deprivation, particularly during the “Arduous March” period of famine and hardship that occurred under Kim Jong Il.

This leads to two additional hypotheses:

H2a: Messages to the Pyongyang audience will more likely employ a co-optation strategy, while messages to non-Pyongyang audiences will more likely employ a mobilization strategy.

H2b: Messages to the Pyongyang audience will more likely invoke themes of economic prosperity, industrial development, and modernization, while messages to non-Pyongyang audiences will more likely invoke themes of agricultural production.

Note that our theory predicts clear differences in the subnational distribution of two of the four propaganda strategies: co-optation and mobilization. We do not see a clear theoretical logic for why either strength-signaling or legitimation strategies would be employed more or less among elite versus mass audiences. The regime likely seeks to deter challenges from both groups and needs to legitimate itself to both groups as well. Thus, we expect to see propaganda employing legitimation and strength-signaling strategies directed at both elite and mass audiences.

While we have no *a priori* reason to predict subnational geographic differences in propaganda that uses strength-signaling (and we find relatively few examples wherein strength-signaling is the primary strategy), we do see evidence for strength-signaling in a broad contextual sense, in two ways. First, North Korea is among the most censored places in the world; the “textual public space” is barren of almost anything other than regime-produced content.⁴⁴ As a result, regime messaging monopolizes and dominates the public information space without distraction or competition from rival visuals or text.

Second, strength-signaling appears in the North Korean regime’s ability to consistently project its desired narratives at the ground level. Perhaps the best example is the “immortality towers,” white stone obelisks in North Korean villages that traditionally bore the inscription, “The Great Leader Kim II Sung is with us eternally.” By late June 2012, just six months after Kim Jong Il’s death, all of these towers had been re-chiseled and repainted to add his name. Moreover, new leader Kim Jong Un’s name appeared in nearly a third of North Korean propaganda messages, despite the third Kim having been in power for less than a year. This both corroborates the importance of propaganda in North Korean politics and public life and signals the regime’s ability to quickly project state power to citizens at the grassroots level. Strength signaling does not vary much by audience; instead, it is omnipresent.

Our theory suggests that legitimation strategies will be employed in both elite- and mass-directed propaganda, but that the *themes* used in legitimation propaganda might be different across these two audiences. Recall that one reason elites offer support to a regime is that they receive material and political benefits. Thus, propaganda seeking to legitimate an authoritarian regime among elites will remind those elites of the shared identity and reciprocal commitment inherent in that bargain. Operationalized in the context of

North Korea, this means making reference either to the Kim family—the nucleus of the relationship network that defines elite membership—or to the Korean Workers Party, the institutional vehicle for organizing elites and distributing the material-political benefits described above. Concretely, this means that we expect legitimation messages directed at North Korean elites in Pyongyang to emphasize ideological themes.

By contrast, we expect legitimation messages directed at rural areas to emphasize a different theme: the military. Under Kim Jong Il, North Korea pursued what it called “military-first” politics, which greatly elevated the armed forces’ role. His reign also marked an intensive period of economic deprivation, suffering, and mass starvation known as the “Arduous March.” The regime blamed external enemies and sanctions for the famine; in official narratives, “military-first” politics was both a necessary defense against these external enemies and the objective that justified the intensity of the population’s suffering. Moreover, military service in North Korea is compulsory among the general male population, though both elites and citizens with very bad *songbun* are exempted. Because military service is compulsory, we expect that legitimation messages directed at mass audiences will emphasize security themes, justifying why such service (and “military-first” politics in general) is necessary. This leads to our next hypothesis:

H3: Within the subset of legitimation propaganda, elite-focused messages in Pyongyang will more often feature ideological themes, while legitimation propaganda directed at the masses in rural areas will emphasize security themes.

We similarly expect that North Korea will employ different themes to *mobilize* elite and mass audiences. In particular, while the regime will likely use ideology to legitimate the fundamental bargain between the regime and its elites, ideology serves a different purpose and political strategy when propagandized to the masses: mobilization. Since the Stalinist era, communist parties have been characterized as Leninist-organization “transmission belts” linking the leadership to the masses, mobilizing the latter around the imperative of constructing a socialist society; in North Korea, this is called “organizational life.”⁴⁵ Because of this, we expect that mobilizational appeals directed at the North Korean masses will emphasize ideology.

We also expect mass/rural mobilization to be directed, specifically, at the objective of agricultural production. This is because other than military service, agricultural production is the chief task that the regime seeks to have its rural population engage in, and, unlike military service, which is compulsory, agricultural production is more vulnerable to shirking, foot-dragging, and other “weapons of the weak.”⁴⁶ In a regime whose communist counterparts have experienced the costs of food-related unrest, we contend that the regime believes it is important for political survival that the citizenry maintain certain levels of agricultural production—not an easy task in a chronically food-insecure country like North Korea. We, therefore, hypothesize that mobilizational propaganda in rural areas of North Korea will emphasize ideological and agricultural themes.⁴⁷

Mobilization in Pyongyang, on the other hand, will seek to maintain elite solidarity and prevent elite defection or anti-regime collusion. Two ways to mobilize elites around

this goal are to remind them of shared identity and raise the specter of a common threat. North Korean elites are essentially a network of families bound up with the Kim family by a shared genealogical history of guerilla warfare (first against the Japanese, and then again in defending the regime from external enemies over subsequent decades). We, therefore, anticipate that both security and traditional-familial themes will be used to mobilize elites to continue this shared destiny. This leads us to our final hypothesis:

H4: Within the subset of mobilizational propaganda, messages delivered to elite audiences in Pyongyang are more likely to feature security and traditional-familial themes, while mobilizational messages delivered to the masses outside Pyongyang will emphasize ideological and agricultural themes.

We now turn to an explanation of our data and how we use it to test these hypotheses.

Explanation of Data

Our analysis draws on an original dataset of approximately 700 propaganda signs, murals, and slogans collected on-site during a two-week visit to North Korea in June and July of 2012.⁴⁸ The dataset includes propaganda from the capital, Pyongyang, and five of North Korea's nine provinces: North and South Hwanghae, South Pyong'an, Kangwon, and South Hamgyong. Within these provinces, data were collected from cities (including Pyongyang, Sariwon, Kaesong, Wonsan, Hamhung, and Kungang) and from rural areas, farms, and long stretches of road in between (see Map in the online Appendix). The messages were placed in public areas and clearly intended for domestic, rather than foreign, consumption. Although there were other restrictions on photography, guides and minders did not interfere with photography of propaganda signs and slogans; in fact, they enthusiastically provided explanations of the context and meaning of various images and text.

We coded each piece of visual and textual propaganda according to the geographic and social context in which it appeared (whether it was in Pyongyang or outside, and which of the strategies and themes it employed). We coded a primary strategy and theme and, where applicable, secondary strategies and themes. We also created an "other" category for both strategy and theme to account for messages that did not fit clearly into our schema. Each message was coded independently by two native Korean speakers; coding discrepancies were identified, discussed, and reconciled by the research team; and the final coding was checked again by a native speaker of English proficient in Korean. Intercoder reliability before reconciliation was .78; most discrepancies involved coders selecting the same themes or strategies, but disagreeing on which was "primary" versus "secondary."

We present examples of propaganda messages in each category in Table 1, and report the full list of translated propaganda messages and locations in the online Appendix. We advise readers to exercise caution in taking written English translations

Table 1 Examples of Messages by Strategy and Theme Category

	Category	Example
Strategy	Co-optation	[We have] nothing to envy in the world.
	Mobilizational	Everyone to the weeding battle!
	Strength Signaling	[We can] defeat the U.S. empire and unify our fatherland!
	Legitimation	Long live comrade Kim Jong Un, the great leader!
	Traditional-familial	Long live the sun of military-first Chosun [<i>another name for North Korea, referring to the dynasty that ruled the Korean peninsula from 1392 to 1910</i>], General Kim Jong Un!
Theme	Ethno-nationalism	Mt. Kumgang, the best mountain in the world [<i>one of the sacred mountains of the Korean people</i>].
	Economic (Industrial)	High-tech breakthroughs.
	Economic (Agriculture)	Everyone to the weeding battle!
	Security	Wipe out the U.S. from the earth forever if it challenges us!
	Ideology	Long live the glorious Korean Workers' Party!

of propaganda text too literally; coders made decisions based on the text, but also accounted for intent as communicated in grammar and word choice as understood by native Korean speakers familiar with North Korea’s distinctive dialect, nuances that are not always equally clear in translation. Coders also had access to additional visual clues from photos of the imagery that accompanied the text. For instance, the slogan “Comrade, are you on a flying horse?” is coded as mobilization not just because of the text, but because of the accompanying image (see Appendix). Both contextual knowledge and imagery clarify, in this instance, that the message refers to the *Chollima* (Flying Horse) Movement, North Korea’s worker-mobilization campaign that occurred in the late 1950s and exhorted workers to exceed their production quotas.⁴⁹

We acknowledge limitations to our data. Our sample is not geographically representative, as travel restrictions prevented data collection in the northern-most provinces. We also do not know whether the sample is temporally representative, as we cannot assume that propaganda campaigns are constant over time. Messages in our dataset appeared in the first year of Kim Jong Un’s rule, meaning that they may combine legacy messaging from the Kim Jong Il era with distinctive messaging crafted for the new leader.⁵⁰ However, even if the North Korean propaganda apparatus took a distinctive approach during this transition, this research design still allows us to test our theory, which seeks to explain subnational variations in propaganda targeting by audience at a given point in time. Finally, because elite messaging could also be distributed through private channels that are not visible to external observers, it is possible that our data oversample propaganda directed at the masses.

We believe that these data are nonetheless valuable, for at least three reasons. First, these data are composed of a body of text and images produced solely for domestic audiences, allowing an unusual view into propaganda messaging that is normally inaccessible to external observers. Second, these data allow us to examine not only the content

of the propaganda messages, but also the context of their delivery to citizens, an aspect often missing from other studies. Third and related, these data allow us to test for subnational variations in propaganda use, thereby enabling us to examine a set of theoretical propositions that were previously empirically inscrutable.

Empirical Analysis

We employ a variety of quantitative approaches to test our hypotheses, including simple descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and machine learning-based text analysis. We divide this section into subsections according to the hypotheses outlined above, explaining the methodological approach used to examine each hypothesis in turn.

Thematic Distribution of Propaganda Our first hypothesis states that the regime would, overall, be likely to emphasize traditional-familial, security, and economic themes more than ideological, ethno-nationalist, or procedural legitimation. Accordingly, Table 2 examines the overall distribution of themes in our data. Traditional-familial appeals are most common: just about half of all propaganda messages (350 total) reference the Kim family. Economic development is the second most common theme (about 20 percent combined), followed by security-themed propaganda at 10.2 percent. Ethno-nationalism is the least common theme, constituting just 1.15 percent. Eighty-eight pieces of propaganda were assigned an “other” theme by our coders. These messages typically feature one of two characteristics: a slogan that is not neatly categorized (e.g., “solidarity with one heart”) or very short, ambiguous text (e.g., “determination” or “always prepared”) accompanied by equally non-thematic visuals.

Approximately 50 percent of the messages (i.e., 361 out of 696) contained a secondary appeal (see Table in online Appendix). These secondary themes most commonly pertained to security (19.97 percent) and then to traditional-familial (8.76 percent).

The distribution of primary and secondary themes is consistent with our hypothesis that North Korean propaganda will feature traditional-familial, security, and economic themes more often than ideology, ethno-nationalism, or procedural legitimacy.

Table 2 Distribution of Primary Themes in North Korean Propaganda

Primary Appeal	Frequency	Percent
Traditional-Familial	350	50.29
Industrialization	95	13.65
Other	88	12.64
Security	71	10.2
Agricultural Production	48	6.9
Ideology	36	5.17
Ethno-nationalism	8	1.15
Total	696	100.00

The low frequency of ethno-nationalist messages is particularly interesting, as it contravenes conventional wisdom about the importance of ethnicity to North Korea; it is, however, consistent with our theory focused on autocratic political survival. Our results also accord more importance to economic messages than existing studies often suggest, though this may signal the turn toward “market Leninism” that unfolded under Kim Jong Un shortly after our data collection.⁵¹

Regional Differences in Economic Themes and Strategies Our second hypothesis (H2a) predicts a relative emphasis on mobilizational strategies in rural areas, and on co-optation strategies in Pyongyang. H2b also predicts an emphasis on agricultural production themes in rural areas versus themes of economic prosperity, industrial development, and modernization in Pyongyang.

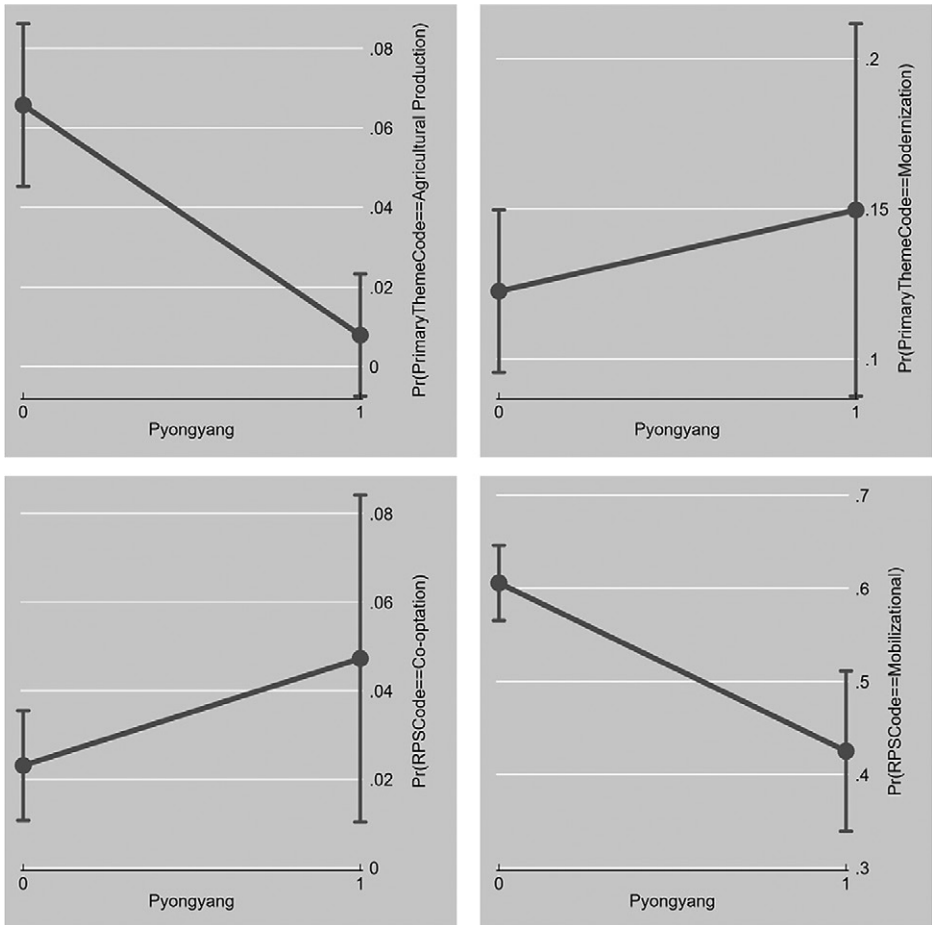
To test these hypotheses, we employ both inferential frequentist statistics and text analysis. First, we present the results of two multinomial logit regression models that employ the primary theme and strategy category as the dependent variables and a dichotomous variable indicating the location of the propaganda message (Pyongyang or outside Pyongyang) as the independent variable. While the full tables for our multinomial models are available in the online Appendix, we focus on the substantive results in Figure 1.

In the top row of Figure 1, we plot the predicted probability, given its location, that a propaganda message features the primary theme of industrialization or agriculture (H2b). We find that the probability that a propaganda message features an agricultural theme is over ten times as high if the message is located in rural areas ($\rho = .08$) versus in Pyongyang ($\rho = .008$). These probabilities are statistically significantly different ($\chi^2 = 52.9$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). The probability that a propaganda message features an economic development theme is also higher in Pyongyang ($\rho = .15$) than in rural areas ($\rho = .13$) but only 15 percent higher ($\chi^2 = 108.87$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). Messages in Pyongyang are more than fifteen times as likely to feature industrialization/modernization themes than agricultural themes.

To address H2a, we need to examine substantive results from the multinomial model of the primary strategy variable (bottom row of Figure 1). The predicted probability plots show that the probability that a message employs a mobilizational strategy is 30 percent higher ($\chi^2 = 958.73$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$) in rural areas ($\rho = .606$) than in Pyongyang ($\rho = .425$). The probability that a propaganda message employs a co-optation strategy ($\rho = .047$) is twice as large in Pyongyang as in rural areas ($\rho = .023$), and the difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 19.60$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$).

We next provide additional evidence for these hypotheses using text analysis. We use machine learning to identify the words that best define economic-themed messages in Pyongyang and elsewhere. The strength of this empirical approach is that it employs a computer algorithm to objectively identify which words best define propaganda messages in the two locations; it, therefore, relies less on qualitative, potentially subjective judgments by human coders. The strength or significance of these findings can only be assessed via model validation diagnostics (which appear in the Appendix). Machine

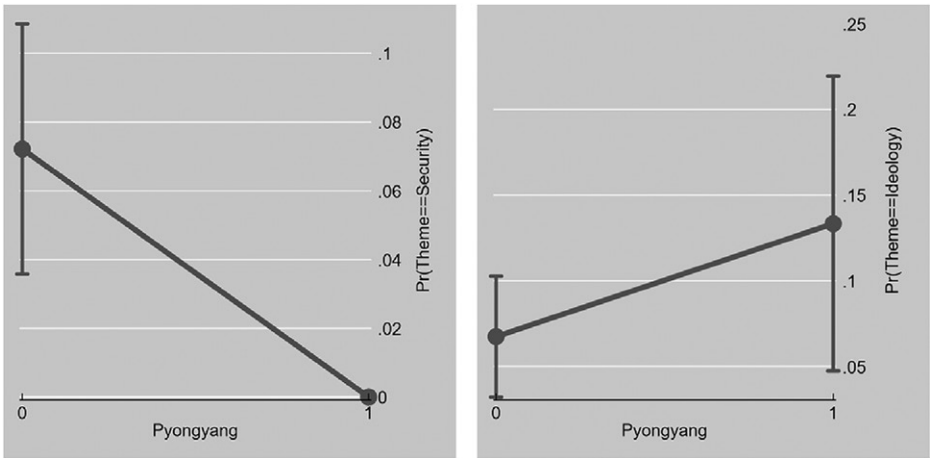
Figure 1 Predicted Probability Plots from Multinomial Logit Models of Primary Theme and Strategy



These plots show the predicted probability that a propaganda message belongs to a particular *theme* category (top row) or *strategy* (bottom) depending on its location in Pyongyang (1) or elsewhere (0).

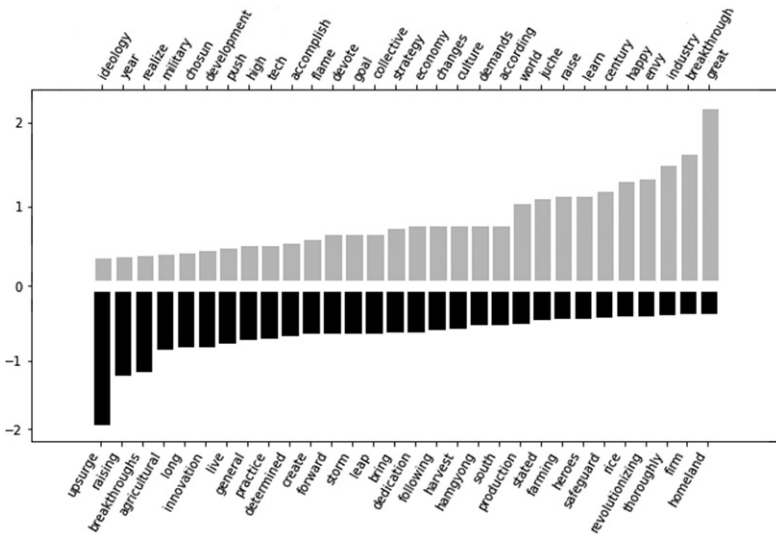
learning highlights the features (individual words) of the messages that are most unique to each category (Pyongyang versus elsewhere) but leaves their interpretation and significance to the researcher. We train and execute a linear support vector classification model using just economic-themed propaganda messages and recover the forty words with largest positive and negative weights (which are akin to coefficients, but have no associated *p*-values) from the SVC model that predict the messages' location (for a detailed explanation, see the Appendix). We plot these words in Figure 3.

Figure 2 Predicted Probability Plots from the Multinomial Logit Model of Primary Theme Using Only Legitimation Messages



These plots show the predicted probability that a propaganda message belongs to the security and ideology theme categories depending on location.

Figure 3 Words Associated with Propaganda in Pyongyang and Elsewhere



The gray bars represent the twenty largest positive weights on words that best define propaganda in Pyongyang. The black bars represent the twenty largest negative weights from the machine learning model, which are associated with the twenty words that best define propaganda found outside of Pyongyang.

The results lend credence to our argument that the regime strategically targets its economic propaganda messages to different groups. Words, such as “agricultural,” “harvest,” “farming,” “rice,” and “production,” are among those that best define propaganda messages outside of Pyongyang. Consistent with our hypotheses, we also see words that suggest mobilization and obedience, such as “bring,” “following,” and “dedication.” By contrast, words like “breakthrough,” “raise,” “industry,” “economy,” “high-tech,” and “development” best define the Pyongyang frame, suggesting a focus on co-optation and economic modernization. Messages such as “High-tech breakthrough strategy” and “Raise the flag of the new-century industrial revolution toward the high-tech breakthrough!” appear only in Pyongyang, while messages like “Carry out proper weeding when in season!” and “The country will thrive when rice jars overflow!” appear only in rural areas. A table with additional examples appears in the Appendix.

These results confirm that the North Korean regime crafts varied propaganda for specific domestic audiences, according to how that audience matters for regime political survival. When appealing to elite audiences, North Korean propaganda emphasizes co-optation via economic benefits, including reminders of modernization and economic privilege. Propaganda targeting the rural masses, however, mostly exhorts that audience to fulfill a subservient role by mobilizing around agricultural production. Both human coding and machine learning techniques corroborate this central result.

Regional Thematic Differences within Mobilizational and Legitimation Propaganda

H3 predicts that propaganda aimed at legitimation will exhibit thematic differences for audiences in Pyongyang versus audiences outside it. Legitimation messaging in Pyongyang should more often feature ideological themes, while legitimation propaganda in rural areas should emphasize security. To test H3, we estimate a multinomial logit model with theme as the dependent variable and the “Pyongyang” dummy variable as the independent variable, restricting the sample to only legitimation messages.

Figure 2 presents the results of the multinomial logit regression model of legitimation messages for these two outcomes of interest, ideological and security themes. The results suggest that legitimation messages in Pyongyang are twice as likely to feature an ideological theme ($\rho = .133$) as legitimation messages in rural areas ($\rho = .067$). A post-hoc Wald test of equality between estimated parameters reveals that this difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 23.17$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). Furthermore, legitimation messages that appear in rural areas are at least seven times more likely to feature a security theme; legitimation messages with a security theme do not appear in Pyongyang.⁵²

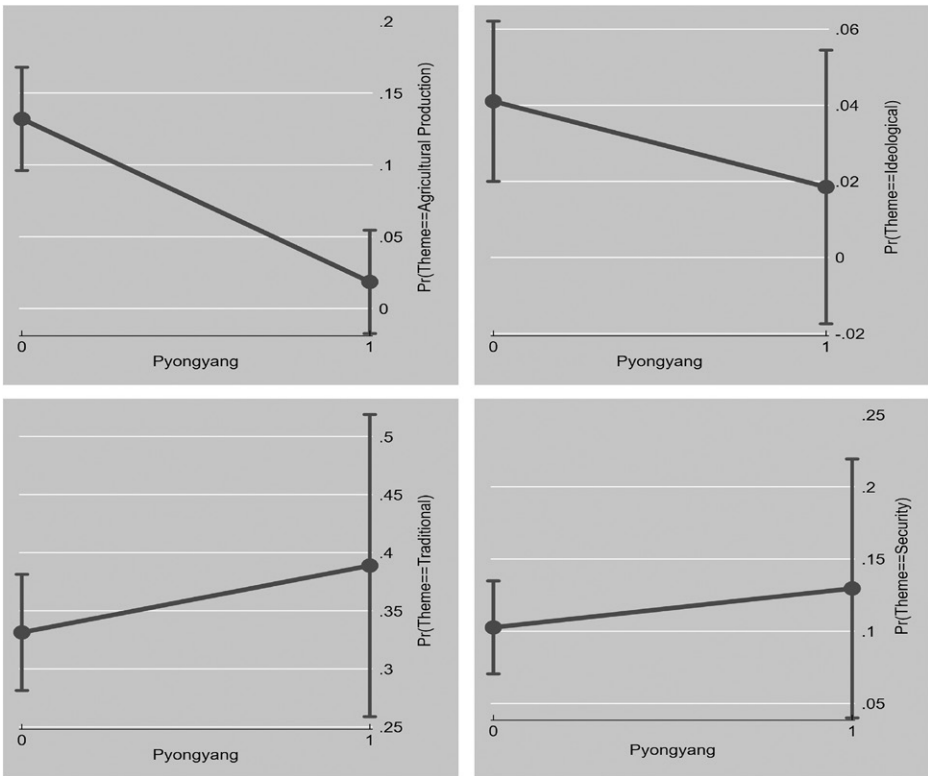
The bottom row of Figure 5 shows the predicted probability, depending on location, that a legitimation message belongs to each theme category. The Figures show that while familial messages are the most common type of legitimating message in both places, the second most common legitimation appeal in Pyongyang is ideological, while the second most common legitimation theme in rural areas is security, matching the predictions of our theory.

H4 predicts that mobilizational propaganda will also employ different themes for elite versus mass audiences. Specifically, it predicts that mobilizational propaganda in Pyongyang will more often feature security and traditional-familial themes, while

messages in rural areas will emphasize agricultural and ideological themes. To evaluate this claim, we estimate multinomial logistic regression models using the primary theme as the dependent variable and the “Pyongyang” dummy variable as the independent variable, estimating them only on propaganda that employs a mobilizational strategy. While the full tables for these models are available in the online Appendix, we focus on the substantive results in Figure 4 and the bottom row of Figure 5.

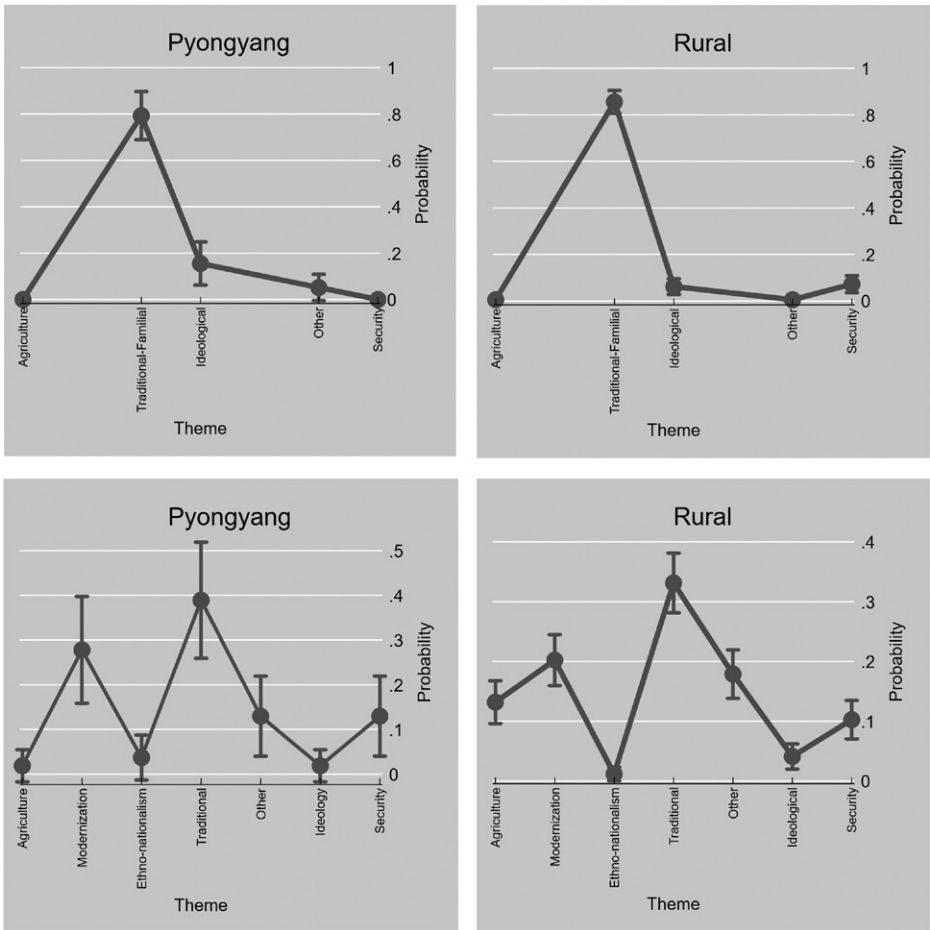
In Figure 4, we see that mobilizational propaganda in Pyongyang is 15 percent more likely to feature traditional-familial themes ($\rho = .38$) than in rural areas ($\rho = .33$), and this difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 203.37$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). Mobilizational propaganda in Pyongyang is also 28 percent more likely to feature security themes ($\rho = .10$) than in rural areas ($\rho = .13$), and this difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 47.05$ and $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). Moreover, mobilization messages featuring an

Figure 4 Predicted Probability Plots from the Multinomial Logit Model of Primary Theme Using Only Mobilization Messages



These plots show the predicted probability that a mobilizational propaganda message belongs to a particular theme category depending on its location in Pyongyang (1) or elsewhere (0).

Figure 5 Predicted Probability Plots for All Outcomes of the Multinomial Logit Model of Primary Theme Using Mobilization and Legitimation Messages



These plots show the predicted probability that a legitimation propaganda message (top row) or mobilizational message (bottom) belongs to each *theme* category depending on location.

agricultural theme are seven times more likely in rural areas as compared to Pyongyang ($\rho = .13$ vs. $\rho = .019$, $\chi^2 = 52.86$, $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0000$). Mobilizational propaganda featuring an ideological theme is twice as likely in rural areas as in Pyongyang ($\rho = .041$ vs. $\rho = .018$, $\chi^2 = 15.62$, $Prob > \chi^2 = 0.0004$).

The plots in the bottom row of Figure 5 show the probability, depending on location, that a mobilizational propaganda message falls in each theme category. Among

mobilizational messages in Pyongyang, the traditional-familial theme is (again) most common, followed by economic industrial development, and then security. This not only supports H3, but also provides further support for H2b. Among mobilizational messages in rural areas, we see that agriculture is the third most common substantive theme, after familial and economic themes. By comparison, agriculture-themed messaging appears just once among mobilizational propaganda in Pyongyang: a stark geographic contrast.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that North Korea's authoritarian regime engages in subnational propaganda targeting, tailoring messages to elites and masses differently. Our empirical results confirm the argument that the North Korean regime targets different types of propaganda at audiences in and outside Pyongyang, in ways intended to improve the regime's likelihood of political survival.

Overall, North Korean propaganda emphasizes the traditional legitimacy of the Kim family's rule and emphasizes security and the role of the military. North Korean propaganda employs economic themes that seek to mobilize the masses around economic production and to reinforce the co-optational economic bargain that exists between the regime and its elites. Comparatively speaking, North Korea's Pyongyang-based elites are more likely to receive co-optational messages promising modernization, prosperity, and economic benefit, while the masses outside Pyongyang are more likely to receive messages focused on mobilization and agricultural productivity.

Pyongyang's approaches to both legitimation and mobilization also vary, depending on which audience it is targeting. The regime legitimates itself on a more ideological basis in Pyongyang, but is more likely to invoke security and "military-first" politics for legitimation purposes outside the capital. The regime also appears to have mobilized elites around shared security and identity-based (traditional-familial and, to some degree, ethno-nationalist) themes, but to have mobilized the rural masses on the basis of ideology and agricultural production. Evidence of this subnational variation in propaganda targeting, consistent with the logic of authoritarian political survival, appears in descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and machine learning-based text analysis.

Although we test our theory in the context of North Korea, the theoretical framework advanced here should be generally useful for predicting which types of propaganda messages will be targeted to which subnational audiences in a wide array of autocratic regimes. As noted above, qualitative evidence from beyond North Korea suggests similar dynamics in other country-contexts. We view our study as an initial step toward developing a unified, broadly applicable theory of how and why authoritarian regimes engage in subnational propaganda targeting. We hope that future research explores how other authoritarian regimes vary the strategy, themes, and delivery mechanisms of their propaganda to achieve the goal of political survival, and that this work will combine further exploration of subnational variation with ongoing research into cross-national differences.

Indeed, our findings suggest several promising avenues for future research. First, we demonstrate that autocratic regimes engage in subnational propaganda targeting, but our data and research design do not permit us to assess whether such targeting achieves its intended effect. Future research could, therefore, look into the effect of subnational propaganda targeting on political survival. Second, future research could fruitfully explore how the imperatives of autocratic survival might generate systematic variations in the expected use of propaganda at different points in a regime's life cycle, as well as across different types of authoritarian regimes (such as competitive/electoral versus closed authoritarian systems, or military versus single-party regimes). Finally, future research could incorporate the international dimensions of authoritarian propaganda, comparing the delivery and reception of messages across domestic and international audiences.

NOTES

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52. The logit model still estimates a non-zero probability despite the non-occurrence of this theme in legitimation messages in Pyongyang.

APPENDIX

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1 Summary Statistics of Propaganda Placement, Type, Placement, and Format

Table 1: Tabulation of Propaganda Placement

	Freq.	Percent	Cumulative
Building	174	24.86	24.86
Field	44	6.29	31.14
Indoors	67	9.57	40.71
Plaza	51	7.29	48.00
Roadside	213	30.43	78.43
Sidewalk	151	21.57	100.00
Total	700	100.00	

Table 2: Tabulation of Propaganda Type

	Freq.	Percent	Cumulative
Indoor Slogan	16	2.29	2.29
Monument	117	16.71	19.00
Mural	86	12.29	31.29
Outdoor Slogan	364	52.00	83.29
Photo	35	5.00	88.29
Poster	82	11.71	100.00
Total	700	100.00	

Table 3: Tabulation of Propaganda Format

	Freq.	Percent	Cumulative
Text	508	72.57	72.57
Visual	73	10.43	83.00
Visual and Text	119	17.00	100.00
Total	700	100.00	

Table 4: Cross Tabulation of Primary Theme and Primary Strategy

	Co-optational	Legitimation	Mobilizational	Other	Strength	Total
Agricultural Production	1	1	46	0	0	48
Modernization	9	0	85	1	0	95
Ethno-nationalism	0	0	6	2	0	8
Traditional-Familial	2	213	135	0	0	350
Other	1	4	69	13	0	88
Ideology	0	21	15	0	0	36
Security	7	14	45	1	5	71
Total	20	253	401	17	5	696

Table 5: Distribution of Secondary Themes in North Korean Propaganda

Secondary Theme	Frequency	Percent
None	336	48.27
Security	139	19.97
Traditional-Familial	61	8.76
Agricultural Production	53	7.61
Ideology	42	6.03
Ethno-nationalism	33	4.7
Industrialization	32	4.6
Total	696	100.00

2 Tabulation of Unique Propaganda Messages and Their Location

Table 6: Tabulation of Unique Propaganda Messages and Their Location

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
21st century / military-first revolutionary guidance / powerful and great country / military-first politics.	2		2
A new and revolutionary great upsurge.	1		1
A new leap forward with the strength of the military-first policy!		1	1
A new, great upsurge.	1		1
A new, great march.	2		2
A resolute, swift all-out attack.	1		1
A torpedo boat that the great leader Kim II-sung comrade sailed on when he was inspecting and giving guidance to the vy fleet.		1	1
Accomplish dear comrade Kim Jongun's words and instructions, no matter what the situation!	1		1
According to the demands of the military-first revolutionary ideology, let's realize new changes in the development of economy and culture!		1	1
Achieve great innovation through this year's agricultural production!	2		2
Achieve thoroughly the party's agriculture-first policy!	3		3
Actively support rural development!	1		1
Adjust/change the ideological viewpoint, the struggle custom, and the way of life according to the demands of military-first!	1		1
Agrarianism.	1		1
All-out attack / assault.	6	1	7
All-out attack toward the final victory.	1		1
All-out march forward following our great leader's grand vision for economic construction!	1	1	2
Always be prepared!	1		1
Always prepared!		2	2
Amity, self-reliance, and peace.	1		1
An economically powerful country.	1		1
Arm ourselves thoroughly with Kim Jong-il-ism!		1	1
Arm ourselves thoroughly with the revolutionary ideology of great comrades Kim II-sung and Kim Jong-il!	1		1
Arm ourselves thoroughly with the revolutionary ideology of our great leader, comrade Kim II-sung!	1		1
Arm strongly with our party's revolutionary ideology and Juche ideology!	1		1
Arm thoroughly with great Kim II-sungism and Kim Jong-il-ism!	2		2

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Arm thoroughly with the revolutionary ideology of great comrades Kim II-sung and Kim Jong-il!	2		2
Arm thoroughly with the revolutionary ideology of our great leader, comrade Kim II-sung!	1		1
As if one person, everyone engage in the learning movement to follow the 26th lane that epitomizes loyalty and creation!	1		1
As if one person, whole party, whole military, and whole people actively engage in the struggle to prevent flood damage!	3		3
As long as the great general stays with us, we will win!	4		4
As the descendants of great comrade Kim II-sung, let's struggle through and focus on creation! (Fight and create the way as the descendants of great comrade Kim II-sung?)	1		1
Baekdu's revolutionary spirit.	2	1	3
Become a locomotive that pierces snow.	1		1
Blessed to serve the captain.	3		3
Blessed to serve the general.	3		3
Blessed to serve the leader, blessed to serve the general, blessed to serve the captain.	2		2
Blessed to serve the leader.	2		2
Building a powerful country/strong nation.	1		1
Carry out an all-out attack following the party's pleas!	2		2
Carry out proper weeding when in season!	2		2
Carry out when determined!	1		1
Chart for socialist competition to win the "Flame of South Hamgyong Award" (Weeding).	1		1
Chart for socialist competition to win the "Flame of South Hamgyong Award" (Weeding: Paddy, Corn).	1		1
Chart for socialist competition to win the "Flame of South Hamgyong Award."	1		1
Chollima great march / powerful and great country / unwavering solidarity / safeguard with our lives.	1		1
Chosun will do anything when determined!	4		4
Chosun, be proud of the honor that comes from having been able to serve comrade Kim II-sung, the greatest in our nation's history of 5,000 years!	1		1
Comrade Kim II-sung, our dear supreme commander, sparks soldiers' devotion toward victory.		1	1
Comrade Kim Jong-il is not only a brilliant philosopher and politician, but also a versatile leader. Kim II-sung, Comrade, are you on a flying horse?	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Construct a strong tion.	1		1
Continue on with the Baekdu march following dear comrade Kim Jong-un!	2		2
Defeat the U.S. empire and unify our fatherland!	1		1
Defend the Party Central Committee led by the dear comrade Kim Jong-un with our lives!	1		1
Defend with our lives the Party Central Committee that has great comrade Kim Jong-un at the center!	16	1	17
Defend with our lives the Party Central Committee that has great comrade Kim Jong-un at the center!	1		1
Destined community.	1		1
Determination.	1		1
Droplet of patriotic sweat.	1		1
Everyone join the movement to capture the red flag symbolizing the third-generation revolution!		2	2
Everyone to the weeding battle!	7		7
Everyone toward realizing the party's policy on revolutionizing agriculture!	2		2
Everyone toward the construction of a new democratic Chosun!		1	1
Everyone, all-out march forward following the military-first revolution!	1		1
Everyone, devote and push through to accomplish this year's collective goal!	6	5	11
Everything for improving people's standard of living!	1		1
Firmly establish the base of the socialist political ideology!	1		1
Firmly establish the sole leadership system of the dear comrade Kim Jong-un throughout the whole party and society!		1	1
Firmly hold the ideology that prioritizes science and construct a powerful and great country!	1		1
Follow Ram's torch fire and accomplish the tasks given by the party with our lives!	1		1
Follow the General forever.	9		9
Follow the great comrade Kim Jong-un and move forward toward the final victory!		1	1
Follow the Great Leader forever.	2		2
Follow the way of anti-Japanese commando!	1		1
For labor and tiol defense!	1		1
General Kim Jong-il, the sun of the 21st century.	1		1
General to the frontline and children to the camp.	1		1
Give hearts to our motherly homeland!	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Go higher, go faster.	1		1
Great comrades Kim II-sung and Kim Jong-il are together with us forever.	23	4	27
Great comrades Kim II-sung and Kim Jong-il are together with us forever.		1	1
Guns and explosives.	1		1
Highest honor to the great mother party!		1	1
High-tech breakthroughs.	1		1
Honesty for the preparation of abundant fall. (Have conscience to welcome a productive fall?)	1		1
Honor forever as the sun of Juche!	1		1
I will take all of you, my comrades, to the communist society. Kim II-sung.	1		1
Ideology / technology / culture.	1		1
Improve people's standard of living.	3		3
Invincible. (Always victorious.)		1	1
It is possible to say that the Wonsan Agricultural University is the incubator of agricultural technicians. Kim II-sung.	1		1
Juche agricultural practice.	1		1
Juche.	2	2	4
Juche's guiding star, Kim Jong-il.	1		1
Kim Eung-woo, great-grandfather of the great leader, who led the fight against an armed and invading American ship Sherman.		1	1
Kwangmyongsong 2. Underground nuclear test.	1		1
Let the year of 2012 shine with a successful harvest!	4		4
Let us brighten 2012 as the victorious year that marks the heyday of strength revival by upholding great comrade Kim Jong-il's instructions!	8		8
Let's always prepare for our dear general Kim Jong-il!	1		1
Let's arm thoroughly with Kim Jong-il-patriotism!	1	1	2
Let's arm thoroughly with the great Kim II-sung-ism and Kim Jong-il-ism!		1	1
Let's be armed thoroughly with great Kim II-sung-ism and Kim Jong-il-ism!		1	1
Let's become a fervent patriot that serves Kim Jong-il-patriotism in practice!	5		5
Let's become farming heroes that safeguard the great general with lives through rice production!	3		3
Let's become farming heroes that safeguard the great general with rice!	1		1
Let's become guns and bombs that safeguard general Kim Jong-il, the great leader, no matter what!	2		2

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Let's become the youth league that shines the military-first era!	1		1
Let's become true community workers that take on the responsibility of promoting people's welfare!	1		1
Let's become true sons and daughters of our dear father Marshal Kim Jong-il!	2		2
Let's build our own powerful and great country!	2		2
Let's complete the Juche revolutionary work no matter what by following the banner of great Kim II-sung-ism and Kim Jong-il-ism.	2	1	3
Let's continue on the tradition of safeguarding the revolutionary center with our lives well!	1	1	2
Let's create a storm of great innovation and great leap forward following the flame of South Hamgyong!	4		4
Let's destroy the tragedy of division as soon as possible!	1		1
Let's fill the entire party and society with Kim II-sung-ism and Kim Jong-il-ism!	1	1	2
Let's follow comrade Kim Jong-un and make great Kim II-sung-homeland and the country of general Kim Jong-il shine into all directions!	1		1
Let's fully adopt and develop the revolutionary tradition of Mt. Baekdu as the revolution's foundation that would last 10 thousand years!	1		1
Let's hold up Kim Jong-il-patriotism high and make my country, my fatherland stronger!	1		1
Let's keep pace with the patriots of the military-first era!	1		1
Let's learn for Chosun!	2	1	3
Let's learn from comrade Kim Jong-suk, the heroine of the anti-Japanese struggle!	3		3
Let's learn from general Kim Jong-il, the great leader!	1		1
Let's learn from our mother Kim Jong-suk, the best incarnation of safeguarding the great leader and the heroine of the anti-Japanese struggle!	2		2
Let's live following our own way!	2		2
Let's prepare well to be a true revolutionary warrior forever faithful to the ideology and the leadership of our party!	1		1
Let's prevent accidents by launching a nationwide struggle movement!	1		1
Let's push more aggressively the movement to capture the red flag symbolizing the third-generation revolution!	2		2
Let's push production and construction harder with revolutionary military spirit!	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Let's realize great leader comrade Kim Jong-il's wish to build a powerful country!	1		1
Let's realize the words of the great leader Kim Jong-il comrade from July 30, Juche 97!		1	1
Let's sacrifice our hearts for the motherland!	2		2
Let's smile even if the road ahead is perilous!	1		1
Let's uphold the great comrade Kim Jong-un's military-first revolutionary guidance with loyalty!	2	3	5
Line of the military-first revolution / safeguard with lives / unification of thoughts, actions, and determination / powerful and great country.	1		1
Long live comrade Kim II-sung, the great leader!	1		1
Long live comrade Kim II-sung's revolutionary ideology!	3		3
Long live comrade Kim Jong-un, the great leader!	4	2	6
Long live comrade Kim Jong-un, the great leader!	9	1	10
Long live comrade Kim Jong-un, the top leader of our party and people!	1		1
Long live General Kim II-sung!		1	1
Long live General Kim II-sung, the incomparable patriot!		1	1
Long live General Kim Jong-il, the sun of the 21st century!	1	1	2
Long live our party's glorious military-first revolutionary ideology!		2	2
Long live our party's ideology of military-civil unity!	1		1
Long live the Democratic People's Republic of Korea!		3	3
Long live the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the fatherland that we love!	1		1
Long live the glorious Korean Workers' Party!	9	3	12
Long live the glorious Korean Workers' Party, the organizer and leader that brings victories to our people!	1		1
Long live the great Juche agricultural practice!	1		1
Long live the great Juche ideology!	4	1	5
Long live the great Kim II-sung-ism and Kim Jong-il-ism!	1		1
Long live the great military-first politics!	2	1	3
Long live the great victory of military-first politics!	5		5
Long live the invincible Korean Workers' Party!	1		1
Long live the invincible Marxism-Leninism!		1	1
Long live the Juche ideology!	1		1
Long live the Korean Workers' Party, the organizer and leader that brings victories to the people of Chosun!	1	1	2
Long live the military-first policy!	1		1
Long live the revolutionary ideology of comrade Kim Jong-il, the great leader!	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Long live the sun of the military-first Chosun, General Kim Jong-un!	19	3	22
Love for the comrade.	1		1
Love for the factory.	1		1
Make the world look up to Kim Il-sung's vision and Kim Jong-il's Chosun!	1		1
March forward following the banner of military-first!	1		1
Military-civilian unity.	3		3
Military-first politics.	3	1	4
Military-first revolutionary guidance.	1		1
Military-first.	2		2
Move forward to the final victory following great comrade Kim Jong-un!	6	2	8
Move forward to the final victory following great comrade Kim Jong-un!	1		1
Move forward to the final victory!		1	1
Move forward to the final victory.	1		1
Move forward with the line of the military-first revolution firmly in grip!	2		2
Mt. Kumgang is really Chosun's unimagable. Kim Jong-il.	1		1
Mt. Kumgang, the best mountain in the world.	1		1
Mt. Kumgang. Kim Il-sung.	1		1
My country. Make my fatherland wealthier and stronger!		3	3
My country's blue sky.	1		1
Nice to meet you.	1		1
Nothing to envy in the world.		2	2
Nothing to envy in the world. Always be prepared! Thank you Marshal Kim Jong-il!		1	1
Oily hands are the valuable hands. Kim Jong-il.	1		1
On August 19, 1973, the great leader Kim Il-sung comrade personally passed through the Kumgang Gate here and said the following meaningful statement: "Only after passing through this Kumgang Gate, I feel like I'm at Mt. Kumgang."	1		1
On September 27, 1947, the great leader Kim Il-sung comrade personally climbed up to Cheonseondae and stated that Manmulsang symbolizes the indomitable spirit of our people.	1		1
Only those shoulders with sweat can hold up the fatherland.	1		1
Our father, great marshal, is our eternal sun.	2		2
Our youth, the racehorses! Provide momentum once more!	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Powerful and great country / fighting spirit of Mt. Baekdu.	1		1
Powerful and great country.	11	1	12
Powerful and great country. Massive construction war.	1		1
Prioritize guns.	2		2
Prioritize science.	1		1
Push for the revolution and construction on the basis of the military-first principle!		1	1
Push through at all costs.	9		9
Push through to accomplish this year's militant task at all costs!	3	2	5
Quick with the wind of all-out attack / assault!	1		1
Raise the flag of the new-century industrial revolution for/ toward the high-tech breakthrough!		1	1
Raise the revolutionary vigilance to drive out every single spy, along with the destructive, cancerous elements!	1		1
Ram / fight until death / safeguard with our lives / accomplish with our lives.	1		1
Responsibility for one thousand years, guarantee for ten thousand years.	1		1
Revenge to the American coyotes a thousand and one hundred times!	1		1
Revenge to the American murderers a thousand and one hundred times!	1		1
Revolutionary contributions of madame Kim Jong-suk, who was the most loyal warrior of the great leader Kim II-sung comrade, will be immortal.	1		1
Revolutionary flame. The new century's industry.		1	1
Rise, Hungm. Mt. Baekdu is looking. Many will follow you! The only way to live is through anti-Japanese struggle.	1		1
Safeguard the great leader with our lives.	1		1
Safeguard the line of improving people's standard of living.	1		1
Safeguard the revolutionary center with our lives.	1	2	3
Safeguard with our lives.	7		7
Safeguarding the fatherland is the highest representation of carrying out duties as citizens. Kim Jong-il.	2		2
Scouts of military-first revolution.	1		1
Self-revival is the only way to survive!	1		1
Self-revival.	8	1	9
Serve comrade Kim II-sung, the great leader, forever!	2		2
Serve general Kim Jong-il as the sun of military-first forever!		1	1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Serve great comrade Kim Jong-il as the leader of our party and revolution!	1		1
Serve the great comrade Kim Jong-un as the center of guidance and as the center of solidarity!	3		3
Serve the party with rice!	1		1
Serve the revolutionary center's ideology and guidance with solidarity and willingness!	1		1
Socialism.	1		1
Soldiers' revolutionary spirit.	1		1
Solidarity with one heart.	12	4	16
Songdown Intertiol Children's Camp is a "house of love" that the party has built for the children as a gift.	1		1
Stand firm in the homeland and look to the world!	1		1
Storm out with the offensive spirit of Baekdu!	1		1
Strategy to revive power.	2		2
Strengthen and develop our party forever as the party of comrades Kim II- sung and Kim Jong-il!	2		2
Strengthen my country, my fatherland wealthier and stronger by holding Kim Jong-il-patriotism up high!		1	1
Strengthen the material hub for regiol industrial factories!	1		1
Strictly follow the technological regulations and standard operating procedures!	1		1
Strongly move through the road of Juche socialism following the military-first banner!	1		1
Struggle through with strength.	2		2
Support our general until the end!	2		2
Take care like a flower garden.	1		1
Take over and develop the revolutionary tradition.	1		1
Thank you dear father, general Kim Jong-il.	1		1
Thank you dear father, Marshal Kim Jong-il.	1		1
Thank you Marshal Kim Jong-il!		1	1
The 100th anniversary of the birth of our great leader.	3		3
The 26th factory that is expected to perform well.	1		1
The 70th anniversary of the birth of our general.	1		1
The battlefield for capturing the red flag that symbolizes the third-generation revolution!	5		5
The country will thrive when rice jars overflow!	1		1
The determination of South Hamgyong.	1		1
The determination of ten million soldiers and civilians.	1		1
The double 26th business that is expected to perform well.	1		1
The earth revolves according to the guidance of the military-first revolution!	2		2
The farmland of the commune is my commune.	1		1
The firm solidarity between the military and civilians.	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
The flame of South Hamgyong.	3		3
The foundation of building a powerful and great country.	1		1
The general's family.	1		1
The great comrades Kim II-sung and Kim Jong-il are together with us forever.		1	1
The great leader Kim II-sung comrade is together with us forever.	2	1	3
The great leader Kim II-sung comrade, here on August 19, 1973, gratefully looked back at the time when he visited Mt. Kumgang with the communist revolutionary warrior madame Kim Jong-suk on September 28, 1947 and enthusiastically spoke of her noble loyalty.	1		1
The Great Leader Kim II-sung is with us eternally.		1	1
The great leader Kim Jong-il comrade is together with us forever.	1	1	2
The heart of Chosun, Pyongyang.		1	1
The height of the flame of South Hamgyong.	1		1
The highest honor to the great mother party!		1	1
The high-tech breakthrough strategy.		1	1
The long chair that the great leader Kim II-sung comrade used himself.	1		1
The map of where comrade Kim Jong-il, the great leader, and comrade Kim Jong-suk, the female hero of the anti-Japanese struggle, visited. Juche 36 (1947). 9. 29.	1		1
The owners of agricultural products are us, the farmers!	1		1
The party always trusts Hungm's labor class. Kim Jong-il.	1		1
The place where the great leader Kim II-sung comrade gave pivotal instructions regarding the historical task of total unification on August 19, 1973.	1		1
The power of military-first.	1		1
The power of solidarity with one heart.	1		1
The revolutionary center.	1		1
The role models of the military-first era chosen by the great general.	1		1
The sixth working group's weeding battlefield.	1		1
The spirit of continuous revolution.	1		1
The spirit of Kanggye.	1		1
The third-generation revolution.	3		3
The Victory Way.	1		1
The Wonsan Agricultural University is a competent university. Kim Jong-il.	1		1
The year of all-out march.	2		2
Thoroughly accomplish great comrade Kim II-sung's instructions!	3		3

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued)

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Thoroughly arm with our glorious party's revolutionary tradition!		1	1
Thoroughly defend and realize the policies and decisions of the party!	1		1
Thoroughly realize the great general's stated policy on revolutionizing agriculture!	1		1
Thoroughly realize the policy of prioritizing our leader, our ideology, our military, and our system!		2	2
Together with my farmland.	1		1
Total concentration, total mobilization.	1		1
Toward building a powerful and great country!	1		1
Toward constructing a powerful and great country with the victor's mind!	1		1
Toward the final victory with the burning hearts and minds in service of patriotism.	1		1
Toward the high-tech breakthroughs by raising the flag of the industrial revolution in the new century!	2		2
Toward the world with our nation united.		1	1
Transform all of the mountains into gold and treasure mountains.	1		1
Transform sadness into strength and courage to serve our great party with loyalty!	1		1
Uphold and serve general Kim Jong-il, the son of Mt. Baekdu, for 10 million years!	2		2
Uphold and serve great comrade Kim Jong-il as the leader of our party and revolution!	1		1
Uphold and serve great comrade Kim Jong-un as the centers of guidance and solidarity!	2		2
Uphold and serve great comrades Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il as the eternal leaders of our party!	1		1
Uphold and serve great comrades Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il as the eternal leaders of our party!	1		1
Uphold great leader Kim Jong-il's instructions by creating a massive wave in the construction of a powerful country!	1		1
Uphold the military first revolution doctrine of the great comrade Kim Jong-un with loyalty	1		1
We are happy.	1	1	2
We are one.	1		1
We do it when the party is determined!	3		3
We welcome tourists to Mt. Kumgang with brotherly love!	1		1
Weeding battlefield.	1		1
When the party is determined, we accomplish it!	1		1

(Continued)

Table 6: *(Continued)*

Slogan	Elsewhere	Pyongyang	Total
Whole party, whole country, and whole people actively support rural development!	2		2
Whole party, whole military, and whole people uphold great comrade Kim Jong-il's military-first revolutionary guidance!	1		1
Whole party, whole military, and whole people uphold the power of military-first in unity!	1		1
Wipe out the U.S. from the Earth forever if it challenges us!		1	1
With dedication that will bring great harvest.	1		1
Grand Total	524	102	626
End of Table			

3 Multinomial Logit Model Result Tables

Table 7: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Primary Strategy

Co_optation	
pyongyangyes	1.070* (.515)
_cons	-3.267*** (.283)
Legitimation	
pyongyangyes	0.675** (.208)
_cons	-0.569*** (.090)
Mobilizational	Base Outcome
Other	
pyongyangyes	1.150* (.521)
_cons	-3.347*** (.293)
Strength Signaling	
pyongyangyes	0.457 (1.128)
_cons	-4.446*** (.503)
<i>N</i>	690
<i>PseudoR</i> ²	0.005
Standard errors in parentheses	
* <i>p</i> < .05	

Table 8: Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Primary Strategy

Agricultural Production	Base Outcome
Modernization	
pyongyangyes	2.477* (1.043)
_cons	0.467* (.186)
Ethno-nationalism	
pyongyangyes	2.752* (1.299)
_cons	-2.058*** (.434)
Traditional-Familial	
Pyongyangyes	2.420* (1.019)
_cons	1.785*** (.158)
Other	
pyongyangyes	2.282* (1.049)
_cons	0.427* (.1875)
Ideology	
pyongyangyes	2.752* (1.081)
_cons	-0.554* (.242)
Security	
pyongyangyes	2.464* (1.054)
_cons	0.175 (0.198)
<i>N</i>	690
<i>PseudoR</i> ²	0.007

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .05$

Table 9: Multinomial logit regression results for primary theme using just the subset of legitimation messages. This table corresponds to figures 7 and 8 in the main paper.

Agriculture	
pyongyangyes	-15.41 (2555)
_cons	-2.49* (1.04)
Traditional-Familial	
pyongyangyes	-.996* (0.78)
_cons	2.63* (0.471)
Ideological	Base Outcome
Other	
Pyongyangyes	1.39 (1.24)
_cons	-2.48* (1.04)
Security	
pyongyangyes	-15.405 (683)
_cons	.154 (.393)
<i>N</i>	253
<i>PseudoR</i> ²	.006
Standard errors in parentheses	
* <i>p</i> < .05	

Table 10: Multinomial logit regression results for primary theme using just the subset of mobilizational messages. This table corresponds to figures 9 and 10 in the main paper.

Agricultural Production	Base Outcome
Modernization	
pyongyangyes	2.28* (1.05)
_cons	0.43* (0.19)
Ethno-nationalism	
pyongyangyes	3.11* (1.33)
_cons	-2.42* (0.52)
Traditional-Familial	
pyongyangyes	2.12* (1.04)
_cons	0.92* (0.18)
Other	
pyongyangyes	1.64 (1.09)
_cons	0.30 (0.20)
Ideology	
pyongyangyes	1.17 (1.45)
_cons	-1.17* (0.31)
Security	
pyongyangyes	2.20* (1.09)
_cons	-0.25 (0.23)
<i>N</i>	395
<i>PseudoR</i> ²	.0094

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .05$

4 Linear SVC Model and Results Details

The procedure for our SVC model is as follows. First, we train and test a linear support vector classification (SVC) model. We begin by splitting the data set in half and training the SVC model with one half of the data. Support vector classification algorithms use quadratic programming to identify a hyperplane that separates partitions data into distinct categories. The method is particularly well suited for textual categorization (Aggarwal and Zhai, 2012). The dependent variable in the model is the “Pyongyang vs. elsewhere” indicator, and the independent variables are all of the tokenized words (stop-words such as “the” are removed) that appear in the economic-themed propaganda messages that compose the training dataset. Then, the model is tested on the other messages that compose the testing set. Next, we extract the predicted categories from the testing data and compare those to the actual value of the dependent variable to evaluate the precision and recall of the model.¹ We repeat this process, adjusting the estimation algorithm and other specifications until we obtain the highest possible level of model accuracy. Finally, after we have optimized the accuracy of the model, we retrain the model using the optimized model specifications on the complete set of 143 economic propaganda messages. We then extract and plot the words with the largest coefficients to assess which words are most influential in the two different categories (i.e., Pyongyang vs. elsewhere).

The results of the model optimization and testing are below. We achieve an overall accuracy of .85, which we consider acceptable given the relatively small number of observations and the fact that there is some level of overlap in messaging in and outside Pyongyang.

As expected, the model has a harder time predicting messages that appear in Pyongyang, which makes sense given that there are fewer of those messages in the sample.

Table 11: SVC Model Optimization Results

	Precision	Recall	F1-score	# Support Docs
Non-Pyongyang	0.94	0.86	0.90	59
Pyongyang	0.33	0.57	0.42	7
<i>Accuracy</i>			0.83	66
<i>Macro Avg.</i>	0.64	0.72	0.66	66
<i>Weighted Avg.</i>	0.88	0.83	0.85	66

Figure 1: Examples of Economic Messages in Pyongyang vs. Elsewhere

Economic Messages from Pyongyang	Economic Messages from Elsewhere
The high-tech breakthrough strategy.	Carry out proper weeding when in season!
Raise the flag of the new-century industrial revolution toward the high-tech break-through!	The country will thrive when rice jars over- flow!
According to the demands of the military- first revolutionary ideology, let's realize new changes in the development of economy and culture!	Achieve thoroughly the party's agriculture- first policy!
Nothing to envy in the world.	Serve the party with rice!

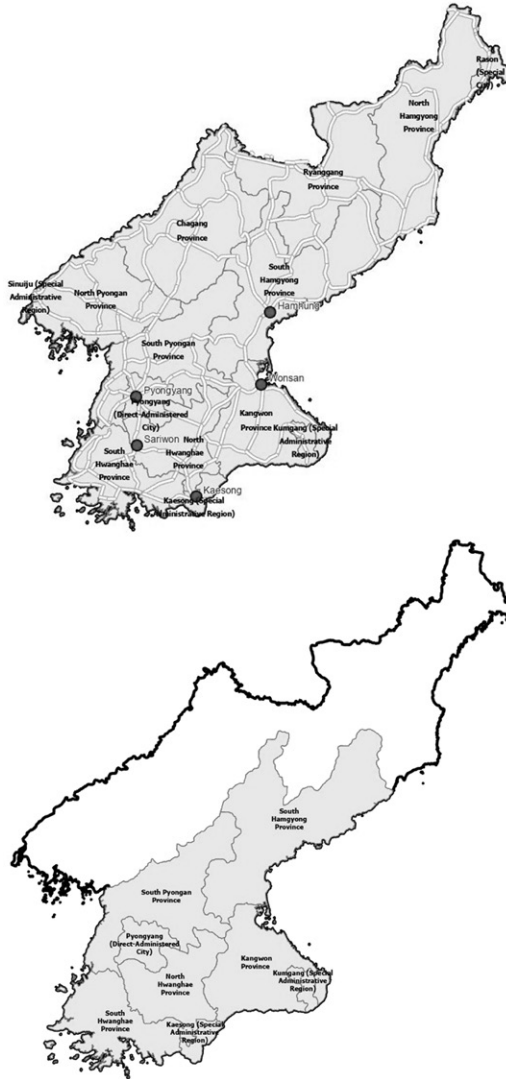
5 Chollima Flying Horse Propaganda Image

Figure 2: North Korean Propaganda in Context. *This appeared in a rural location outside Hamhung, South Hamgyong Province. The poster reads, “Comrade, are you on a flying horse?” The Chollima (Flying Horse) Movement was North Korea’s worker-mobilization campaign in the late 1950s. The red banner to the right reads, “Let’s become true community workers that take on the responsibility of promoting people’s welfare!”* This image is reference in the data section of our paper.



6 Map of North Korean Regions from which Propaganda Data is Sourced

Figure 3: Maps of North Korea depicting the cities and regions where we collected the propaganda data.



NOTE

1. Precision is calculated using the following: “true positive rate/(true positive rate + false positive rate).”
Recall is calculated using the following: “true positive rate/(true positive rate + false negative rate).”