

International Sanctions and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Impacts and Resilience (Summary)

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This study compares the effects of international sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and examines how the two shocks interacted to weaken its economic resilience. International sanctions are treated as a long-term institutional shock constraining trade, finance, technology transfer, and industrial production, whereas the pandemic is analyzed as a sudden physical shock disrupting border crossings, logistics, and supply chains. Using annual crude steel production data, monthly China–DPRK trade data, and mineral fuel production statistics, the study combines descriptive analysis, STL decomposition, and ordinary least squares regression to identify changes in production, trade, and resilience across the pre-sanctions, sanctions-only, and sanctions-plus-pandemic periods. The findings indicate that sanctions gradually eroded the foundations of industrial production by restricting access to raw materials, equipment, finance, and technology. The pandemic then intensified these weaknesses by sharply reducing trade flows and interrupting remaining formal and informal supply routes. Their combined effect was therefore greater than the sum of the two individual shocks. The DPRK responded through self-reliance, internal mobilization, border controls, and the prioritization of security over economic efficiency. Although these measures contributed to short-term political and social stability, they also deepened resource misallocation, technological stagnation, and long-term economic vulnerability.

Keywords: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK); international sanctions; COVID-19 pandemic; economic resilience; China–DPRK trade

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