Under what conditions do unemployed youth engage in hostile collective action? To address this question, this study focuses on the youth unemployment of South Korea and Taiwan in comparative perspective. A high youth unemployment rate by itself is not necessarily a determinant of hostile collective outbursts, as in the case of South Korea. Instead, outbursts can occur in the context of other contributing factors. This article identifies three important ingredients of hostile outbursts of collective action: dysfunctional political institutions, generalized beliefs, and precipitating forces. These factors can explain different levels of political mobilization across South Korea and Taiwan, despite their similar structural constraints. The findings of this study will provide useful insights into how to manage the potential for hostile collective action, and the implications for populist movements and regional stability in East Asia.

Key Words: youth unemployment, Taiwan, South Korea, collective action, populist movement, contentious politics

Under what conditions do unemployed or underemployed youth engage in hostile collective action? A time bomb of youth unemployment is ticking in many countries around the world, but few governments have been capable of tackling the problem effectively.¹ Rising frustration among youth

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, for statistical description this article identifies “youth” as young people between 15 and 24 years of age for the sake of consistency with existing literature and statistical data. However, the mini-case study of the article adopts a more flexible and expanded notion of youth (including young adults). This study gives more focus to inadequate employment among youth. Inadequate employment concerns those who are temporarily employed but want to work full-
facing unemployment due to an inadequate supply of jobs can easily turn into political dissatisfaction and even violent protests. With the rapid expansion of education, unemployed university graduates or secondary school graduates tend to engage more frequently in forms of political unrest. At the end of 2013, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated nearly 74.5 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 worldwide were not working. According to The Economist (2013), “Many of the employed young have only informal and intermittent jobs ... nearly half of the world’s young people are either outside the formal economy or contributing less productively than they could.” Furthermore, demographic and technological trends are unlikely to alleviate chronic youth unemployment worldwide. As Jack Goldstone (2010) notes, “Most of the world’s expected population growth will increasingly be concentrated in today’s poorest, youngest, and most heavily Muslim countries, which have a dangerous lack of quality education, capital, and employment opportunities.” Technological changes are also making manufacturing more capital- and skill-intensive, diminishing the ability of the manufacturing sector to absorb unskilled labor from the countryside and informal sectors. Production automation will further reduce job availability within the traditional manufacturing sector (Tse and Esposito 2014).

At the same time, youth unemployment is one of the most pressing issues in the East Asian region today. This is a generic problem encountered in key East Asian economies, which include Malaysia, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. In 2015, for instance, Malaysia’s youth unemployment rate was estimated to have reached 10.7 percent despite the country’s low overall unemployment rate of 3.1 percent. Malaysia’s youth with tertiary education were the highest among the unemployed at 15.3 percent (Star 2017). The Chinese government appears to be considerably worried about youth unemployment despite the country’s rather low official unemployment rate (4.05 percent in 2013), which is highly debatable and seemingly underreported. Large numbers of young people in China express time; who are highly skilled but working in low-paying jobs; and who have given up the search for jobs altogether.

As Dan Slater (2010, 5) points out, “violent internal contention can ‘make the state’ as surely as international warfare.” Elite threat perception of mass unrest might shape the level of state power and control over society.

As Samuel P. Huntington (1968, 48) aptly pointed out, “The higher the level of education of the unemployed, alienated, or otherwise dissatisfied person, the more extreme the destabilizing behavior which results.”

China does not use internationally accepted metrics to measure youth unemployment. Some other survey reports suggest that China’s real youth unemployment stands around eight percent or even as high as 20 percent (Tse and Esposito 2014).
frustrations about their employment outlook over the Internet, and unsatisfying job prospects combined with declining opportunities for upward mobility will likely pose a great risk to social stability in China in the future (Schucher 2014). Taiwan and South Korea are also confronted with the growing challenges of youth unemployment. According to the ILO, Taiwan’s youth unemployment rate registered 13 percent in 2012, the second highest in East Asia behind Hong Kong’s 15.1 percent (Taipei Times 2013). Similarly, South Korea’s official youth unemployment rate (excluding discouraged workers) has increased over the past decade, hitting 11.1 percent in February 2015.

Despite the salience of youth unemployment in the East Asian region and beyond, a very limited body of literature has identified specific mechanisms through which an increasing number of unemployed or underemployed youth might engage in collective action and subsequently influence state policy. While students of contentious politics and social movements produced excellent works on protest, rioting, civil disobedience, and revolution (Benford and Snow 2000; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Tilly 2008), there is a conspicuous dearth of scholarship on the collective action of unemployed youth in newer, economically-developed democracies with low birth rates and rapidly aging populations. This study intends to fill this scholarly gap by applying some theoretical insights from past scholarship towards a better understanding of the collective action of the jobless youth in South Korea and Taiwan. The contentious politics of the jobless youth in new Asian democracies can also offer useful insights into public debates over populist movements today. Self-labeled populist movements draw global attention and raise important questions about whether these social movements represent legitimate responses to self-serving privileges and views of global and national elites. The youth of South Korea and Taiwan played a vital role in initiating social movements and democratic transition in the late 20th century. A better understanding of the possible collective action of jobless youth in these Asian democracies can serve as a useful reference for our discussion of populist movements in other parts of the world.

There are some variations in the level of political mobilization among frustrated, unemployed, and underemployed youth, which is puzzling for scholars and practitioners. For example, frustrated young people have been involved signifi-

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5 According to the 2013 ILO report, the jobless rate among young males in East Asia reached 11.2 percent, while unemployment for young females in the region was 7.6 percent. Youth unemployment was also more severe than overall unemployment. The rate of unemployed youth was 2.7 times that of older people.
cantly in the “Green Revolution” in Iran, the “Jasmine Revolution” throughout the Arab world, protest activities in crisis-hit Spain and Greece, the “Sunflower Movement” in Taiwan, and the “Umbrella Revolution” in Hong Kong. However, unemployment, _per se_, has not automatically led to the mobilization of many young people in South Korea and China. This study aims to identify the scope of the conditions under which under- and unemployed youth may or may not engage in collective action in democratic countries. To that end, the article will conduct a mini-case study comparing South Korea and Taiwan in terms of hostile outbursts of collective action by young people.

The first section of the article discusses a seeming puzzle about the different levels of hostile collective action in South Korea and Taiwan. The second section will introduce a conceptual framework on the social movements of frustrated youth, the key components of which include dysfunctional political institutions, generalized beliefs, and precipitating forces. Subsequent empirical sections will discuss the cases of South Korea and Taiwan, and explain variations in the levels of political mobilization across the two countries. The article will conclude with a discussion of theoretical and policy implications for regional stability and cooperation in East Asia.

**THE PUZZLE OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTH PROTESTS IN SOUTH KOREA AND TAIWAN**

**SIMILAR STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES**

In terms of the socio-economic structures related to youth unemployment, there are several similarities between South Korea and Taiwan. First, rapid expansion of higher education over the past several decades has resulted in the potential oversupply of highly educated workers. Since the 1990s, the governments of South Korea and Taiwan have encouraged the establishment of new universities and colleges in order to generate a more skilled labor force and reduce fierce competition for college admissions among high school graduates (Park 2007; Tsai and Xie 2008). This policy has produced a surge in the number of college graduates, who are increasingly vulnerable to the risks of unemployment or underemployment. Unemployment has hit graduates of elite universities hard, to

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6 This research is puzzle-driven, not theory-driven. The article is structured around the empirical puzzle of why different degrees of hostile collective action manifest despite similar structural challenges, while steering clear of a redundant discussion of the theoretical literature on contentious politics, and social movements in general. The brief review of past scholarship relating to the puzzle is incorporated into the section outlining my conceptual framework.
say nothing of graduates from second-tier universities or high schools.\footnote{For example, recent graduates from the three most prestigious Korean universities—Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University (the so-called ‘SKY’ universities)—also find themselves struggling in a deteriorating job market. In the past, prestigious SKY degrees almost guaranteed job placements at large or state-owned enterprises. According to a 2015 article in the \textit{Joongangilbo}, nearly one-third of recent SKY graduates in the humanities and social sciences were unemployed during the period of August 2013-February 2014.}

Second, both societies face a low birth rate and an aging population. Their aging populations are requiring more and more income and savings to pay for extended care over longer periods of time. Aging populations are an increasingly common fate for industrialized economies, as many European countries, the United States, Japan, and even China are aging at unprecedented rates. Nevertheless, population projections for South Korea represent the extreme example of demographic composition imbalances: the population of working age (15-59) South Koreans is expected to drop by 36 percent, while the number of South Koreans aged 60 and older will increase by nearly 150 percent. By 2050, the entire working-age population of South Korea will barely exceed the 60-and-older population (Goldstone 2010). Further complicating the Korean and Taiwanese cases, a relatively large number of young adults now live with their parents before marriage (Yu, Su, and Chiu 2012; Yu and Chiu 2014). This living arrangement appears to enable college graduates to afford joblessness until landing their optimal job.

Third, young people in both societies appear to be cynical about the positive role of their governments and political parties. For instance, findings of an International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) suggest that both South Korean and Taiwanese teenagers (age 14) scored much lower than average—across a survey of 38 countries—with regards to trust in the national government and political parties: the percentage of students reporting “complete” or “quite a lot” of trust in national government was 20 and 44, respectively. Similarly, only 18 percent of Korean and 26 percent of Taiwanese respondents reported “complete” or “quite a lot” of trust in political parties (Schulz, et al. 2009, 45-47). On a related point, one should also note the presence of politically active youth in both societies. The youth of South Korea and Taiwan played a critical role in initiating social movements and democratic transition under authoritarian regimes. After democratization, Korean and Taiwanese students became an active social force in promoting socio-political reforms in their societies.

Fourth, young people in both advanced societies are highly connected to the
Internet, which enables them to disseminate common beliefs and sentiments about job situations (Anduiza, Jensen, and Jorba 2012; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). These new channels of communication provide opportunities for different aggrieved groups to act. However, it is important to note that the causal role of the Internet in creating contemporary social movements should not be overestimated. Despite the availability of the Internet, there are significant variations in actual collective action. Thus, it might be reasonable to assume that the Internet is one of many variables conducive to the promotion of political mobilization in South Korea and Taiwan.

Fifth, growth within these two mature, trade-oriented economies is far more modest now than before. Although South Korea and Taiwan registered high economic growth rates during the Cold War period, they both have experienced similar economic slowdowns starting in the 1990s. Taiwan and Korea managed to recover relatively quickly from financial crises in 1997 and 2008, but their recent rates of economic growth in the range of 2-4 percent can barely generate equivalent job growth.8

Last but not least, China-centered global economic integration has contributed to hollowing out the manufacturing sectors in the two countries. China’s vast market size and cheap production costs have attracted numerous Korean and Taiwanese manufacturing firms facing the challenges of rising wages and land costs at home. These labor-intensive firms have moved their factories to China, taking local manufacturing jobs with them. To counter the problem of this hollowing out and keep wage costs competitive in their local manufacturing sectors, Korean and Taiwanese industrial employers have asked their governments to introduce foreign guest workers.

However, those low-skilled foreign workers from Southeast Asia who accept lower wages for longer working hours have reduced the job opportunities available to local workers. In addition to an increased supply of foreign guest workers, the two governments also have pursued other policies to increase labor market flexibility. These labor policies have resulted in soaring dependence on dispatched workers, fixed-term contracts, and part-time jobs. Since young

8 A notable structural feature that distinguishes South Korea from Taiwan is the chaebol-dominated economic growth model. The Korean economy has long been dominated by the chaebol, or large enterprises (LEs), that depended on state support and protection during the early period of Korean industrialization. Today, however, they underperform in terms of job creation. For example, the 30 largest chaebol provide a mere six percent of Korean jobs. Chaebol job creation has declined as LEs have implemented factory automation and hired more from abroad. The vast majority of Koreans are employed by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that pay about 60 percent of LE wages (Financial Times 2016).
people make up the bulk of vulnerable, low-paid, and temporary employment, this trend also has aggravated youth concerns about job prospects. Overall, the aforementioned structural factors have conspired to create an unfavorable environment for youth employment in both South Korea and Taiwan.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF HOSTILE COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR
To date, South Korea has witnessed only minor protests against declining job opportunities for Korean youth.\(^9\) Involving less than a hundred participants, these protests were isolated incidents that did not have any major impact on the rest of Korean society. In April 2010, for instance, some student organizations and NGO groups declared the creation of a new social network to target the problem of youth unemployment. Despite their attempts at a series of one-man relay protests, their activities were not visible enough to attract public attention (People Power 2010). In May 2011, several hundred college students took to the streets to call for reductions in tuition. However, the incident failed to embolden other young Koreans (Joongang Ilbo 2011). Another relevant example is “Alba Yeon-dae,” a solidarity group for part-time workers aiming to increase minimum wages. Mainly composed of college students, the group has expressed frustration with perceived injustices in labor markets, but they have not risen to prominence in public discourse. Despite the lack of large-scale protests, the persistent problem of youth unemployment has resulted in the decline of belief in the Korean Dream of “work hard and get ahead.” According to a recent survey of the Pew Research Center on the future of the next generation, only 52 percent of Koreans said that their children would be better off financially than they were (Park 2015). Koreans in their twenties and thirties are much more downbeat about the country’s present and future than elderly Koreans. Young Koreans disparagingly call themselves the “three abandonments (sam-po) generation,” meaning they are forced to abandon “love,” “marriage,” and “reproduction” in part due to a lack of adequate jobs (Joongang Ilbo 2015). Nevertheless, the pessimistic views and rhetoric of young Koreans have not led them to stage any outbreaks of large-scale protests about their declining socioeconomic status.

Korea’s small guerrilla-type protests contrast sharply with Taiwan’s larger movements, which carry mass appeal and are driven by a coalition of students

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\(^9\) For an example of recent news reporting on small-scale protests against youth unemployment, see Dong A Ilbo (2006). Student-led campus protests against rising tuition and other university management issues have become an annual ritual in South Korea. When a new semester starts, students gather on campuses, raise banners, and chant slogans to express their concerns. Such small and isolated protests, however, have not as yet translated into any large-scale political uprisings against growing youth unemployment.
and civic groups concerned about the negative impact of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) on the local economy and job market. Taiwan’s “Sunflower Movement” lasted for 24 days, from March 18 to April 10, 2014. The majority of the active participants were Taiwanese students who were protesting the ruling party’s breaking of its promise to conduct a clause-by-clause review of the CSSTA with Mainland China. Several hundred students occupied the Legislative Yuan Chamber. More than 500,000 supporters massed along Ketagalan Boulevard in Taipei on March 30, 2014. The student-led movement not only protested the undemocratic nature of the trade negotiation process, but also the economic inequality and occupational immobility that would be produced by the agreement. While both young Koreans and Taiwanese are concerned about rising unemployment, there have been no large-scale collective outbursts involving Korean youth—at least, ones that could compare to the Sunflower Movement’s unprecedented occupation of the Taiwanese legislature. Given the seemingly common structural constraints on the two societies, why are there different degrees of political mobilization? What can account for the distinctive character of contentious politics in South Korea and in Taiwan?

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section focuses on what might trigger differences in the collective outbursts of unemployed or underemployed youth under conditions of similar socioeconomic constraints. A collective outburst refers to collective action undertaken by a loose coalition of activists that lacks central leadership, well-institutionalized organization, and clear procedures for deciding upon a common course of action. In general, widespread strain in society might be a necessary condition for any kind of collective outburst. Strain may take the form of severe deprivation caused by poverty, disease, economic crisis, military defeat, or some combi-

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This section has benefitted from a large body of the literature on contentious politics, including Neil J. Smelser classic 1962 work on social movements, Theory of Collective Behavior. While acknowledging the key theoretical propositions of past scholarship, this article attempts to minimize the literature review given space constraints.

The sources of joblessness among the young are not the focus of this study. Günther Schmid (2013) lists the interrelated causes of youth unemployment as the following: “(1) Lack of jobs due to economic slumps and loss of international competitiveness; (2) mismatch between skills demanded by existing jobs and skills provided by the educational system; (3) labor market rigidities due to inflexible wages, employment protection, high non-wage costs due to a generous welfare state, or even discrimination.” On the various causes of youth unemployment in South Korea, see Jeong (2007).
nation of these.

Such deprivations are often relative to expectations. When people find the gap between their expectations and their reality unacceptable, they are more likely to engage in collective action to express their grievances (Davies 1962). Collective outbursts, including revolutions, are more likely to take place when a period of economic growth is followed by a sharp economic downturn (Huntington 1968). Such downturns and subsequent political upheavals occurred in England (1687-88), the United States (1774-75), Russia (1915-17), and Cuba (1952-53). In this sense, one might imagine that, if rapidly growing economies of Northeast Asia, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and China, encounter significant economic downturns, they would also become vulnerable to social frustration and political instability.

In some cases, material improvement on absolute grounds also can bring with it deprivation on relative grounds. When the gains of rapid economic transformation are concentrated within a few social groups, but the losses are diffused among the many, the number of people that remain, or even become, impoverished in the society might not decrease. The perceived absence of mobility opportunities for young people can sharpen their frustration and resentment. Limited opportunities for income and occupational mobility within society can further contribute to intensifying structural strains. Altogether, perceived inequality, injustice, and immobility can set the stage for a rise in hostile collective behavior.

However, structural strains, per se, are not sufficient to explain a high level of hostile political mobilization. As discussed above, there are variations in collective outbursts among youth across countries despite similar structural strains and challenges. This section identifies three important ingredients that help to explain hostile outbursts of collective action: dysfunctional political institutions, generalized beliefs, and precipitating forces. Our understanding of these factors may enable us to narrow the range of possibilities for political mobilization by jobless youth. This framework by no means dismisses the role of emotions, such as anger, pride, and solidarity, and rational decision-making, which involves the calculation of risk and success, in accounting for hostile outbursts of collective action. Rather, this conceptual framework intends to illuminate the key drivers translating such public sentiments and reasoning into

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12 Conceptually, one can identify three broad categories of possible options: silence, voice, and exit. The option of silence refers to the drift toward passive resignation (self-disrespect, suicide, reliance on religion). The option of voice includes a collective outburst, appeal to political institutions, revolutionary movement, and terrorism. The exit strategy involves immigration and guest worker programs.
hostile collective action.

DYSFUNCTIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS
The first ingredient is related to the degree to which existing political mechanisms can ease grievances among a population suffering from all kinds of strain. A paucity of orderly venues for the expression of grievances, or insufficient policy attention from political elites, can be structurally conducive to the rise of hostile collective behavior. Unresponsive governments or dysfunctional political parties can also pave the way for rising hostile political movements.13 Frustrated young people are more likely to engage in collective behavior when they are unable to find institutional means for remedying their situation, or are unable to expel the persons or agencies responsible for their suffering. Furthermore, collective outbursts from unemployed youth are more likely to occur when those young people lack institutional access to those who could initiate the policy changes that might address that strain. High levels of compassion or political attention focused on youth unemployment and corresponding policy measures can help moderate a sense of dissatisfaction and diminish the inclination for hostile collective behavior.

GENERALIZED BELIEFS ABOUT SITUATIONAL PROBLEMS
The second factor concerns dominant, if not common, beliefs about the primary causes for problems. People under conditions of strain evaluate and explain their situation through generalized beliefs. The development of generalized beliefs often relates to “crafting narratives”; that is, “the act of choosing which facts to use in order to create a story that fits a certain agenda” (Shah 2015).14 Generalized beliefs or a fact-based narrative can influence future events by identifying the causes for problems, who might be responsible, and how to improve the situation.15 As such, generalized beliefs about youth unemployment can bring a number of different grievances together under a single cause or narrative. By oversimplifying or selectively emphasizing or de-emphasizing certain aspects of the unemployment problem, generalized beliefs can help young people recognize a common source for their suffering, or a common social

13 This proposition is in line with the logic of political opportunity theory (Eisinger 1973; Meyer and Minkoff 2004).
14 John Lanchester (2015) wrote, “Everybody in politics now seems to talk about narratives all the time; even political spin-doctors describe their job as being ‘to craft narratives.’ We no longer have debates, we have conflicting narratives.”
15 This point resonates with the logic of framing theory (Gamson 1990; Benford and Snow 2000).
ill. In this vein, generalized beliefs play a significant role in creating community consciousness, or collective identity, for the jobless youth who were previously disconnected from other frustrated young people. This contributes to the gradual development of a “we” mentality in opposition to the leaders deemed responsible for youth unemployment. Conversely, the absence of generalized beliefs, or the presence of conflicting narratives about structural strains, may reduce the likelihood of hostile collective actions.

PRECIPITATING FORCES
Even when combined, dysfunctional institutions and generalized beliefs may not by themselves generate hostile collective behavior among jobless youths. A collective outburst is very likely to be facilitated by a policy accident or mistake resulting from misjudgments by governments that young protesters perceive as being responsible for their suffering. Under conditions of growing youth unemployment, angry outbursts from young people are expected to be precipitated by dramatic political failures, such as the signing of highly unpopular treaties or the implementation of similarly regarded policies. Dramatic political failure may confirm concerns or views about existing problems. It may also exaggerate the conditions of structural strain and the dysfunction in political institutions. These precipitating factors connect generalized beliefs to concrete situations, and thus stimulate mass protest.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: EXPLAINING VARIATION IN THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

DYSFUNCTIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS
South Korea’s presidential election and policy debates in the National Assembly have served as orderly venues for the expression of youth grievances and legitimate channels of unemployment-related agenda setting. As they prepared for the 2012 parliamentary election, both ruling and opposition parties stepped up their efforts to address college students’ grievances about rising tuition fees. The precipitating factor is also related to an important element of protest cycles or waves in which protests diffuse to many sectors of society and becomes widely used as a means to put forward demands (Tarrow 1989; McAdam 1995).
conservative Grand National Party (later the Liberty Korea Party) laid out a plan targeting students from lower-income households, offering discounts for the bottom 50 percent. Opposition parties, led by the Democratic Party, preferred to give subsidies regardless of household income. Since leading presidential candidates were eager to reach out to frustrated young voters, this parliamentary debate started gaining momentum. All of the presidential candidates recognized the campus protests against rising tuition fees by promising to alleviate the financial burden on college students and their parents. Even the conservative candidate Park Geun-hye tried to win support from young voters by saying that her ruling conservative party planned to slash college tuition fees in half. Promises of half-priced college tuition and other policy initiatives suggest that Korea’s political parties are key institutions linking social forces with government. The suffering and resentment of the young thus rose orderly to prominence in Korea’s domestic politics through legitimate channels.\(^9\)

More importantly, both the ruling and opposition parties utilized a parliamentary mechanism to better represent younger demographics, despite political polarization. South Korea’s political parties allocated proportional representative candidacies to young politicians before the 2012 general elections. After an internal vetting process, the conservative ruling party placed 38-year-old Kim Sangmin and 36-year-old Lee Jaeyoung higher up on its list of proportional representative candidates, thus guaranteeing their elections. Similarly, the opposition parties hosted internal primaries to select their young candidates. After an open audition process modeled after the singing contest “Superstar K,” the Democratic Party selected 36-year-old Jang Hana and 32-year-old Kim Kwangjin. These political moves reflect an established political elite attempting to better represent the concerns and preferences of Korean youth through the use of existing political institutions. Although they failed to resolve the problem of youth joblessness, such responsive (or preemptive) measures—an initial step in solving a problem—helped temporarily moderate the desire for hostile collective action among young Koreans. Despite a lack of noticeable improvement in the local job market (i.e. the ruling party’s failure to deliver on its campaign promise), Korea’s electoral politics managed to keep the issue of jobless youth alive and turn it into a subject of policy debates, forcing the government to take into account a new political force—the young—when making

\(^9\) On a related point, the dramatic rise of Ahn Chul-soo, a popular Internet entrepreneur who was critical of the chaebol and concerned about youth unemployment in the Korean political landscape also has to do with his ability to give a hearing to young voters’ anxieties about a sluggish economy, creeping social inequality, and growing youth unemployment.
policy adjustments. The institutional venues for the expression of grievances and sufficient policy attention from political elites—both important functional aspects of representative democracy—managed to decrease the political opportunities for hostile collective actions.

Meanwhile, the dissatisfaction among Taiwanese youth failed to get the same attention during presidential and parliamentary elections in Taiwan. Low levels of political or media attention focused on youth unemployment contributed to heightening the sense of frustration. Many young Taiwanese felt that, as they had no official channel for expression, the existing political system did not represent them. In other words, they held the view that they lacked institutional access to policy makers and institutional power to expel the persons responsible for their suffering. To further complicate the problem, a minor policy measure addressing youth unemployment ended up eroding public confidence in the government. One notable case in point was the 22K program, an employment-boosting initiative introduced in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis that was intended to address declining job prospects for college graduates. Taiwan’s Ministry of Education allocated a special budget to subsidize the monthly salary of interns who were recent college graduates, bringing it up to NT$22,000 (about US$700). Instead of relieving concerns about youth unemployment, however, the program sparked criticism and controversy (China Post 2015). The subsidy not only raised salaries to just slightly over the minimum wage, but also created an incentive for employers to lower pay for new hires. Employers who received government subsidies for 22K interns were also not required to offer any guarantee of employment following the completion of the internship. This policy fumble failed to ease dissatisfaction among young people about the role of the political establishment in Taiwan, and a growing number of young Taiwanese came to believe that their current political leaders should not be deciding their future. Without political power or a medium for expression, they gradually sought to form a protest group (Chen, Liao, Wu, and Hwan 2014). Unlike in the Korean political process, youth unemployment had not emerged as a top priority in Taiwanese parliamentary politics before the Sunflower Movement. Regardless of actual policy outcomes, the low levels of political salience of youth unemployment and limited institutional access to policy makers have increased youth resentment and, subsequently, improved the chances for collective

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18 This point does not mean that the Taiwanese government has made no efforts to tackle labor problems in general. Some legislative initiatives have been launched to address the issues of labor protection in terms of regulating mass dismissal, activating unemployed workers, and strengthening trade unions in social dialogues (Shi 2012). Youth unemployment has nevertheless failed to emerge as a top priority in Taiwanese parliamentary electoral politics.
outbursts in Taiwan.

**GENERALIZED BELIEFS**

One can hardly identify a single culprit in Korea’s blame game over youth unemployment. There is no prevailing narrative about what has caused suffering among Korean youth. Public commentaries have tended to point out numerous reasons, including slowing economic growth, an over-educated population seeking high-value jobs, an inflexible labor environment, and production automation. Despite prevalent terms and rhetoric about the suffering of young Koreans, such as the popularity of such phrases as ‘Hell Joseon’ and ‘Sam-po Generation,’ there continues to be disagreement about the primary causes of youth unemployment and economic hardship. In addition to the absence of generalized beliefs about the problem, South Korea’s conservative media seems to be playing a significant role in pitching the conservative narrative of youth unemployment—that the primary responsibility for youth unemployment lies in the individual, not the social structure. Korean conservatives remain less discontent about the existing rules of the game in the market economy than progressive groups. Conservative media has tended to highlight individual talents and effort as critical factors for job placement through a “don’t blame the government” message. However, in the eyes of progressives, until very recently Korea’s TV media has been dominated by conservative voices since four general cable channels were set up in 2011 to join forces with the three government-run national television networks, KBS, MBC and SBS. Conservative discourses on the responsibility of the individual for youth employment might help moderate youth grievances directed toward the government or ruling party.

In the meantime, there has been an emerging consensus among Taiwanese youth about a possible causal relationship between the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA), a prominent example of China-led economic integration, and youth unemployment. This narrative has emphasized the claim that job or salary prospects for Taiwanese youth have been significantly eroded by the rapid movement of Taiwan’s manufacturing base to Mainland China, at a cost of continued investment and development in domestic industries. From this perspective, high levels of cross-strait economic integration should be critically reviewed and changed if Taiwan is to improve local manufacturing and job opportunities. Accordingly, public opinion surveys indicated a large majority opposed the CSSTA or felt a majority of Taiwanese citizens must consent before it was to be signed.

Growing skepticism about President Ma Yingjeou’s approach to cross-strait economic integration began to appear in late 2012, even in such pro-government
media as the United Daily News, regarded as supporting the pan-blue coalition or pro-Kuomintang, as well as the Liberty Times, regarded as taking a pan-green pro-independence stance and arguing for a more “local” economy, which was more than a year before the Sunflower movement began (Lin 2013). Regardless of the political polarization between pan-blue and pan-green camps that had arisen and been evolving since the early 2000s, editorials in the two leading newspapers both blamed the Ma administration for Taiwan’s economic strain. A growing chorus of nationwide media criticism might have reinforced the emerging belief that rapidly increasing cross-strait economic integration had led to stagnant wages and declining job opportunities for young workers, while greatly benefitting only big business elites. This dominant narrative resonated with the existing opposition in Taiwan to Beijing’s “one country, two systems” formula, which truly has not succeeded in finding its voice in Taiwan. The prevailing view could bring several of the different grievances of frustrated young Taiwanese together under a single cause, namely, anti-CSSTA. This emerging consensus has contributed to the development of a “we” in opposition to those policy makers who are responsible for tackling youth unemployment in Taiwan.

PRECIPITATING FORCES
The presence of precipitating factors also distinguishes South Korea from Taiwan. By remaining vigilant about frustrated youth, the Korean government avoided bringing a bad situation to the brink of crisis through a major policy mistake. Even when the Korean government made policy mistakes, the misbehavior of state authorities was rarely perceived as the source of youth unemployment. For instance, neither the Sewol ferry sinking nor the MERS disease disasters were regarded as related to the causes of youth unemployment and economic difficulties in Korean public discourse. Even recent large-scale protests over the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye were not framed in the context of debate over youth unemployment and suffering. However, Taiwan is a different story. It was the controversy over the lack of transparency in the CSSTA negotiations, and what became known as the “thirty-second” incident, that exacerbated the condition of dysfunctional political institutions and, more importantly, general beliefs about the problems of youth unemployment. As a

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19 On this point, the author has benefitted from multiple interviews with Taiwanese scholars and officials at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., in March 2015 and at the University of Hong Kong in October 2015.

20 Public opinion polls have shown growing anxiety about the possible political repercussions from dependence on, and reunification with, the mainland among not only students, but also the broader Taiwanese public (Romberg 2015).
precipitating factor, this policy accident provided a concrete and immediate focal point towards which collective action could be directed.

In 2013, when Taiwanese media reported that Mainland China and Taiwan would sign the CSSTA, Taiwanese government agencies did not announce any plan for assessment reports concerning the details of the agreement. Skeptics of the agreement were concerned about the treaty’s negative impact on Taiwanese industries and local job markets for the young, while advocates of the treaty argued that increased Chinese investment would boost the economy. The absence of sufficient public consultation provoked an angry response from Taiwanese college students. From the views of student protesters, the Internal Administration Committee co-convener Chang Chingchung violated procedures by calling the review to a conclusion after only thirty seconds.  \(^{21}\)

After Chang’s thirty-second announcement that the CSSTA had already passed, protest leaders began to claim that the Ma administration and the Kuomintang-controlled Legislative Yuan had violated the basic principles and procedures of democracy. Protesters argued that people should “take back their own legislature when it cannot fulfill the responsibilities the public entrusts to it” (Fan fu mao liyuan kangzheng chuandan, n.d.). This remark reflected a heightened sense of the dysfunctional nature of political institutions among Taiwanese youth. An overwhelming majority of participants in the Sunflower Movement were between 20 and 40 years of age, and the protest group was composed of students and educated white-collar employees (Chen, Liao, Wu, and Hwan 2014). The young protesters expressed their concern that rapidly increasing cross-strait economic integration, which would be facilitated by the CSSTA, would keep wages down and decrease local job opportunities for young people. Several sectors of Taiwanese society, such as public employees, industrial workers, and farmers, who shared the same concerns about the harmful effects of the CSSTA on local democracy and the economy, also joined and supported the student-led movement.  \(^{22}\) The policy accident of the CSSTA, which resulted from the misjudgments of the Ma administration, provided an unusual political opportunity that allowed young people to express their resentment and

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21 On 30 March 2013, KMT Committee Chairman Chang Chingchung gave his thirty-second announcement: “Fifty-two are present. Thus, the legally necessary number has been reached. Meeting is commenced. Let us begin discussion. Since it has been three months since the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) was submitted to committee for review, it is viewed as already reviewed according to regulations, and will be sent to the Legislative Yuan general assembly. Meeting is adjourned.”

22 For the causal effect of “China impact” on the public’s support for the student-led movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong, see Hsiao and Wan (2018).
suffering. The precipitating incident also contributed to a rapid expansion and diffusion of mass protests in terms of geographical scale and diversity of social groups in Taiwan.

CONCLUSION

As discussed above, a high youth unemployment rate by itself is not necessarily a determinant of hostile outbursts of collective action. Instead, outbursts can occur in the context of other contributing factors. For a start, the route to political crisis requires dysfunctional political institutions. Institutional dysfunction closes the door to the possibility that the demands of jobless youth will be heard, and that some responsible decision will be taken in turn. When an ineffective political institution combines with a generalized belief about the situational problem, which is then accompanied by a major policy accident, the likelihood of hostile collective outbursts increases. This is not to say that the presence of these factors is sufficient for all types of hostile collective-action movements across time and space. Instead, this study claims that they can illuminate the probability of hostile collective action as part of the political process. Hopefully, this approach can make an initial contribution to theoretically informed empirical work on the contentious politics of youth unemployment in East Asia and beyond in the 21st century.

The findings of this study do not rule out the possibility that small and isolated protests among frustrated young Koreans could be replaced in the future by larger movements with mass appeal in South Korea, or that young jobless Taiwanese could resort to mass protests again. Believing in the promises of policy elites that their patience will soon be rewarded, jobless youth may put up with discontent for a time; however, their infinite patience is little more than wishful thinking. If structural strain continues to haunt the young, without tangible improvements in the local job market, political radicalization may manifest in South Korea and Taiwan. Increasing structural strain may lead to a breaking point that could see young political activists knowledgeable about the issue effectively deploying communications technology to mobilize a public against the government.

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23 The youth unemployment rates of Taiwan and South Korea remain high. Taiwan registered 12.1 percent in 2016, while the rate of unemployed young Koreans reached 11.2 percent in April 2017 (*Taipei Times* 2017; *Korea Daily* 2017).
However, collective action in the form of protests or populist movements is not the death knell for democratic regimes. Even if one cannot find an easy, or one-size-fits-all, solution to the chronic problem of youth unemployment, young protesters in South Korea and Taiwan may prove more system-supportive than system-subversive. Protests can help to provide an effective check on the misbehavior and policy mistakes of state authorities, thereby undergirding rather than undermining democratic political institutions. These young resisters work largely within an existing opportunity structure. As resisters frame their claims with reference to attentive enforcement of existing commitments made by policy elites, they behave in accordance with prevailing norms and rules (O’Brien 1996). They are less likely to utilize unlawful force or engage in other criminal behavior, which has the potential to undermine their position and alienate their supporters.

Another policy implication of this study concerns the growing skepticism among youth about free trade agreements. Growing youth unemployment may further affect the level of political support for future free trade agreements in East Asia and elsewhere. Since the establishment of the FTA roadmap in 2003, for instance, South Korea has actively engaged in FTA negotiations with over fifty countries. While the majority of young Koreans appear to have been supportive of—or at least receptive to—FTAs, the absence of FTA-associated job creation suggests support may be declining over time. Just over half of Korean respondents (53 percent) believe that trade creates jobs, according to the 2014 *Global Attitude Survey* by the Pew Research Center. Growing skepticism about free trade is not limited to Korea. The survey also found that great skepticism about free trade exists in Japan and the United States. Only 10 percent of Japanese and 17 percent of Americans hold the view that trade increases wages. Just 15 percent of Japanese and 20 percent of Americans say it creates jobs.

If the China-Japan-Korea trilateral FTA, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), or other FTAs offer disproportionately large gains to large enterprises and undermine already weak small-medium enterprises (SMEs), this could motivate political action by those potential losers—jobless youth and SME employees—to block free trade policy initiatives. East Asian governments could face strong backlash from FTA skeptics, especially if trade negotiations lack a legitimate procedure for consultation and consensus-building, as in the case of Taiwan’s CSSTA. These emerging veto players could make future FTA formation more difficult and costly.

The future impact of youth unemployment on developed democracies cannot
be determined, so wise policy matters.\textsuperscript{24} The time bomb of youth unemployment will continue to have major repercussions for political and economic development not only in South Korea and Taiwan, but also in other parts of East Asian and the wider world. The contentious politics of youth unemployment has significant implications for peace and prosperity in the region. Policy makers may want to buy time to address the highly complicated and persistent problem of youth unemployment to avoid allowing a bad situation to reach the brink of political crisis. Governments and policy makers have every reason to prevent isolated and small protests from translating into large-scale political uprisings. At the moment, few governments seem to be capable of effectively tackling the structural problems of youth unemployment. Nevertheless, state authorities could manage the potential for hostile collective action by minimizing the combined effects of the three key contributing factors of dysfunctional political institutions, generalized beliefs, and precipitating forces.

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\textsuperscript{24} A detailed discussion of possible solutions to the problem of youth unemployment is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, one can identify several conceptual approaches: conservative approaches, which emphasize “muddling through” without tackling fundamental problems head-on as youth unemployment may be less of a problem in the future due to low birth rates; liberal approaches emphasizing the service industry, with bold deregulation and liberalization; and localist approaches that embrace more flexible international trade regimes reflecting local context and allowing for both growth policy and social policy.
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