DICTATORS AND AUTOCRATS

Securing Power across Global Politics

Edited by Klaus Larres

DICTATORS AND AUTOCRATS

In order to truly understand the emergence, endurance, and legacy of autocracy, this volume of engaging essays explores how autocratic power is acquired, exercised, and transferred or abruptly ended through the careers and politics of influential figures in more than 20 countries and six regions.

The book looks at both traditional "hard" dictators, such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, and more modern "soft" or populist autocrats, who are in the process of transforming once fully democratic countries into autocratic states, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Brazilian leader Jair Bolsonaro, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Narendra Modi in India, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary. The authors touch on a wide range of autocratic and dictatorial figures in the past and present, including present-day autocrats, such as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, military leaders, and democratic leaders with authoritarian aspirations. They analyze the transition of selected autocrats from democratic or benign semi-democratic systems to harsher forms of autocracy, with either quite disastrous or more successful outcomes.

The book is an ideal reader for students and scholars, as well as the general public, interested in international affairs, leadership studies, contemporary history and politics, global studies, security studies, economics, psychology, and behavioral studies.

Klaus Larres is the Richard M Krasno Distinguished Professor of History and International Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He served as Counselor and Senior Policy Adviser at the German Embassy in Beijing, held the Kissinger Chair in International Relations at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and was a fellow at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) – German Institute for International and Security Affairs think tank in Berlin. Among his many publications are the books *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy; Uncertain Allies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Threat of a United Europe;* and *Understanding Global Politics: Actors and Themes in International Affairs* (co-edited).

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DICTATORS AND AUTOCRATS: A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Klaus Larres

Throughout much of human history dictators and autocrats have been in charge of the affairs of many, if not most empires, nation-states and societies. Recent history has been no exception. In fact, dictatorship and autocracy have been a defining characteristic of the precarious new global orders, largely still based on the nation-state, which emerged after both world wars. The rocky and delicate semblance of a new order, which haphazardly materialized, though with some delay, in the aftermath of the Cold War was characterized by the return of old and the arrival of new forms of autocracy, both left- and right-wing ones.[1] In order to truly understand the emergence, nature, endurance, and legacy of autocracy it is crucial, I believe, to explore how autocratic power is acquired, transferred, or terminated as well as exercised and controlled in a significant number of widely dispersed geographical areas.[2]

This is what the essays in this volume set out to do. The 24 experts, who have contributed to this book, focus on how some of the most notorious left- and right-wing autocrats of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries came to power and, not least, how they managed to stay in power for a prolonged period of time and during often highly challenging and tumultuous years. The contributors to this volume thus explore the careers and politics of the most influential dictators and autocrats in almost two dozen countries and six geographical regions (Europe, Asia, Africa, Americas, the Middle East, India).

Structurally, as further detailed later, the book differentiates between traditional "hard" autocrats, such as Stalin, Hitler, and Mao, and more modern "soft" (or populist) autocrats, who have transformed or are in the process of transforming once fully democratic countries into autocratic states.[3] The politics of Hungarian prime minister Orbán, Turkish president Erdoğan, and the respective leaders of Brazil and India, Bolsonaro and Modi, fall into this latter category, as well as perhaps the aspirations of Donald Trump, who largely failed however, during his one-term presidency.

The politics of these leaders and many others – both "hard" and "soft" autocrats – are all explored in the pages of this book.

Dictatorship and autocracy – the concentration of power

Autocracy, according to a straightforward but useful definition, "is characterized by the concentration of power in a single centre, be it an individual dictator or a group of power holders such as a committee or party leadership." The ruling power of this centre "is not subject to effective controls or limited by genuine sanctions: it is absolute power."[4] The notion of absolute power, however, has undergone a significant development from the times of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao to the era of their modern-day successors. In many cases autocratic power has morphed from an effective one-man rule into the rule of an oligarchy made up of people who for political, security/military, tribal, or economic reasons have become loyal followers of the leader in question.

This is clearly the case in Putin's Russia,[5] but also, for instance, in Assad's Syria, and to some extent in bin Salman's Saudi Arabia as well as in Egypt and Thailand, led respectively by military rulers el-Sisi and Prayuth Chan-o-Cha. Total personal loyalty to the autocrat has clearly become dominant among his followers. This has become more important than once essential matters such as expressing strong support for a certain ideology or advocating nationalist or religious sentiments. At the same time, the importance of knowledge and expertise, though never particularly significant for any kind of autocracy, has been brushed aside and become even less decisive than in the past.

Autocratic power, however, remains closely interlinked with a cult of personality and "personalist rule" or what Max Weber has controversially called "charismatic" leadership based on "the extraordinary qualities of the leader."[6] Still, on closer examination, most autocrats do not have particularly impressive personalities. In many cases they are mere thugs and bullies and frequently suffer from overemotional, insecure, indecisive, and aggressive personalities. They are also mostly all male. Most thrive on admiration, glamour, and grandeur and have an impulsive need to exercise firm control and receive constant attention. Philippine autocrat Duterte, Turkey's Erdoğan, North Korea's Kim Jong Un, Saudi Arabia's bin Salman, and also former US president Trump, to name but a few, have all displayed these character traits. Perhaps, Theodor Adorno's influential ideas of nine inherent traits, which together contribute to the making of an "authoritarian personality," are still helpful.[7]

Despite claims to the contrary proclaimed by most of them, these autocrats frequently are unable to offer much in terms of long-lasting bureaucratic efficiency, military accomplishments, or economic productivity gains. In fact, they often clearly lack ability and expertise. Chaos and incompetence and a great deal of corruption result. The activities of Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Kabila in the DR Congo, but also Pinochet in Chile and more recently Assad in Syria, Kim Jong Un in North Korea, bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, and Erdoğan in Turkey, to mention

only some of them, spring to mind in this context. And notwithstanding the rapid development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines in the United States in 2020 (Operation Warp Speed), on the whole the Trump administration's response to the pandemic exhibited "a high level of dysfunction and discord," as the *New York Times* expressed it, which needlessly cost the lives of many hundreds of thousands of people.[8]

The same could be said about the COVID-19 policies of most of the ruling autocrats analyzed in this book, notably Bolsonaro, Modi, Orbán, Khamenei, Duterte, and many others. In particular, the popularity of Bolsonaro, Brazil's far-right autocratic president, plummeted over his mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and his opposition to quarantine and masking measures. "Politics in a dictatorship," Frank Dikötter has reminded us, quoting Mao Zedong's doctor, "begins in the personality of the dictator."[9]

The terms "dictatorship" and "autocracy" are used interchangeably in this book, though not all scholars agree with this, with some preferring the even less specific though more fashionable term "strongmen." In any case, dictatorship and autocracy have mostly remained a "surprisingly fuzzy concept."[10]

Hard and soft autocracy

To overcome the nebulous and ambiguous nature of the concept with regard to autocracy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it is helpful to differentiate between "hard" and "soft" dictatorship models. The former dominated much of the twentieth century, while the latter represents a more recent dictatorship type. It is also often referred to as "populist" leadership, which tends to be a right-wing phenomenon that has become increasingly influential since the early years of the twenty-first century.[11] There is, however, also some overlap between these two autocracy models.

"Hard" autocracy was and is based to a large degree on the use of fear, violence, and the terrorization of the respective countries' population by all sorts of appalling methods and techniques, including kidnapping, prolonged imprisonment, solitary confinement, torture, assassinations, beheadings, and other brutal killings. Twentieth-century "hard" dictatorships also often included the ideological indoctrination of the country in question and its isolation from the outside world. This frequently but not always led to a totalitarian form of autocratic rule. Prime examples are clearly Stalin and Hitler, though even in the Soviet Union and in Nazi Germany not all individualistic space could be extinguished; in particular, Hitler had to enter into many compromises.[12] In our times, the vast growth of the surveillance state in Xi Jinping's China, in Khamenei's Iran, and indeed in North Korea, to name but a few, is pushing their autocratic governments into an increasingly totalitarian direction.

The chapters in this volume illuminate not only the nature of the rule of the "notorious big three" dictators of the modern age (Stalin, Hitler, and Mao) but also enlighten us about twentieth-century "hard" autocrats, such as Castro in Cuba,

Pinochet in Chile, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Congolese leader Joseph Kabila, and János Kádár in Cold War Hungary. The essays dealing with them explore how these ruthless leaders managed to hang on to power for many long years by means of violent autocratic methods, while also skillfully using political means of persuasion, corruption, and more complex "softer" methods of coercion as well as other means to stay in power.

The essays on Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez and Singapore's "authoritarian pragmatist" Lee Kuan Yew[13] make clear, however, that not all autocrats of the twentieth century can be neatly subsumed under the rubric of "hard" autocracy. There is something like an intermediate type of autocracy (a "half-way-house" perhaps), which cannot be pushed into either the "hard" or "soft" category of autocracy while still qualifying as undemocratic rule. This might be considered as a "mild" or somewhat "softer" form of autocracy.

In particular, during the post–Cold War era, and mostly since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a "soft" (or "populist" and mostly far-right) type of autocracy has become an established feature of the way many countries are governed. It is a less violent, less ideological, and a much more bureaucratic and pseudo-democratic type of autocracy that is increasingly dominating our age. The effective use of hyped-up oratory, propaganda, outright lies, the extensive manipulation of the media, a focus on mass electoral campaigns, widespread economic and financial corruption, including a carefully built system of patriarchal patronage, and, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat has demonstrated, virility, masculinity, and misogyny all play important roles.[14]

The rule of these contemporary "soft" autocrats often emerged on the basis of the transformation of their once solid liberal-democratic governments into an increasingly more autocratic state. Orbán and Erdoğan, but also Bolsonaro, Modi, and Duterte, are good examples, as outlined in the respective chapters. They managed to turn their once flourishing democratic states with a free-party political system, a free media, and an independent judiciary into fully fledged or at least semi-fledged autocracies, while carefully maintaining a façade of representative democracy.

In fact, the veneer of observing democratic rules and institutions, such as parliamentary assemblies and regularly held elections, which are in reality neither free nor fair nor equal, provides the appearance of democratic legitimacy. This has become an important criterion for modern-day autocrats of both the "hard" and "soft" variety. Many, if not most, present-day autocrats feel that this helps them to maintain domestic and external credibility. They carefully make sure, however, that neither the elections nor the state's main legal institutions (parliament, the Justice Department, the Courts) are capable of providing effective checks on the power of the state.

Russia's Putin, for instance, continues to hold regular elections at local, regional, and federal levels and pretends that voters have a choice among a number of genuinely independent candidates, which in reality is seldom the case. Not surprisingly, the State Duma, Russia's parliament, is dominated by Putin's United Russia party

and allied parties. Even hard-line Kim Jong Un's North Korea has a Supreme People's Assembly of just under 700 delegates, which however only meets once or twice a year; it was convened in early 2021 for yet another rubberstamping session. In China the National People's Congress meets annually for two weeks and votes on important work reports and major bills proposed by the Chinese leadership. With some 3,000 delegates it is formally the largest parliamentary body in the world. Yet already since the creation of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1949, the delegates' as well as all legislation and progress reports have always been carefully vetted and controlled to avoid any surprise outcomes.

Unlike most "hard" autocracies, "soft" autocratic governments frequently maintain a limited open society and a globally integrated capitalist economic system. They also often enjoy much genuine popularity among a majority or at least a sizable minority of their populations. What plays into the hands of present-day "soft" autocrats and what often enables them in the first place is the emergence of a deeply polarized and divided society, such as in Turkey, Hungary, and Brazil.[15] As the essay on Donald Trump in this volume makes clear, the deep polarization of American society in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008–2012 greatly helped Trump to win the 2016 presidential election, much to his own surprise, and govern his country in an increasingly authoritarian way without losing the goodwill of a large number of American voters. In fact, in the 2020 presidential election he gained 11 million more voters than four years previously (while still losing the election, however).

"Illiberal" democracy, democratic regression, and the China model

The term "illiberal democracy" has become trendy for characterizing this new form of autocracy. It was coined by Fareed Zakaria in 1997 and unwittingly popularized by Hungarian leader Orbán's use of the phrase "illiberal state, a non-liberal state" in a July 2014 election victory speech.[16] The governments led by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Narendra Modi in India, Recep Erdoğan in Turkey, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines also fall in this category, as outlined by the respective essays in this volume. Nevertheless, these leaders are not only admired domestically, but they often also enjoy a significant popularity and a good deal of respect abroad, despite their countries having become deeply flawed democracies, if not autocratic states.[17]

Orbán's claim of not having abandoned liberal democracy in Hungary but of having instead created a new kind of "illiberal" democratic state does not make much sense, however.[18] An autocracy and many other forms of an undemocratic style of government, such as an oligarchy, a tyranny, an aristocracy, or an ochlocracy, always lack a liberal foundation. A genuine representative and constitutional democracy is by necessity always liberal. The term "illiberal democracy" is meant to serve as a euphemism to obscure the fact, as outlined in the chapter on Orbán in this volume, that genuine liberal democracy has been toppled in Hungary. It has been replaced by an autocratic style of government, in spite of the country being a

member of the European Union (EU), a block of 27 deeply integrated democratic nations.

It is commonly agreed, the reader may recall, that the liberal dimension of democracy refers to free elections on the basis of a multiparty system and universal adult suffrage, the separation of powers between the three branches of government (executive, legislature, a fully independent judiciary), a market economy of some sort that allows and protects free enterprise and private property, the rule of law, the protection of civil rights and liberties, the protection of human rights and, of course, free speech and religion and a free media. Liberal democracy also often displays a rich but frequently messy and contradictory political, economic, and cultural life. As Winston Churchill explained during the early Cold War years, democracy is "an appalling muddle, riddled with faults, dangers, unfairness and contradictions" and "no one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise." Democracy, the Briton famously said in November 1947, was in fact "the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."[19]

As many of the essays in the last part of this volume, which deals with ten contemporary autocrats, demonstrate, the "hard"-type autocratic leader is still very much alive and kicking in the twenty-first century. The terrible dictatorships of Iran's supreme leader Khameini, Syrian president Assad, Kim Jong Un in North Korea, Egyptian president el-Sisi, and Saudi Arabian crown prince bin Salman, to name but a few, are nothing if not ruthless and bloody. They have become the true heirs of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao Zedong.

After all, the waves of democratization, which the contemporary world first witnessed in the aftermath of World War II, then from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, and again with renewed vigor in 1989–1991 and in the subsequent years,[20] soon petered out. Francis Fukuyama's belief in the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism and the resulting end of all ideological struggles would turn out to be rather optimistic. President George H.W. Bush's vision of a liberal "new world order" never materialized either.[21] Instead, autocracy managed to reestablish itself in many countries. By 2006 democracy was regressing, in particular, as Larry Diamond has noted, "among the G-20 countries and other most populous and geopolitically weighty countries." This democratic backsliding was mostly, though not exclusively, brought about by means of the "incremental strangulation of democracy by elected (typically populist) executives."[22]

Still, the revelation of serious flaws in Western-style capitalistic democracy has also contributed to this development. For instance, since the Great Recession of 2008–2012, during which Western economic and governmental incompetence could hardly be overlooked, China has tirelessly campaigned for its authoritarian capitalist model of government and development as a global alternative to Western-style liberal democracy and capitalism.[23] Global interest in an alternative "Beijing model" to the West's liberal capitalist democracy flared up again in 2020/21 in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, which at least initially revealed the widespread incompetence and inefficiency of many Western governments, no more so than in the United States and Europe, to contain successfully the spread of the virus.[24]

What "hard" and "soft" autocrats have in common is the basic reality of "the concentration of power in a single centre" and the use of at least some degree (and frequently a significant degree) of force and coercion "to prevent the emergence of [any] opposition," be it parliamentary or extra-parliamentary opposition.[25] Yet most autocrats like to pretend that the coercion of certain inconvenient societal forces is based on the consent of the rest of the population.

The personality cult around the autocratic leader, the strict control of the country's economic and financial resources, the frequent interference in the judicial system as well as the use of violence and terror to suppress opposition forces, or at the very least the threat to employ terror and war, including civil war as al-Assad has demonstrated in Syria, are some of the crucial factors that characterize the politics of dictators and autocrats. These have been their main instruments to maintain power for long periods of time in both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[26]

Taken together, all the essays in this volume provide illuminating accounts of how autocracy has developed in the last 100 years or so and how some of the world's most notorious and influential dictators and autocrats have managed to hang on to power for so long. While many readers may justifiably contend that certain other autocrats should also have been included in this book, space and the specialist expertise available imposed certain limits. Still, I have attempted to represent most geographical regions and locate authors with impressive knowledge of the most influential dictators of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who shaped or are still shaping the contemporary world. Altogether – due to the outstanding quality of the contributors – this book has turned out to be a most enlightening and very readable volume. Readers will gain a quick overview of the main gist of the various articles by consulting the chapter abstracts listed in the next section of this book.

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ABSTRACTS

Part I: The notorious three

1 Joseph Stalin: autocrat par excellence (1878–1953)
Hiroaki Kuromiya

Stalin was the epitome of a modern autocrat. He believed in the Law of History as explained by Marxism and acted accordingly. Certain of the ultimate victory of socialism and the demise of capitalism, he teleologically justified the destruction of everything that stood in the way of the execution of the Law. He believed he was the executioner of historical progress, equated his personal, autocratic power with progress, and exercised his unrestrained power at the cost of millions of lives of Soviet citizens. Largely free of vanity and sentimentality, he was a consummate politician who lived by politics alone. He was a "steely" autocrat who understood human relations well and used his understanding effectively for politics. As a politician, this terroristic autocrat appeared even "charming" to many of his observers. His dictatorial rule was emulated and developed by his followers, and Stalin's impact on world politics is felt even today.

2 Adolf Hitler: from democracy to dictatorship (1889–1945)
Eric Kurlander

Hitler's rise from relative obscurity to arguably the most powerful right-wing autocrat in modern history depended on a combination of four factors: (1) his charisma and oratorical skill; (2) his focus on achieving and maintaining popularity through at least quasi-democratic means; (3) his conviction that a party (state) could only succeed with a hierarchical organization under an undisputed leader (*Führer*); and (4) his ruthless pragmatism, including a willingness to employ violence, but also to compromise when the situation required it. Combined with the specific circumstances, endemic to interwar Germany, an emphasis on these four factors,

incorporating multiple scholarly interpretations, does much to explain Hitler's ability to obtain power and maintain legitimacy for as long and effectively as he did.

3 Mao Zedong: Communist Party dictatorship (1893–1976) Covell F. Meyskens

This chapter analyzes the origins and development of Mao's Communist Party dictatorship. It begins by evaluating Chinese politics in the early twentieth century whose international challenges and domestic divisions served as the historical incubator for Mao's dictatorship and its paternalist proclivities. The chapter then examines how Mao and his colleagues built the party and its socialist objectives into the fabric of Chinese society, giving the party-state the capacity to mobilize as well as restrict national flows of material resources and information, a power that was central to both the durability and disasters of Mao's party dictatorship. This chapter also briefly explores Mao's legacy and the lessons learned from his long rule, including the Communist Party's decision to abandon its revolutionary mission and emphasis on the importance of the class struggle. Mao's huge personality cult was also given up. The latter, however, has recently returned during the Xi Jinping era.

Part II: Pathbreaking autocrats of the twentieth century

4 Fidel Castro: from grassroots dictatorship to Communist autocracy (1926–2016) Lillian Guerra

This essay explains the transformation of Cuba's popular revolutionary state into a Communist autocracy directed by Fidel Castro over the course of the first 20 years of his nearly six-decade rule. Castro's provisional government, which took power in 1959 after the toppling of the Batista regime, became increasingly radical and did its best to undermine the influence and role of civil society. Fidel Castro secretly allied with members of Cuba's historic Communist Party, known as the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). Eliminating the autonomy of the press and liberal freedoms of assembly, speech and protest proved essential to the centralization of power and authority in Castro's hands. Its validity was based on the Cuban citizens' belief that surrendering their own rights was essential to consolidating national sovereignty and blocking US aggression. Loyalty to Fidel Castro and unanimous support for his policies, whatever their goals or content, ultimately enabled the rise of Soviet-style Communism and a security state in which surveillance of oneself and one's neighbors was an essential fact of national life, culture, and Cuban identity.

5 Augusto Pinochet: the emergence of one-man rule in Chile (1915–2006) Patricio Silva

General Augusto Pinochet is undoubtedly among the most well-known and most discredited Latin American dictators of the twentieth century. He ruled Chile for 17 years in an extremely repressive way. Ironically, Pinochet was appointed as chief of

the Army by the socialist President Salvador Allende, only 19 days before the military coup on September 11, 1973. Pinochet was not even among the organizers of the complot. Initially, the military government was intended to be short-lived. However, Pinochet soon managed to impose his will within the ruling Junta as representative of the army and chief of the armed forces. The Pinochet regime proved to be exceptional in terms of its longevity, stability, and capacity and made fundamental changes to local socioeconomic conditions, which have endured to a large extent. Pinochet became a victim of his own attempt to institutionalize his personal rule following the adoption of the 1980 constitution, which enabled the opposition forces to win the 1988 referendum and the 1989 general elections. Pinochet managed to survive politically beyond the end of his dictatorship in 1990, continuing to play a political role in Chile until his death in 2006. His 1998 arrest in London and subsequent corruption revelations had weakened him significantly, however.

6 Robert Mugabe: ruthless authoritarian who preferred democratic clothing (1924–2019) Richard Bourne

Robert Mugabe ruled Zimbabwe from 1980 until his overthrow in 2017 at the age of 93. He demonstrated that a Leninist party system, vicious use of the instruments of repression, and genuine support based on anti-colonialism and opposition to the legacies of White rule could maintain authoritarian power well into the twenty-first century. Western governments were complicit in his vengeance against the Ndebele people in the 1980s, for their eyes were focused on an end to apartheid in South Africa. Mugabe rode out inflation and economic collapse with the aid of China and other long-standing international friendships. There are four factors of special significance that enabled Mugabe to rule for such a long time: the role of liberation movements; the ability to amass power while retaining a façade of democracy; the potency of regional and international alliances; and his relationship with the instruments of force, especially the military. His authoritarian system and human rights abuse, however, have survived his bloodless overthrow by his former colleague Emmerson Mnangagwa.

7 Joseph Kabila: the "Raïs" of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (born 1971) Charles Tshimanga

This chapter focuses on former president Joseph Kabila, who led the Democratic Republic of the Congo for 18 years, from January 2001 to January 2019. Joseph Kabila succeeded his father Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. When Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his son initially took power, the unarmed opposition held difficult political talks to end the dictatorship of their predecessor Mobutu Sese Seko. Instead of offering a new social contract to the Congolese upon the death of his father in 2000, Joseph Kabila installed his own dictatorship and turned the Congo into a kind of personal property for his enrichment and that of his family. The fortune he was able to accumulate enabled him to set up a system of patronage, which served him as a tool to control the Congolese political

system and maintain his political power beyond the two terms he was allowed to serve as president according to the Congolese constitution.

8 Hugo Chavez: was he an autocrat? (1954–2013) Gabriel Hetland

This chapter reviews the widely held view that Venezuela's Hugo Chávez was an autocrat. The chapter argues that this "autocrat thesis" suffers from three major shortcomings: a fetishization of liberal democracy, selective de-contextualization, and disregard for disconfirming evidence. The chapter proffers an alternative "messy analysis of Chavismo" thesis, which analyzes Chávez's significant achievements and limitations vis-à-vis multiple concepts of democracy. In so doing, this essay points to unresolved tensions in the relationship between liberal and other forms of democracy. While rejecting the view of Chávez as authoritarian, the chapter concludes that Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, developed into an authoritarian leader.

9 Lee Kuan Yew: autocracy, elections, and capitalism (1923–2015) Michael D. Barr

The key to Lee Kuan Yew's autocratic rule was his creation of a hyper-politicized environment in which government permeated every aspect of society through a networked elite that monopolized power. Elections and politics more broadly were not about choosing the government but about soliciting compliance and support for the government's national-capitalist project. Tools of repression were essential but insufficient components of Lee's version of authoritarian rule, since he needed to ensure that both the national elite and the population more broadly would fully engage with his vision for Singapore's future. Lee succeeded in this task and passed on power in 1990, while remaining senior minister and then minister mentor under his two successors until 2011. He also enjoyed a reputation as an internationally respected statesman. Lee had built a hyper-politicized society, wherein his personal power and that of his closest collaborators were institutionalized throughout all aspects of society. Yet the only way to run such a system was to have a hyper-charged politician in charge. Perhaps, this methodology makes Lee Kuan Yew the most democratic of autocrats – but it was certainly the key to his success and that of Singapore's unusual marriage of capitalism and authoritarianism.

Part III: Twenty-first-century autocrats: the major powers

10 Vladimir Putin: Russia's neo-patrimonial façade democracy (born 1952) Allen C. Lynch

Vladimir Putin has developed and consolidated a personalist political regime that incorporates every key formal feature of liberal democracy while also virtually eliminating the chance that the Putin network can be removed from power by electoral

means. Putin and his allies have captured the administrative machinery of the Russian state and in the process created a hybrid post-Communist party-state – a "neo-patrimonial façade democracy." The essay argues that the structure and functioning of Putin's system is best understood in terms of the history of one-party political "machines" that have appeared over the past century and a half in nominal democracies in the United States, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and so on. Paradoxically, Russia is freer than ever in its history, but at the same time much of Russia has rejected liberal values as understood in the contemporary West. By cultivating a charismatic traditionalist bond with the Russian people, reinforced by defensible performances in a series of domestic and foreign crises, Putin's position appears unassailable although his bond with the Russian people has become more fragile. Whether this system can long survive Putin himself, however, remains very much to be seen.

11 Xi Jinping: the rise of an authoritarian leader (born 1953) Johnny Erling

China's paramount leader Xi Jinping described his childhood: "Half my time I lived under sunshine, the other half was the opposite." Born "red" he spent his first nine years in the privileged household of his father, the veteran Revolutionary Xi Zhongxun in Beijing. Yet his father was purged in 1962 by Mao Zedong, suffering severe consequences, including lengthy imprisonment. Son Xi had to suffer too. He worked seven years in a remote village until he could come back to Beijing and attend university, shortly after his father was released in 1978. Although supported by his rehabilitated father, it took Xi 25 years to work his way up through a dozen party and governing positions in four provinces. After Xi was made general secretary of the Communist Party in 2012, he was successful in changing the Party Statutes and the State Constitution to accommodate his relentless rise and his one-man rule. A formerly widely unnoticed provincial administrator became China's most authoritarian leader since Mao. Xi is opposed to any liberal political reforms as he believes that he needs to guard against a Soviet-style collapse of China. He wants his nation to become the dominant world power by 2050. He has no identifiable rivals and no likely successor.

12 Narendra Modi: elected authoritarian (born 1950) Ian Hall

Narendra Modi is the most dominant Indian politician of his generation, an authoritarian who exercises obsessive control over his image and whose personal popularity has helped him win two extraordinary election victories. This chapter explores his rise to power, the evolution of his distinctive approach to governance while chief minister of Gujarat, and the manner in which he has retained high levels of public support as prime minister. The essay argues that aside from Modi's commitment and ambition, his use of identity politics and his capacity to tap into popular aspirations as well as his tactical flexibility and remarkable capacity for reinvention help explain his success and his autocratic tendencies.

13 Donald J. Trump: the authoritarian style in American politics (born 1946) Klaus Larres

Throughout his one-term presidency Trump broke many long-standing democratic norms and traditions and, on multiple occasions, skirted legality and moved into unlawful and authoritarian territory. In particular, there were three factors, which turned him into the first autocrat in the White House. They explain why Trump became the only president who was impeached twice by the US House of Representatives. There was, first, Trump's frequent obstruction of justice; it was the basis upon which many of Trump's illegal and autocratic activities as president rested, including some of his foreign policy initiatives. Second, Trump actively courted autocrats abroad and White supremacists at home. Third, there was Trump's adamant refusal to accept Joe Biden's electoral victory in November 2020 and his insistence that he had in fact won the election. These three factors provide clear evidence for Trump's undemocratic leanings and authoritarian presidency. This chapter explores them. But it was in particular the insurrection and storming of the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, which Trump actively incited, that exposed the real nature of his political convictions.

Part IV: Twenty-first-century autocrats: other influential autocrats

14 Ali Hosseini Khamenei: routinizing revolution in Iran (born 1939) Kjetil Selvik

This chapter analyzes how Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei consolidated his rule and the political consequences of his survival strategy. The author argues that Iran's long-serving leader capitalized on the institutional and ideological legacies of his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as on the high potential for repression in revolutionary regimes. Khamenei has invested in nonelected and parallel revolutionary bodies, maintained strong emphasis on the Islamic Revolution's ideology and recruited a new generation of followers to the ruling coalition. This essay outlines the tensions arising from Khamenei's emphasis on the organizational structures, aims, and elite selection mechanisms of the revolution. It also explores the wish of the Iranian population to change the political and economic course of this important Middle Eastern country.

15 The Assad dynasty: quo vadis Damascus? (Hafiz: 1930–2000; Bashar: born 1965) Moshe Ma'oz

After its independence from France in 1946, Syria was dominated by Sunni-Muslim leaders representing the majority population and adopting a parliamentary-democratic system. But since 1949 Syria has experienced many years of instability, including several military coups. The coup in 1970 by Hafiz al-Assad imposed on Syria 50 years of autocratic rule by minority Alawite leaders: Hafiz al-Assad

(1970–2000) and since 2000 his son Bashar. To gain public legitimacy and political stability both leaders introduced socioeconomic reforms and endeavored to create a non-sectarian national community. But they encountered fierce opposition and bloody rebellions by radical and conservative Sunni-Muslims. Bashar al-Assad lost control of most of Syria after the "Arab Spring" uprising in 2011. In response he killed some half a million people and turned more than 11 million Syrians into refugees. On the brink of the collapse of his regime in 2013, Bashar was helped by Shi'te military forces – notably from Iran and Hezbollah. It was Russian airpower – first employed in Syria in September 2015 – which proved absolutely essential for his survival. By 2019/2020 these forces had re-captured most of Syria for Bashar. Iran and Russia are likely to determine the fate of Bashar's autocratic rule and the future of the Assad dynasty.

16 Kim Jong Un: rise to power and leadership style (born 1984) Rachel Minyoung Lee

Due to North Korea's unique power structure centered on the top Kim leader, comprehending the sources of Kim Jong Un's power and his leadership style is crucial to understanding the nature of Kim's regime. Kim Jong Un's greatest claim to succession is his "bloodline of Mt. Paektu," a widely known reference to the Kim family. He started building his credentials in the military as the successor-designate. When Kim Jong Il died in December 2011, Kim Jong Un progressively gained all of his father's titles in the party, state, and military. Kim Jong Un cemented his power in phases through the years, both through the institutions he sat atop and the elaborate propaganda campaigns that built his unique leadership brand. The three meetings with US President Trump in 2018 and 2019 helped him to consolidate his power domestically and gain greater acceptability abroad. Indirectly helped by Trump's outreach to him, Kim also managed to overcome the poor relations with Beijing, which had characterized his rule until then despite the fact that China's support was vital for North Korea's economy.

17 Abdel Fattah el-Sisi: the one and only Egyptian dictator (born 1954) Robert Springborg

Sisi possesses the prototypical dictatorial political persona. That his dictatorship is not simply the product of an inherently dictatorial political system is demonstrated by comparison with his presidential predecessors. Along the dimensions of dictatorial rule – instilling fear and greed, creating an image of toughness leavened by concern for the weak and poor, conspiring against domestic and foreign challengers, and ruling without institutional political constraints such as those embodied in even a single party – Sisi is at the top end of each. None of his presidential predecessors so brutalized the population nor appeared so disdainful of close colleagues. While none was a committed democrat, all had some interest in and commitment to a national political life as evidenced by public debate and institutionalized politics.

Sisi alone has demonstrated a personal contempt for politics in any and all forms, which may be the best indicator of his status as Egypt's sole dictatorial president.

18 Prayuth Chan-o-Cha: from the barracks to the ballot box (born 1954) Pasuth Thothaveesansuk

Other than a brief period of military rule from 2006 to 2007, Thailand enjoyed an unprecedented two decades of civilian democratic rule prior to 2014. It contrasted well with the country's history of Cold War authoritarian regimes. The coup d'état on May 22, 2014, however, put a sharp end to that process of democratization and brought the kingdom under the military rule of General Prayuth Chan-o-Cha. Even after the 2019 election, Thailand remains an autocracy and Prayuth continues in power with a semi-democratic government. This chapter investigates his rise and consolidation of power through cultural, political, and legalistic means. It argues that Prayuth and his regime worked to construct consent and a sense of legitimacy and took advantage of political burnout in Thai society.

19 Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (a.k.a. "MBS"): king in all but name (born 1985) Christopher M. Davidson

This essay seeks to explain Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud's dramatic rise to power over the past five years. It explores the increasingly autocratic-authoritarian nature of his nascent rule. In particular, this chapter assesses his perceived loyalty-boosting measures, including promises of substantial economic reform and greater social liberalization. It also investigates his apparent support from both a powerful neighboring state (the United Arab Emirates) and the Trump administration in the US. MBS's methods are then scrutinized, including his tightening of circles of patronage, his "anti-corruption" crackdowns, the centralization of command over military and security organizations, and the co-option or repression of all forms of local and social media. Finally, in the context of Saudi Arabia's relatively impressive socioeconomic indicators and its status as one of the world's surviving monarchies, the chapter considers the impact of MBS's important changes to Saudi statecraft and authority structures on a number of debates relating to the future of autocracy and authoritarianism.

20 János Kádár and Viktor Orbán: from Communist to post-democratic autocracy in Hungary (Kádár: 1912–1989; Orbán: born 1963) András Bozóki

This chapter compares two leaders who, together, ruled Hungary for more than 50 years during almost the last seven decades of the history of the country. The Communist dictator János Kádár spent 32 years in power (1956–88) as the local

agent of the Soviets. He was successful in navigating between the expectations of the Soviets and the wishes of his own people. The collapse of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe ended his career and he died in 1989. The second leader, the ultranationalist autocrat Viktor Orbán, started as a liberal politician in 1988 and served as Prime Minister of a democratic government (1998–2002). Since he returned to power in 2010, however, he has abused his constitutional majority by systematically hollowing out democracy from inside and creating an authoritarian regime. The character and ruling style of these two nondemocratic leaders can explain many of the present problems of the democratic political culture in Hungary.

21 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: from "illiberal democracy" to electoral authoritarianism (born 1954) Howard Eissenstat

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in 2003 promising an era of liberalization and openness. Rather than governing with a broad coalition, however, he has opted to eke out narrow victories that ensure him continued political control without the burden of reaching out to the opposition. There are three basic components of this success. First, he is a politician of considerable genius, with a remarkable capacity to embody and communicate the hopes and aspirations of millions of Turkish citizens. Second, his government worked assiduously to co-opt and control key institutions. Third, Erdoğan is adept at the politics of division and has been able to capitalize on challenges to his rule in ways that have rallied his base and left the opposition open to repressive measures. Under Erdoğan's rule, Turkey has moved from a flawed, but promising democracy to authoritarianism with shocking speed.

22 Rodrigo Duterte: macho populism and authoritarian practice (born 1945) Nicole Curato and Yvan Ysmael Yonaha

The Philippines have had a habit of electing macho populists since electoral democracy was restored in 1986. This chapter investigates this phenomenon by focusing on the micro political foundations of populism in the Philippines and how populism descends into authoritarian practice. Drawing on sociological and media studies literature, the authors argue that populism is not a unilinear relationship where a populist leader such as Rodrigo Duterte commands the loyalty of a naïve constituency but one that is dynamic and reciprocally constructed in micropolitical and often overlooked ways. This essay outlines that populism in the Philippines is constituted by everyday demands of compassion over competence, indistinction between entertainment and politics, and the politicization of latent anxieties. By understanding the micro politics of populism, the chapter demonstrates how populist performances can result in legitimizing authoritarian practices and corroding democratic cultures.

23 Jair Bolsonaro: beyond the pale, above the fray (born 1955) Andre Pagliarini

Jair Bolsonaro, an insubordinate former army captain, began his political career as a spokesman for the interests of rank-and-file soldiers and policemen. Over a long but undistinguished legislative career, his appeal gradually broadened. He became an avatar of right-wing reaction – homophobic, militaristic, and vehemently against anything and anyone even mildly progressive. But he was largely confined to the political fringe after the return of democracy in the late 1980s. After four consecutive victories for the center-left Workers' Party between 2002 and 2014, economic crises, and a political class ensnared by myriad corruption scandals, many voters were willing to embrace a radical challenge to the post-dictatorial political consensus. This applied to both conservative voters and those millions of otherwise nonideological Brazilians. Bolsonaro, long seen as beyond the pale, appeared above the fray. His obvious incompetence and failure to successfully deal with the COVID-19 crisis, however, undermined his popularity and the downfall of his close political ally, US President Trump, in January 2021 weakened Bolsonaro's unique brand of populism.

PART I

The notorious three

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1

JOSEPH STALIN

Autocrat par excellence (1878–1953)

Hiroaki Kuromiya

Iosif V. Stalin (1878–1953), the Soviet dictator who ruled the Soviet Union for three decades from 1924 to 1953, was a man with no close friends or confidants. He trusted no one. He was a consummate politician who literally lived by politics alone. Politics, he would say, is dirty business, and those who do not wish to dirty their hands should not get involved in politics. It was power that drove him, and power, in his view, had no ethical dimensions. It is not that he was ignorant of human relations; in fact, he demonstrated a savvy knowledge of human behavior. Rather, he simply subordinated everything, including human relations, to his political ends.

Stalin was a believer in Marxism and its Law of History. As a Bolshevik, he deemed counterrevolutionary anyone and anything that impeded the Marxist progress of history. The Soviet Union, the result of the first successful Communist revolution, was ipso facto revolutionary, and its leader and guardian, Stalin himself, was the embodiment of the revolution. Therefore, anyone and anything that stood against him was counterrevolutionary by default and had to be destroyed. To that end, Stalin was unrestrained in his use of political terror. Yet what guided his followers and disarmed his opponents was precisely his resolute and unwavering adherence to the revolutionary cause, profoundly influencing his followers in the twentieth century and beyond.

Stalin's "Charm"

On the surface, Stalin does not look like a sure candidate for top leadership. Unlike his rivals such as Lev D. Trotskii (1879–1940) and Nikolai I. Bukharin (1888–1938), he neither was a good orator nor had the flair of a brilliant intellectual. Born as Iosif Dzugashvili in Georgia in Imperial Russia, he initially followed his mother's wishes and studied in an Orthodox seminary, where he learned Russian,

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the lingua franca of the empire, as a foreign language and always spoke Russian with a heavy accent. Unlike many of his fellow revolutionaries, he did not seek exile abroad and never quite mastered the language of Marxism, German. Instead, he grounded his life and work in the empire itself. He was never a cosmopolitan Marxist but a Marxist deeply rooted in the Russian revolutionary movement: he was keenly aware of his need to be connected to the *narod* (people). Even after the Bolsheviks emerged from underground and took power in 1917, Stalin consciously styled himself not as a man of power aloof from the common people but as a militant leader arisen from among them, appearing in military tunics (not a suit and tie) and leather boots (not dress shoes) and using plain (often vulgar) Russian (instead of "proper" and refined speech). In this respect, Stalin outdid his mentor Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924), the initial leader of the dictatorship of the proletariat, who was almost always dressed like a Western gentleman in a suit and tie.

Stalin grew up in an autocratic Russian Empire in which the feudal system of estates (*sosloviia*) survived until its last days in 1917. In other words, new, modern class differences were complicated and accentuated by old juridical estate differences. The Bolshevik Revolution reflected the violent resentment of the workers (legally still belonging to the peasant estate) and peasants toward the strata enjoying not merely wealth but legal privileges as well. Therefore, when the old regime collapsed, mass violence against these latter groups of people (branded *burzhui*, a pejorative word for "bourgeois") was extraordinarily harsh and extensive.[1] Stalin skillfully used such violent popular energy for his political ends. When it came to charisma, the brilliant Trotskii may have had an advantage over Stalin, but when it came to practical politics, Stalin appealed to the masses far more than did Trotskii. The cult of Stalin did not emerge spontaneously, however. It was created from above only after Stalin's rivals were politically defeated during the five years that followed Lenin's death in 1924.

Popular support was not necessary to gain political power, something Stalin took advantage of from the beginning. By 1924 all illegitimate political sentiments had been driven underground. Moreover, there was no freedom of press, no free elections, and no free opinion polls, making it difficult even for the secret police to gauge the minds of the people. The slightest indication of discontent was dealt with by terror (as will be discussed later). Therefore, Stalin's proletarian posture was more of an appeal to the rank-and-file members of the ruling Communist Party than to the masses of people. Indeed, the party decided everything. It was in the closed, narrow circles of the party that Stalin ultimately emerged victorious after the bitter power struggle following Lenin's death in 1924.

Stalin's victory in the party was evidently in part a result of his single-minded devotion to politics, a trait that would define his path to success as an autocrat. Of course, he did have personal interests in matters other than politics, including women and sex.[2] After his second wife's suicide, however, he had no family life to speak of. According to his daughter Svetlana, who defected to the West after his death, Stalin "hadn't a soul he could talk to."[3] Stalin may have begun his political life as a romantic Georgian nationalist,[4] but he soon turned to Marxism. As a

Marxist revolutionary, Stalin adopted the code name of "Stalin," meaning "man of steel," signifying his steely nerve and will. Indeed, one of his prison cellmates in the prerevolutionary Caucasus remembered Stalin's composure long after the event: while nocturnal executions and the accompanying screams and moans of the condemned strained the nerves of every prisoner, Stalin "slept peacefully or quietly studied Esperanto."[5] With that steely nerve, Stalin carried out his brutal "revolution from above" in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, which diverted enormous resources from consumption to capital accumulation and resulted in the 1932–1933 famine that left millions dead. Karl B. Radek, a repentant Trotskyite-turned-Stalinist, brushed aside any criticism of Stalin in this regard and instead bragged that Stalin's nerves were "like wire ropes."[6]

The Bolsheviks were not put off by Stalin's ruthlessness. They believed in a strong leader. It is likely that Lenin preferred Stalin to Trotskii, who, although ruthless as well, did not lose his sense of humanity. In 1921, Lenin said, "Trotsky is a temperamental man with military experience . . . as for politics, he hasn't got a clue."[7] The following year, Lenin placed Stalin in the position of the general secretary of the Communist Party. Although Stalin insulted Lenin's wife, Nadezhda K. Krupskaia (1869–1939), Lenin nevertheless appears to have trusted Stalin in politics, even praising him as "firm, steel-like [*stal'noi*], and free of any sentimentality."[8] Many believe that toward the end of his life in his final "testament," Lenin changed his mind and called for the removal of Stalin from his position as general secretary on the grounds that he was too rude to be a party leader. Lenin's final "testament," however, is in dispute as a possible forgery.[9] If so, and if Stalin knew that the testament was a forgery in which Krupskaia and Trotskii had played a part, he did not dispute it publicly. He appears to have used it instead to intimidate and manipulate Lenin's widow with the threat of exposure, a tactic he perfected over the years. This would explain why Krupskaia never spoke up when Stalin executed Lenin's closest colleagues in the late 1930s. Krupskaia died in 1939, and Trotskii was assassinated by Stalin's order in 1940. From the start Stalin felt no compunction in eliminating his rivals. As Stalin told Zygmunt Berling, a Polish general, during World War II, "In politics there is, was, and will be no sentimentality."[10]

Perhaps owing to his undeviating obsession with politics, Stalin, unlike his rivals, seems to have been free of intellectual vanity. While they were steeped in Marxist and other relevant literature and yearned for intellectual recognition, Stalin despised such ambitions. A formidable intellect himself, with a self-imposed quota of some several hundred pages of reading a day, he deemed intellectual endeavors inessential to the political struggle.

What Stalin valued was political astuteness. He was a master at knowing when to bide his time and when to strike. He was also an excellent listener, a quality that deeply impressed both his colleagues and interlocutors. While not eloquent, he spoke carefully and clearly after much thought. Unlike his rivals, Stalin did not seem remote to the rank and file. Although people may have admired his rivals for their intellect and elocution, when it came to politics, they looked to Stalin for leadership.

Even when it came to revenge (which Stalin certainly enjoyed, particularly political revenge), there is no evidence that Stalin subordinated politics to his personal feelings. In a conversation with British prime minister Winston Churchill, who insisted that Bulgaria be punished for siding with the Axis powers during World War II, Stalin responded to him:

> "I do not," he [Stalin] said, "wish to give my colleagues a lesson on policy" (Pause). "But if I may say so I do not think policy should be based on considerations of revenge." (Pause, during which we [the British side] wondered what he would say it should be based on; justice, the interests of the masses, the preservation of peace?) "In my opinion," he went on, "policy should be based on the calculation of forces."[11]

Revenge was a valued tool for Stalin, but his focus was always political.

Stalin's calculations extended to his relations with people in general. As his daughter Svetlana noted:

> My father had a very negative view of human beings in general. He would see them as what they are good for, what he could make them do. . . . He was rough and tough: when he saw potential, he would go out of his way to attract it. He could be very charming when he wanted to attract and impress people; he would give them all that they needed so long as they worked for him. . . . He had a staggering capacity to inspire love, tremendous charisma.[12]

Stalin mercilessly discarded those whom he had used when they were no longer useful. Sensing Stalin's proclivity, his secret police often secretly disposed of them on his behalf. Once, however, Stalin cautioned against hastiness: "There is no need to put such people in jail. They carry out the dirty work [for us]."[13]

Indeed, Stalin said repeatedly that politics is a dirty, filthy business. He told Romain Rolland in 1935, for instance, that it was

> better to be out of politics and keep one's hands clean, but we don't have the right to stay out of politics if we want to liberate enslaved people. When you agree to engage in politics, then you do everything not for yourself but only for the state. The state demands that we are pitiless.[14]

In 1948, he gave revealing political advice to a Bulgarian Communist: "You should not be afraid of 'categorical imperative' regarding moral responsibility."[15] A year before he died, Stalin burst out against his secret police chief he suspected was squeamish about torture: "You want to keep your hands clean, do you? You can't. Have you forgotten Lenin ordered Fanny Kaplan to be shot? . . . If you are going to be squeamish, I'll smash your face in."[16]

Many Westerners, including Churchill and the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had met Stalin in person, were simultaneously charmed, awed, and

repelled by him. He was the consummate politician who appeared to be free of human emotions and human vanity and yet able to understand these human qualities very well and to manipulate them for his political ends.

The source of Stalin's power

In his conversation with Romain Rolland in 1935, Stalin openly admitted that he killed people for political purposes. Like all autocrats, Stalin used terror, sometimes with abandon, as was the case with his Great Terror in 1937–1938. During his reign, close to one million people were executed for political reasons, and millions more died in the famine in the 1930s. Further millions filled the Gulag, the Soviet-forced labor camps. The scale of repression was staggering. Between 1930 and 1936, that is, before the Great Terror, for instance, as many as 12 million people were convicted by Soviet courts, tribunals, and nonjudicial organs for various "criminal" offenses.[17] While the vast majority of an estimated 15–16 million people killed in World War II were killed by enemy hands, almost 160,000 Red Army soldiers were executed by Soviet authorities for desertion, insubordination, and cowardice, an extraordinarily high figure (the corresponding figures for Nazi Germany are 15,000 and just one soldier for the United States).[18]

Stalin, like other dictators, could not have ruled the country by terror alone. Stalin's industrial modernization of the Soviet Union created vast opportunities and upward social mobility for younger generations. They were most likely the mainstay of Stalin's power. Ambitious, they benefited from Stalin's rule and believed in the future of their country ("a new, socialist civilization") different from and superior to Western democratic countries depicted in official propaganda as corrupt, decadent, and doomed by history. Stalin captured the minds of these people by almost completely insulating the country from the outside world and thus preventing any comparison of Soviet life with life in advanced capitalist states. He justified a vast diversion of national resources from consumption to capital accumulation in the name of national defense against the hostile capitalist world.

Stalin succeeded, to an extent, in creating Soviet experts (professional cadres) who were loyal to his regime ("Red" and expert).[19] Many foreign observers, including German military experts, were delighted when Stalin killed off the high command of the Red Army in 1937–1938. The Red Army, they believed, had been beheaded and now posed little threat to other powers. Adolf Hitler was puzzled by Stalin's terror and called him "crazy" (*gehirnkrank*, literary "sick in the brain"): "His bloody regime can otherwise not be explained."[20] Other foreign experts reasoned differently: new groups of competent loyal cadres would surely emerge to replace those killed and the terror therefore would be seen not to affect the fighting capacity of the Red Army negatively.[21] Ultimately, whatever tension existed between Stalin and his military commanders during World War II, they worked together far better than did Hitler and his commanders; certainly, there was no political dissent among them. Later, Hitler, when he realized that he had

lost, intimated that after all Stalin had not been crazy. According to his interlocutor, Hitler said on February 14, 1945:

> My disciples have not yet had time to attain their full manhood. I should really have had another twenty years in which to bring this new *élite* to maturity, an *élite* of youth, immersed from infancy in the philosophy of National Socialism. The tragedy for us Germans is that we never have enough time. . . . [A] Germany, cemented by a single faith and National Socialist in body and soul, . . . would have been invincible. . . . We lacked men molded in the shape of our ideal, . . . Our generals and diplomats, with a few, rare exceptions, are men of another age, and their methods of waging war and conducting our foreign policy also belong to an age that is passed.[22]

Hitler's conclusion brought him strikingly close to Stalin's own approach, which Hitler had once found unfathomable. It is possible that he was implicitly admitting that Stalin had accomplished in the Soviet Union what Hitler had failed to do in Germany.

In Stalin's zest to neutralize any internal threat to his power, he had untold numbers killed as German, Polish, and Japanese spies or anti-Stalin conspirators. Although he did not, in fact, believe that those so targeted were all foreign agents,[23] such branding was a political expedient: it helped him mobilize the country and demonize those whom he did not fully trust. His trusted prosecutor Andrey Yanuaryevich Vyshinsky frankly admitted that the Soviet justice system "neutralized" not merely those who had committed crimes but also those "who might commit crimes."[24] Stalin was utterly ruthless and thorough, leaving no stone unturned. It appears that using the Chinese Communist Party Stalin first experimented with his modus operandi of terror in China in the early 1930s when the Chinese Communists were fighting against the Guomindang encirclement. In this he was adhering to the principle of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), following the old Chinese saying "ningke cuo sha yi qian bu ke shi yi ren louwang": it is better to kill 100 people wrongly accused than to allow one guilty person to escape. Mao had killed many in his own ranks as traitors when waging war against the nationalists. Mao's success in defending his forces was duly reported to Moscow.[25]

Some see Stalin's terror as a reflection of the weakness of his rule.[26] There is little evidence for this. Rather, for Stalin terror was a means to further strengthen his power and prevent any potential threat. Stalin used terror to intimidate, frighten, and disarm people into submission. Indeed, in his meeting with Rolland in 1935, Stalin frankly admitted that capital punishment in general was important in order to instill a sense of "terror" even though the Soviet government would not admit to it publicly.[27] Absolute security would have been secured only if he killed everyone off: "no man, no problem." But, then, there would have been no one to support him or fight for him. Such a solution was therefore untenable. His Great Terror is instructive in this regard. He targeted certain groups of people for terror – those whom he deemed politically unreliable: priests, former oppositionists,

dispossessed peasants (kulaks), ethnic Poles, and the like. The police had already compiled large and detailed lists of such individuals numbering in the millions. Stalin did not intend to kill them off completely. Instead, he assigned upper target figures for killing. True, Stalin repeatedly allowed these figures to be surpassed in carrying out his terror operations. Yet if Stalin had meant to ensure unconditional security, such limits would have made little sense. Indeed, when he concluded that the people were sufficiently intimidated and frightened, he put an end to the Great Terror in 1938.

In his unbridled pursuit of power, Stalin ultimately succeeded in gaining what he wanted. However, even he was aware that he had gone too far: he had made mistakes, and "many honest people" had suffered as a result.[28] His right-hand man Vyacheslav M. Molotov (1890–1986), for example, noted in the 1970s, well after Stalin died in 1953, that Stalin "played it safe" in his terror operations (*Stalin perestrakhoval delo*) – that is, Stalin killed more people than was necessary.[29] Lazar M. Kaganovich, one of the most ardent supporters of Stalin who worked as his political troubleshooter, defended Stalin's Great Terror, admitting, however, that Stalin "overdid it" (*peresolil*).[30] Stalin understood the negative impact of the Great Terror and did not repeat a similar operation. In 1944, he admitted that even after 26 years of Soviet rule, it could not be said that 90% of the Soviet population supported his government.[31] When, after World War II, Eastern European Communists were eager to replicate the Soviet experience of the collectivization of agriculture in their own newly Sovietized countries, Stalin cautioned them against dispossessing the kulaks (which had traumatized millions of Soviet peasants): "Don't force anyone [into collective farms]: if they want to [join them], it's fine, if they don't want to, don't force them." Simultaneously, Stalin warned that the East German people "are afraid and silent, but sometimes the silence of such a patient people is more dangerous than open demonstrations."[32] Likewise, Stalin cautioned China in 1946 that in a divided China, where there are no elections, "it is difficult to know what the people think": if the opposition is not represented in the government through elections, it would resort to illegal struggle.[33] In his own sphere, however, Stalin neither allowed contested elections nor ceased to use terror for political purposes.

As noted earlier, the question of how much support Stalin actually enjoyed is a question difficult to answer. Although there has been much argument, no consensus has emerged. Nor is it likely to ever emerge.[34] Some insist that opposition was universal, while others are adamant that the Soviet people were heart and soul dedicated to the regime. Neither is likely true. Dictators know well that nondemocratic politics is not about numbers but about political dynamics. Certainly, Stalin was not overtly concerned about numbers. He believed that his rule was rooted in the perceived strength of his power. This helps explain the paradox that sentiments for and against his rule often grew simultaneously. In 1932–1933, probably the most dangerous years for his rule before World War II, when millions of people were dying from famine, and discontent in the country was palpable, he used brutal terror to overcome it. Sentiment that Stalin as leader was responsible for the famine

grew alongside the contradictory sentiment that Stalin as a leader had had the courage to use his power to overcome the crisis however brutal he may have been. World War II itself reinforced this kind of paradox: those who admired Stalin leading the country to victory and those who questioned his leadership for allowing so many millions of people to die coexisted and reinforced each other.

Stalin's thoroughness in securing his hold on power was not limited to domestic politics. He had seen that war could topple a government, just as World War I had toppled the Tsarist government in 1917. At the same time, 1917 demonstrated that war presented a golden opportunity to spread Communism. Stalin's imperative was for the Soviet Union to avoid war, while simultaneously pitting capitalist countries against each other, which would ultimately exhaust them and allow Communists to take over. Stalin failed in this regard in 1941. His refusal to countenance numerous warnings of Hitler's imminent attack against the Soviet Union almost led to sudden defeat. Stalin rallied and eventually defeated Hitler, who had declared that Bolshevism was his life enemy. Nevertheless, Stalin succeeded in bringing much of Eastern Europe into the Soviet sphere and, in the Far East, in spreading Soviet control over China and North Korea.[35] Unlike Tsar Nicholas II, Stalin did not lose his power in war. Instead, he expanded the Soviet sphere west and east in the wake of World War II.

A significant reason for his success in Eastern Europe and East Asia was his remarkably thorough intelligence apparatus. He established the most comprehensive foreign intelligence network in the world and penetrated the highest levels of the political establishment in Britain, Poland, Japan, the United States, and elsewhere. This meant that his influence on international politics, however clandestine, was considerable. His domestic ruthlessness is paralleled by his international aggression. He considered capitalist countries class enemies and had absolutely no prohibition or qualms in his operations against them. He sent assassination squads (called "mobile groups") abroad to liquidate those who stood in his way and engaged extensively in intrigue and provocations.[36] In the 1930s he engaged in a series of political and military provocations against Japan to ensure that it remain bogged down in China and to turn Tokyo's attention away from the north (against the Soviet Union) toward the south (against British, American, and Dutch interests). Military conflicts between the Soviet Union and Japan in 1938 and 1939 (the battles of Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol, or Nomonhan, respectively) are widely misread in the world as instances of Japan's aggression, thanks largely to Soviet disinformation and propaganda (which Russia continues today). They were almost certainly instances of Soviet provocation in disguise.[37]

Thus, while Stalin failed against Germany in the West in 1941, he was singularly successful in the East: he managed to pit Japan and the United States against each other without actually fighting either. Only when Japan was about to surrender to the Allied Powers in 1945 did Stalin violate the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941 and join the war against Japan. Then, even though Stalin had initiated the war with Japan and committed atrocities against Japanese civilians in Manchuria, he nevertheless took part in the Tokyo War Crime Tribunal and clinched Japan's guilt

in the war at Lake Khasan and Khalkhin Gol, among others.[38] In the postwar years Stalin was equally deceptive. He disingenuously promised Churchill and Roosevelt (and his successor Harry S. Truman) free elections in Poland, then intimidated Polish politicians by arrests and murders, and ultimately falsified the elections to the parliament (*sejm*) to establish Communist rule there.[39]

It is difficult to determine whether the Soviet population during World War II was largely convinced by Stalin's contentions that the Soviet Union was besieged by hostile capitalist countries and in constant danger. Hostile though almost all capitalist countries were to the openly anti-capitalist and atheist Communist state, no country save Nazi Germany actually entertained serious war plans against the Soviet Union. Stalin was able to inflate foreign danger vastly by insulating the country from the outside world and totally monopolizing information. Even those outside the Soviet Union were easily misled by Stalin's camouflage, disinformation, and intelligence operations. The United States under Roosevelt is an important, though often overlooked, example. Roosevelt failed to acknowledge Stalin's responsibility for the famine in 1932–1933, the Great Terror in 1937–1938, and the Katyn massacres (of Polish officers in 1940, later revealed during World War II). That Stalin charmed and misled Roosevelt with his sly sleight of hand from 1933 to 1945 is a blot on American history few Americans wish to acknowledge to this day.[40]

The impact of Stalin's rule on the world

Power is seductive, and powerful men and women attract admirers and sycophants. Stalin had the uncanny ability to identify individuals who were both competent and loyal to him. He charmed them and used them as minions for his political purposes. In turn, they were happy to work for him. Marshall Georgy K. Zhukov (1896–1974), for example, whose mounted statue stands today next to the Kremlin, was a World War II hero. He was similar to Stalin in his attitudes toward human life as expendable for politics. Zhukov was charmed and happy to work for Stalin. He fared well until after the war, when Stalin began to worry about Zhukov's ambitions. Likewise, Karl Radek abandoned Trotskii and aligned himself with Stalin when the latter turned out to be the more determined leader and fighter. In the mid-1930s Radek plainly explained to his Western interlocutor, American diplomat Loy W. Henderson, the essence of Stalin and his government, which Radek loyally served:

> Radek said that in his opinion the old tsarist police were unbelievably stupid. They arrested Bolshevik leaders again and again only eventually to release them or allow them to escape. Bukharin agreed. He said, "Yes, our Stalin was arrested several times yet he lived to destroy the police who had failed to destroy him." Radek continued, "But we Bolsheviks are not so stupid. When we arrest enemies of the state we either execute them or we put them away so that no one ever hears of them again." Bukharin again agreed. Neither one

> of them apparently had any idea that within the next three years Bukharin would be executed and Radek would be sentenced to ten years in prison.[41]

Radek did not fully serve his sentence. In 1940 he was killed in prison by Stalin's order. Apparently, Radek was too talkative in his prison cell.[42]

It is not difficult to imagine that Stalin's autocratic rule mesmerized many of his followers in the Soviet Union and abroad. Stalin himself identified a predecessor in the sixteenth-century Tsar Ivan the Terrible, infamous for his cruelty. After the war, Stalin sought to justify his overarching terror by referring to the failure of Ivan the Terrible to kill off his rival clans, which, according to Stalin, led to Russia's "Time of Troubles" in the early seventeenth century:

> One of Ivan the Terrible's mistakes was that he failed to knife through [*dorezal*] five big feudal families. Had he destroyed these five families, there would have been no Time of Troubles. But Ivan the Terrible executed someone and then he repented and prayed for a long time. God hindered him in this matter. . . . Tsar Ivan should have been even more resolute.[43]

Ironically, one of his followers turned this criticism on Stalin himself. During World War II, China's Communist dictator Mao pledged that he would not repeat Stalin's "mistake":

> Stalin committed a mistake, even a serious mistake, when he subjected to repressions only a part of the delegates to the Seventeenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. He should have repressed *all* of the delegates with a few exceptions. No we won't make such a mistake. We'll go further.[44]

Indeed, in light of the scale of Mao's terror, one may be able to state that Mao did go further than Stalin in his terror. In Mao's case, however, at the present state of scholarship, it is difficult to quantify his terror precisely. Mao seems to have influenced Stalin's thinking about terror, as discussed earlier, and subsequently, Stalin's practice of terror as a political weapon certainly influenced Mao's terror in China. The two Communist leaders had a love-hate relationship but influenced one another in the art of dictatorship. In turn, following both Stalin's and Mao's lead, in the 1970s the Khmer Rouge killed 20% or more of Cambodia's population, far exceeding both previous dictators.

Mao's apparent determination horrified Stalin's successor, Nikita S. Khrushchev (1894–1971), who rejected Stalin's "personality cult" and advocated a new doctrine of "peaceful coexistence" with capitalism. According to Khrushchev, Mao told him in 1957, four years after Stalin's death:

> We shouldn't fear war. We shouldn't be afraid of atomic bombs and missiles. No matter what kind of war breaks out – conventional or thermonuclear – we'll win. As for China, if the imperialists unleash war on us, we may lose

> more than three hundred million people. So what? War is war. The years will pass, and we'll get to work producing more babies than ever before.

Khrushchev added that "the audience was dead silent. No one was prepared for such a speech."[45] Whether Mao meant what he said or merely bluffed in order to criticize what he regarded as Khrushchev's compromise with the capitalist camp, Stalin's influence on Mao was evident.

Stalin believed in the Marxist Law of History, convinced that Communism would ultimately destroy capitalism in the crucible of class war. Stalin's famous concept of "Socialism in One Country" was, as Stephen Kotkin has characterized it, a "Marxist approach to geopolitics" formulated from his own experience of war and revolution. He understood "conflicts and wars between our enemies" as a catalyst for revolution.[46] In his conversation in 1938 with Sheng Shicai (1897–1970), the governor of Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan), who emulated Stalin and carried out his own Great Terror in his domain in the 1930s, Stalin claimed that China's war with Japan was a boon for a divided China: all states became united only through war. Stalin cited the example of Italy and Germany. He added that Russia, too, became united through "endless wars."[47] Ivan the Terrible, he noted, was a tsar who had fought "endless wars." Stalin's victory over Nazi Germany and the subsequent spread of Communism to the East and the West led him to the conclusion that he had been right all along in viewing war as a catalyst for revolution. According to Molotov, Stalin told him that "World War I wrested one country from capitalist slavery; World War II created a socialist system; and the third will finish off imperialism forever."[48]

Stalin has not proven right thus far. Nevertheless, Stalin's influence is felt everywhere in the world. Mao criticized Khrushchev and defended Stalin in spite of what he regarded as the latter's grave mistakes. And, even though he renounced class war for "peaceful existence," Khrushchev continued to follow Stalin's formula and exported war abroad by supporting Third World countries in national liberation movements against capitalist and colonial powers. While nationalism is not always compatible with Communism, Stalin forced Mao to work with the nationalists in China's war with Japan. He supported nationalism as long as it fought against his enemy – the imperialist powers. In other words, Stalin experimented in China, and Khrushchev applied the proven formula to the Third World countries after Stalin's death. The defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War in 1975 was a symbol of Stalin's far-reaching influence in the world.

This success has proved to be short-lived. After the dismal era for capitalism in the 1970s (when progressive forces toyed with the ideas of "Eurocommunism" and "socialism with a human face"), Communism, or its national variant "national communism," came to be overtaken by a resurgent capitalism, and in 1991 the Soviet Union itself collapsed. There is not much of Communism in today's China or Vietnam except for the "Communist" Party dictatorship.

It should be emphasized, however, that Stalin's influence is evident in today's Russia. Stalin was a past master of camouflaged aggression, as seen in his dealings

with Japan in the 1930s. Elsewhere in Asia (in Afghanistan, Mongolia, and China), Stalin carefully concealed his military aggression by deploying Soviet forces dressed as local soldiers.[49] Today, Russian president Vladimir V. Putin has taken a page from Stalin's playbook waging what is today called "hybrid war," disguising his military forces as locals. He did so in the capture of Crimea in 2014 and has been doing so in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Of course, by using social media and other means of mass communication, he injects modern elements into the disinformation operations Stalin employed extensively. However, Putin and other contemporary autocrats operate under conditions different from those under which Stalin worked. While Stalin could control the means of communication, today's autocrats cannot easily control the Internet and the globalization of instant communication. They often have to give press conferences or answer questions from news reporters or even online journalists. Moreover, many contemporary autocrats cannot keep secrets a secret. Perhaps proud of his clever camouflage in Crimea, Putin could not help acknowledging, if belatedly and somewhat cryptically, that in fact Russian special forces captured Crimea in 2014. Stalin neither gave press conferences nor disclosed his secret operations. Modern social media enable the "democratization" of political conspiracies. Had he been alive today, Stalin would have become a master of social media.

Conclusion

Stalin was a dictator, autocrat, and tyrant. No doubt, he created a social basis of political support through a grand transformation of Soviet society. That transformation materially supported his desperate fight against Nazi Germany during World War II. At the same time, using extensive terror and threat, Stalin intimidated the population into submission. While it is impossible to know for sure why the Soviet soldiers fought for Stalin's Soviet Union, it is true that Stalin did not face open popular rebellions against his brutal regime. The Soviet people had no choice but to live on terms dictated by the regime. Stalin was very fond of the famous play by Mikhail A. Bulgakov (1891–1940), *The Days of the Turbins*, which sympathetically depicted the fall of the Turbin family critical of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. Against the criticism of Bulgakov's play by "proletarian" writers, Stalin defended it by saying that *The Days of the Turbins* demonstrated to the reader the "all-conquering power of Bolshevism."[50] In other words, it pleased Stalin by suggesting to the reader the futility of resisting the Bolsheviks.

Stalin was by any standard extraordinarily brutal from first to last. There is reason why Hitler, himself a mass murderer, called Stalin "half beast, half giant": "He is a beast, but he's a beast on the grand scale."[51] Yet Hitler underestimated Stalin. Stalin was keenly perceptive about human relations and manipulated them for political ends. Of course, this cold calculation may be precisely why Stalin looked crazy to Hitler (and many others); yet unlike Hitler, who was prone to anger, vanity, and emotional outbursts, Stalin was calm, composed, and patient, subordinating

everything human to politics. Stalin wielded greater control as a dictator than Hitler; indeed, Stalin beat Hitler in the end.

Stalin and Mao were more alike as autocrats. On the surface they were quite different: Stalin was ascetic, and Mao was hedonistic. Stalin placed everything under tight control, whereas Mao left many loose ends (at least it so appeared to outside observers). Yet both were sharply focused on politics and lived by politics. Moreover, when it came to political terror, they appear to have influenced each other. Both Stalin and Mao ruled their respective countries "successfully," in the sense that they retained their hold on the reins of power until they died. It should be noted that both men ruled countries that were closed to the outside world. Once the countries opened up, their grasp of power became shakier. World War II exposed millions of Soviet citizens to the outside world (soldiers marching to Berlin, forced laborers in Germany, and the like), allowing them to compare their country with European countries. Even within the country, millions of foreign prisoners of war (Germans, Hungarians, Japanese, and others) lived side by side with Soviet citizens. Forbidden foreign ideas and thoughts infiltrated the populace. Communist China's opening to the world in 1972 had a similar outcome. This would have been true even had Mao lived longer and ruled China longer with an iron hand.

Ultimately, Stalin's tight, totalitarian control of Soviet society did not and could not eliminate non-Communist ideas. Even within his narrow circle of confidants, such ideas never died off. Lavrentiy P. Beria (1899–1953), Stalin's secret police chief at the time of his death, would seem to have been an excellent candidate to continue Stalin's rule after his death. Yet Stalin feared his own police chief precisely because Beria was not only competent and ambitious but also indispensable. Well before Stalin's death, Beria appeared to have entertained a fundamental change to the Soviet system, one more compatible with the world powers.[52] Beria moved swiftly on Stalin's death. Stalin's minions feared Beria, arresting and executing him immediately.[53]

Nevertheless, Stalin's totalitarian control influenced those beyond Mao, inspiring Kim Il-sung, Pol Pot, and others. Just as there are still Hitler's followers in the world, so are there Stalin's followers. In this age of the Internet and globalization, however, the Stalinist rule of autocracy is unlikely to be replicated easily unless the ruler, like Kim Jong un of North Korea, isolates the country from the outside world. Unfortunately, this does not exclude the possibility of a new type of autocratic rule in the age of the Internet and globalization.

Notes

1 See, for instance, Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (New York: Viking, 1997).
2 See B.S. Ilizarov, *Tainaia zhizn' Stalina: Po materialam ego biblioteki i arkhiva. K istoriosofii stalinizma*, third ed. (Moscow: Veche, 2004); B.S. Ilizarov, *Memuary materi Stalina. 13 zhenshchin Dzhugashvili* (Moscow: AST, 2013).
3 Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 203.

4 See Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Men: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (New York: Random House, 2004), ch. one; Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).
5 Semen Vereshchak's recollections ("Stalin v tiur'me") in *Dni* (Paris) (January 24, 1928), 2.
6 His account to a Japanese journalist quoted in Katsuji Fuse, "Ukuraina: kikin no shiren," *Tōkyō Nichi Nichi Shibun* (November 13, 1933), 2.
7 V.I. Lenin, *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, ed. Richard Pipes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 124.
8 An un-dated testimony by Lenin's sister: M.I. Ul'ianova, "Ob otnoshenii V.I. Lenina k I.V. Stalinu," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, vol. 12(1989): 197.
9 See Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin, vol. 1: Paradoxes of Power, 1878–1928* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), ch. 11; Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin (Profiles in Power)* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), 59–63.
10 Quoted in Zygmunt Berling, *Wspominienia. T.2: Przeciw 17 Republice* (Warsaw: Polski Dom Wydawniczy Sp. z o.o., 1991), 80.
11 William Goodenough Hayter, *The Kremlin and the Embassy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966), 28.
12 Quoted in Rosamond Richardson, *The Long Shadow: Inside Stalin's Family* (London: Abacus, 1994), 201–202.
13 O.B. Mozokhin (ed.), *Politbiuro i delo Beriia: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2012), 386–367.
14 Quoted in Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 116.
15 See Georgi Dimitrov, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933–1949* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 442. "Categorical imperative" refers to the German philosopher Emmanual Kant's concept of commands and laws that are binding on all humans.
16 Rayfield, *Stalin and His Men*, 434. Fanny Kaplan, accused of attempting to assasinnate Lenin, was executed in 1918.
17 Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror*, tr. Vadim Staklo (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 305–306.
18 See V.N. Zemskov, "Liudskie poteri SSSR v 1941–1945 (k voprosu o stepeni dostovernosti imeiushchikhsia podschetov)," *Trudy Instituta rossiiskoi istorii RAN*, vyp. 14 (2017): 114.
19 See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
20 See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–45: Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 44.
21 See a July 1937 lecture given Etsuo Kōtani, a former Japanese military attaché in Moscow, to an association of diplomatic studies in Tokyo, in *Lubianka: Stalin i Glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937–1938* (Moscow: MFD, 2004), 440–451. This lengthy lecture was recorded, seemingly verbatim, and was reported by a Soviet agent to Stalin.
22 See *The Testament of Adolf Hitler; The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February–April 1945*, ed. François Genoud, tr. from the German by R.H. Stevens and with an intro. H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Cassell, 1961), 59.
23 On this matter, see Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Stalin's Great Terror and International Espionage," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 24/2 (2011): 238–252.
24 See Oleg Troianovskii, *Cherez gody i rasstoianiia: Istoriia odnoi sem'i* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 87.
25 See Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Communism, Violence and Terror," in Silvio Pons and Stephen Smith (eds.), *Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 296.
26 Representative of this point of view is Jörg Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde: Stalins Herrschaft der Gewalt* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck. 2012).
27 Romain Rolland, "Moskovskii dnevnik Romena Rollana," *Voprosy literatury*, vol. 3 (1989): 221–222. See also Romain Rolland, *Cahiers Romain Rolland. 29. Voyage a Moscou (juin–juillet 1935)* (Paris: A. Michel, 1992), 130–131.

28 See Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 126.
29 Feliks Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika F. Chueva* (Moscow: Terra, 1991), 416.
30 Feliks Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich: Ispoved' stalinskogo apostola* (Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992), 35.
31 A.F. Noskova, "Stalin i Pol'sha, 1943–1944 gody: Iz rassekrechennykh dokumentov rossiiskikh arkhivov," *Novaia i noveishaia …istoriia* (2009), 3, 217.
32 "Skostit' polovinu summy reparatsii . . . my mozhem," *Istochnik* (2003), 3, 123–124.
33 "Stalin i Chan Kaishi: Sekretnaia missiia syna Chan Kaishi v Moskvu. Dekabr' 1945 – ianvar' 1946 g.," *Novaia i novesihaia istoriia* (1996), 4, 123–124.
34 See Hiroaki Kuromiya, "How Do We Know What the People Thought Under Stalin?" in Timo Vihavainen (ed.), *Sovetskaia vlast' – narodnaia vlast'? Ocherki istorii vospriiatiia sovetskoi vlasti v SSSR* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2003), 30–49.
35 Outer Mongolia (Mongolian People's Republic) had become the first Soviet satellite state before World War II. In the late 1930s, Stalin insisted that numerous Japanese spies were operating in the Mongolian People's Republic and killed approximately 3% of the population (circa 700,000). See *Ulsyg aiuulaas khamgaalakh baĭguullagyn azhild garch baĭsan aldaa zavkhralyg shalgasan düngiĭn mukhaĭ nuutslagdsan iltgêl* (Ulaanbaatar: Urlakh êrdêm, 2002). This figure of the Mongolian Great Terror ordered by Stalin is extraordinary: It was proportionately the equivalent of 4.5 to 5 million executions in the Soviet Union.
36 This is detailed in A.I. Kolpakidi and D. Prokhorov, *KGB – prikazano likvidirovat': Spetsoperatsii sovetskikh spetssluzhb 1918–1941* (Moscow: Iauza-EKSMO, 2004).
37 Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The Battle of Lake Khasan Reconsidered," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 29/1 (2016): 99–109; Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The Mystery of Nomonhan, 1939," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 24/4 (2011): 659–677.
38 Needless to say, Japan's war crimes and atrocities in China and elsewhere are different matters. For Stalin's dubious role in the Tokyo trial, see Aleksei Kirichenko, "Behind the Scenes at the Tokyo Tribunal, 3 May 1946–12 November 1948," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 22/2 (2009): 253–280.
39 See Nikita V. Petrov, *Po stsenariiu Stalina: Rol' organov NKVD-MGB SSSR v sovetizatsii stran Central'noi i Vostochnoi Evropy, 1945–1953 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), ch. 3.
40 This is superbly analyzed in Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Russia* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).
41 G.W. Baer (ed.), *A Question of Trust: The Origins of U.S.-Soviet Diplomatic Relations. The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 426.
42 See Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 314–315.
43 See G. Mar'iamov (ed.), *Kremlevskii Tsenzor: Stalin smotrit kino* (Moscow: Kinotsentr, 1992), 87.
44 Quoted Iu.M. Galenovich, *Stalin i Mao: dva vozhdia* (Moscow: Vostochnaia kniga, 2009), 71 (emphasis added). This episode refers to the rumor that in 1934, soon after the famine crisis in the Soviet Union, some three hundred of the twelve hundred delegates to the congress voted to remove Stalin from his position. Many of the delegates were subsequently killed by Stalin.
45 Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, ed. and tr. Strobe Talbott (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1974), 255.
46 See Kotkin, *Stalin*, 532, 558.
47 See A.M. Ledovsky et al., *Russko-kitaiksie otnosheniia v XX veke: Materialy i dokumenty. T. 4, ch. 1. Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia, 1937–1944* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2000), 310 (September 2, 1938).
48 Feliks I. Chuev, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, ed. with an intro. and notes Albert Resis (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993), 63.
49 See Vladimir Voronov, *Rassekrecheno: Pravda o ostrykh epizodakh sovetskoi epokhi* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2018), ch. 1.
50 I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 11 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1949), 328.

51 Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941–44: His Private Conversations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 624, 657.
52 See Françoise Thom, *Beria: Le Janus du Kremlin* (Paris: Cerf, 2013). On Stalin's fear of Beriia, see 548.
53 On the likelihood that Beriia was executed immediately after his arrest and that his "trial" was a sham, see Mikhail A. Marusenko and Vadim V. Petrov, "Kriminalisticheskii nalaiz nekotorykh aspektov dela Beriia," Klio (2019), 5, 71–80.

Further reading

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Kotkin, Stephen. *Stalin. Vol. II: Waiting for Hitler, 1929–1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).
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2

ADOLF HITLER

From democracy to dictatorship (1889–1945)

Eric Kurlander

Did Hitler "seize" power? Or did he achieve it through mostly democratic means? Was Hitler a "strong" or "weak" dictator? In presiding over the Nazi dictatorship, what role was played by the "carrot," namely propaganda, economic growth, and plebiscitary government, versus the "stick," including Gestapo surveillance, police terror, and the camps? These are some of the central questions that historians, political scientists, and sociologists have debated regarding the nature of Hitler's dictatorship. I will address these questions by providing, first, a brief analytical framework summarizing the existing historiography. We then take up the central theme of Hitler's so-called seizure of power, weighing the role of violence versus popular (democratic) support as well as the influence of broader social, economic, and political circumstances. Next, we turn to the nature of Hitler's leadership in the Third Reich, examining the interplay of ideology and pragmatism; planning and circumstances; top-down decision-making and bottom-up pressures from important constituencies, including party members and state officials, the army and industry, workers and (lower) middle classes, and the churches. In conclusion, we reflect briefly on how Hitler's rise to power and dictatorship anticipates the ways in which autocracy has developed over the course of the past century, whether in terms of goals, instrumental force, or popular support.

Throughout this analysis, I want to emphasize four factors that help to explain Hitler's rise from relative obscurity to arguably the most powerful right-wing autocrat in modern history: (1) his charisma and oratorical skill; (2) his focus on achieving and maintaining popularity through at least quasi-democratic means; (3) his conviction that a party (state) could only succeed with a hierarchical organization under an undisputed leader (*Führer*); and (4) his ruthless pragmatism, including a willingness not only to employ violence but also to compromise when the situation required it. Combined with specific circumstances endemic to interwar Germany, an emphasis on these four factors, incorporating multiple scholarly interpretations,

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does much to explain Hitler's ability to obtain power and maintain legitimacy for as long and effectively as he did.

Interpreting Hitler's dictatorship

Already during the early years of the Third Reich, there emerged lively debates regarding the reasons for Hitler's rise to power and nature of his dictatorship. According to Marxist intellectuals such as Leon Trotsky, Hitler was a manifestation of "the extreme hopelessness of the bourgeois regime," a vehicle for all the "intermediate and doubtful classes . . . made up of officials, clerks, shopkeepers, tradesmen, peasants."[1] His being named chancellor was merely another step in the transformation of the Weimar Republic into a fascist dictatorship, united by Hitler's "providential mission of fighting Bolshevism" at home and abroad.[2] But even Marxist historians early on recognized the importance of Hitler's political ideology and will in determining the nature of the Nazi dictatorship. Nazism was indeed a form of "totalitarian state capitalism," argued Friedrich Pollock, but a dictatorship in which the "[private] economic sphere" had been replaced by the totalitarian Hitler state, yielding the "primacy of politics over economics."[3] In this respect, Pollock anticipated the arguments of another equally nuanced Marxist historian, Timothy Mason, in the 1970s and 1980s. Mason suggested that Hitler's dictatorship, while initially dependent on the forces of capital, eventually subordinated industrial elites as well as workers to the state in the interest of an imperialist war and racial subjugation.[4]

Another early insight into the nature of Hitler's autocratic rule was made by the Marxist political scientist Franz Neumann. Like Pollock, Neumann agreed that Hitler's dictatorship remained indebted to what he called "totalitarian monopoly capitalism," which, despite increasing state control, remained a vehicle for the profits of private industry. Hitler's power rested not only on the support of conservative capitalist elites, however, but also on "the assertion that the Leader is endowed with qualities lacking in ordinary mortals. Superhuman qualities emanate from him and pervade the state, party, and people."[5] That is, Hitler's dictatorship could never truly be subordinated to "state capitalism" since "a state is characterized by the rule of law." The Third Reich, to the contrary, was based on the "Führer principle [*Führerprinzip*]," in which Hitler presided over the executive, legislative, and the judiciary in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. If Germany before 1933 was a *Rechtsstaat*, a "state of laws," under Hitler it became a non-state of tyranny and injustice, a *Behemoth* to Hobbes' *Leviathan*.[6] This argument finds a parallel in the German-Jewish political scientist Ernst Fraenkel's characterization of the Third Reich as a "dual state," in which a "normative state [*Normenstaat*]" of laws competed with a "prerogative state [*Massnahmenstaat*]" of executive decrees emanating directly from the Führer.[7]

After World War II, these Marxist-inflected interpretations of Hitler's dictatorship were both challenged and extended by liberal and conservative scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. On the one hand, the 1940s and 1950s saw the emergence

of a liberal or *Sonderweg* (special path) interpretation of Nazism, first articulated by British historians such as Lewis Namier and A.J.P. Taylor, who argued that Hitler was a natural consequence of the radical nationalism and illiberalism that characterized modern German sociopolitical development since the nineteenth century.[8] As developed in a somewhat more sophisticated fashion by Fritz Fischer and later Hans-Ulrich Wehler in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Sonderweg* emphasized that Hitler's rise to power and the success of his autocratic rule rested on Germany's belated industrialization and lack of a successful bourgeois revolution (along the lines, at least implicitly, of Great Britain, the United States, or France). The persistence of authoritarian, nationalist, and militarist values among the German middle classes after World War I, these scholars argue, made it possible for conservative elites, such as Chancellor Franz von Papen and President Paul von Hindenburg, to undermine Weimar's democratic institutions and install Hitler as chancellor.[9] A more nuanced version of this argument was put forward by the political scientist, Karl Dietrich Bracher, who, similar to some conservative historians, emphasized the contingency of Hitler's rise to power but acknowledged, similar to many liberal scholars, the importance of a "special [illiberal] German mentality" (*Sonderbewusstsein*) that helped pave the way for Hitler.[10] This emphasis on Hitler's widespread appeal to millions of Germans who shared a romantic longing for (an illiberal) past found much more robust elaboration in Joachim Fest's 1973 biography of Hitler.[11]

Another cluster of interpretations that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, try to explain Hitler's ideology and approach to politics through his "exceptional" character, whether due to his Freudian relationship with his parents (hatred of his abusive father, love of his mother), youthful traumas (mother's death under care of a Jewish doctor, war injuries and blindness after Pasewalk), or sexual perversities and dysfunction (single testicle, erotic obsession with his niece, etc.).[12] The 1950s and 1960s, however, also witnessed the first attempts, exemplified by Allan Bullock's *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* and A.J.P. Taylor's *Origins of the Second World War*, to highlight the role of political opportunism and contingency in explaining Hitler's rise to power and dictatorship, both of which were core elements in what would come to be called the "structural-functionalist" interpretation of the Nazi dictatorship.[13]

Generally opposed to these liberal perspectives on Hitler's dictatorship were some more conservative postwar accounts, most notably by Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke. Rather than blame the exceptionally nationalist, authoritarian, or conservative-aristocratic character of German politics and society, Ritter and Meinecke attributed Hitler's rise to power to an "accident in the works [*Betriebsunfall*]" generated by incredibly adverse circumstances, including a lost war, the Versailles Treaty, and Great Depression.[14] A second generation of conservative scholars, including Ernst Nolte, Klaus Hildebrand, and Andreas Hillgruber, built on these arguments by emphasizing the exceptionally forceful nature of Hitler's personality and the fanatical character of his racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Bolshevik ideology (only the latter of which found widespread resonance among his constituents).[15] Timothy Mason would famously characterize this emphasis on Hitler's

ideology and top-down decision-making as "intentionalism" in order to distinguish it from an emerging "functionalist" interpretation, typified by Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, emphasizing the role of competing bureaucratic and party institutions, not Hitler's will, in driving decision-making in the Third Reich.[16]

Like earlier Marxist accounts, these "functionalist" interpretations highlighted larger structural forces and a bottom-up approach to explaining Hitler's dictatorship. Also, like earlier Marxist and liberal interpretations, the functionalist interpretation tended to highlight the role of Hitler's opportunism and the importance of competing political and bureaucratic institutions in moving policy forward. But "functionalist" interpretations, with notable exceptions, are somewhat less indebted to material factors than classical Marxist interpretations. They are also rather less focused on long-term continuities between Hitler and earlier German autocrats than most liberal interpretations.[17] Indeed, according to the most ardent proponents of this "functionalist" approach, such as Broszat, Mommsen, and Edward Petersen, important policies, including the Holocaust, were primarily the result of "polycratic" competition over power and authority between party and state bureaucracies, conflicts that only rarely got resolved through Hitler's express orders.[18]

Since the 1980s, we have seen the emergence of a more nuanced or "moderate" functionalist interpretation, represented by scholars such as Ian Kershaw, Christopher Browning, Doris Bergen, and Adam Tooze, all of whom acknowledge the role played by underlying political-institutional competition and socioeconomic circumstances but nonetheless insist that, first, Hitler's ideology continued to inform most every domestic and foreign policy decisions in the Third Reich; second, Hitler's "charismatic authority," his "self-dramatization" as Führer (The Hitler Myth), ensured the stability and popularity of his regime; and, third, no important decisions occurred without his full knowledge and approval.[19] As Ian Kershaw has put it, paraphrasing a contemporary Nazi bureaucrat, both party and state officials tended to "work towards the Führer" as their charismatic leader and final arbiter.[20] If Hitler's "weak" dictatorship (Mommsen) was therefore more dependent than Stalin or Mao's on the willing cooperation of and compromises with various state, party, and economic interests, it was also more genuinely popular due to the "mythic" nature of Hitler's role as charismatic Führer.[21]

Ultimately, it is this middle ground between intentionalism and functionalism, combining the role of Hitler's will and ideology with the complex pressures and competing interests working toward him from below, that informs most recent interpretations of Hitler's dictatorship.[22] In the past two decades, we have in fact begun to see a renewed emphasis on the role of Hitler's intentions (will) and/or ideology, including recent biographies from Volker Ulrich, Peter Longerich, and Thomas Weber – although all three scholars, it should be noted, are careful to highlight the role of opportunism and contingency.[23] Needless to say, in examining Hitler's seizure of power and the nature of his dictatorship – indeed, in evaluating the nature of autocratic rule in other states and times – the rich analytical framework outlined here can be extraordinarily helpful.

Hitler's "seizure of power"

One problem for the *Sonderweg* interpretation mentioned earlier is the circuitous route that Hitler took to power – from the accident of him joining the German Workers' Party in September 1919 to his failed 1923 putsch to his many years in the political wilderness to his only being appointed chancellor on January 30, 1933, more than 13 years after his entry into politics, not to mention the fact that it would take at least another 18 months for Hitler to establish autocratic rule. Compare Hitler's desultory 14-year trajectory in establishing his dictatorship to Mussolini's – whose fascist party was formed the same year as Hitler's (1919) but was already in power three years later (1922) – and one can understand why conservative and to some extent Marxist interpretations that emphasize the decisive role of domestic political and socioeconomic circumstances remain compelling. Like most such debates, the truth is probably somewhere in between. Hitler's dictatorship was a product of broader domestic socioeconomic and political circumstances, on the one hand, and his galvanizing role as party leader, on the other.

Above all, it is important to remember both Weimar's immense political potential and the formidable challenges facing Germany's first experiment in democracy. The devastating social and political consequences of World War I helped fuel a successful Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917–1918 and a fascist revolution in Italy in 1921–1922, despite both countries theoretically belonging to the "winning" side. In the mid- to late-1930s, a robust right-wing authoritarianism came perilously close to asserting itself in France as well, a country that had been governed primarily by republican governments since 1792.

Moreover, unlike republican Italy or France, Germany's first republic was saddled with the unpopular Versailles Treaty, which blamed Germany for the war (Articles 231–235); demanded more than 100 billion marks in reparations; deprived Germany of an air force, navy, or army of more than 100,000 men; and ceded thousands of square miles in territory to France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and Denmark.[24] Hatred of the Versailles Treaty and center-left government that accepted it likewise produced a wave of political assassinations and insurrections during Weimar's first four years, from the left-wing Spartacist Uprising (1919) and right-wing Kapp (1920) and Hitler Putsches (1923) to the assassinations of the left-wing revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Kurt Eisner (1919), and the centrist democrats Matthias Erzberger (1921) and Walter Rathenau (1922).[25]

There were also structural challenges created by the constitution itself. In response to the aforementioned crises, even the center-left "Weimar coalition" that dominated the early years of the Republic frequently invoked Article 48, a codicil in the constitution that permitted the president to govern by emergency decree. Nor was the government helped by the fact that the Weimar constitution permitted dozens of small parties – basically any that could muster 60,000 votes in a given constituency – a seat in the Reichstag, which undermined the president's ability to form and maintain a governing coalition.[26] But other European constitutions, it

should be noted, included similar executive powers and were susceptible to similar challenges. The reality is that Hitler was fortunate enough to become a national figure on the antidemocratic right in an environment of lost war, a despised peace treaty, an economic crisis, and sociopolitical extremism that was arguably worse than most European countries, including those, such as Italy, that abandoned democracy and committed to fascism much earlier than Germany.

We do not have the space here to examine Hitler's early life or young adulthood in detail. According to the psychohistorical interpretations delineated earlier, it is safe to say that he represented a generation of (lower) middle-class Germans and Austrians who felt a profound sense of loss and dislocation due to rapid modernization and war. Hitler was raised a Pan-German nationalist who remained resentful that Austria had been left out of the Second German Reich and was skeptical of the multiculturalism and putative sociocultural degeneracy he associated with the multinational Habsburg Empire.[27] There is nonetheless some debate in regard to when and to what degree fanatical racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Bolshevism began to define the core of his ideology. In recent years, some scholars have argued that the seeds for these ideas were planted not in prewar Vienna, as Hitler argues in *Mein Kampf*, but late in the war or immediate postwar period, in the whirlwind of early Weimar extremism.[28] Whether developed in prewar Vienna, during World War I, or in postwar Munich, by the time Hitler joined the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or Nazi Party (NSDAP), he was convinced that the forces of Communism and capitalism, pacifism and internationalism, were responsible for Germany's problems and that the Jews were the chief progenitor of all such forces.[29]

What separated Hitler from many of his colleagues on the Weimar right was not his ideology but a combination of the four traits mentioned earlier, which helped him deploy his ideology more effectively than other right-wing politicians. It was Hitler's charisma and oratorical genius, for example, that led to him being invited to join the party in September 1919.[30] It was his focus on transforming the party from a bourgeois "whist club" into a populist mass movement, more nationalist than the Socialists and more social(ist) than the nationalists, that helped expand the NSDAP from a few hundred to a few thousand members in the span of a year.[31] By September 1923 a single rally in Nuremberg, headlined by Hitler, would draw 100,000 people.[32]

It was Hitler's recognition of the need for a hierarchical organization under a single Führer that contributed to his resignation in July 1921, upon learning about an insurgency from Munich leaders while he was on a fundraising trip in Berlin. Two days after resigning, Hitler sent a letter to the NSDAP indicating his conditions for rejoining the party, namely that all "local" party branches be made subordinate to the permanent party headquarters in Munich and that Hitler be given "the post of chairman with dictatorial powers."[33] Hitler's resignation may not have been a calculated strategy; he had threatened to resign in the past due to his frustration with intraparty conflict.[34] But the end result was a stronger, more centralized party, with Hitler as undisputed Führer, which is exactly what he had been seeking.[35] Finally, we cannot ignore Hitler's willingness to employ violence,

including his enthusiasm, for example, regarding Nazi party members' physically assaulting a rival Bavarian party leader, Hermann Ballerstedt, in September 1921.[36] Despite serving a brief stint in jail for his role in the proceedings, Hitler ostensibly gloated about the use of violence afterward, noting that "Ballerstedt won't speak any more today."[37]

Certainly, Hitler and other right-wing extremists' efforts to overthrow the Republic through force ultimately proved unsuccessful, none more infamously than Hitler's own November 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. But just as Hitler was willing to employ violence to achieve his ends, he remained a consummate opportunist, willing to change tactics when necessary.[38] Indeed, as Hitler sat in Landsberg prison in 1924, serving a nine-month sentence for his role in the Munich Putsch, the Weimar Republic had begun to stabilize, assisted by a series of currency reforms and American loans. Instead of continuing to hatch half-baked plans for violent revolution, like many other members of the radical, paramilitary right, Hitler therefore used the period of relative political stability from 1924 to 1929 – what the Nazis called the "time of struggle" – to work on his political testament, *Mein Kampf* (1925), and transform the NSDAP into a national movement that could win power at the polls.

Most of the ideas outlined in *Mein Kampf* were a distillation of ideas shared by the völkisch movement since the late nineteenth century. More original were Hitler's theories of political propaganda and mass psychology. Hitler recognized the need to project and manage his message as simply and ubiquitously as possible, rejecting critical engagement with ideas in favor of easily digestible slogans filtered through the clever manipulation of mass media. Hence, the second half of the 1920s would find Hitler and his propaganda chief Goebbels developing strategies to monopolize the public sphere through well-crafted speeches, pamphlets, film clips, and carefully staged events while generally refusing to permit "the Führer" to be challenged, criticized, or countered in public.[39]

The nine months in prison also gave Hitler time to contemplate the "refoundation" of the Nazi Party and a new political strategy. Upon his release, Hitler proceeded to subordinate the rival NSDAP "left" under Gregor Strasser by reorganizing the party into Gau or districts with regional leaders directly subservient to Hitler, punctuated by institutionalizing the Nazi greeting "Heil Hitler."[40] In the second half of the 1920s he also developed new party organizations, such as the Stormtroopers (*Stürmabteilung* or SA), and Protection Staff (*Schutzstaffel* or SS), Hitler Youth, and German Women's Order (from 1931 National Socialist Women's Organization), to bolster the party's physical presence and grassroots reach across Germany.[41] The other important innovation of the "time of struggle" was Hitler's recognition that the party should shift its strategy from competing with the left for the support of urban workers in major metropolitan areas, never a reliable reservoir of fascist votes. Instead, he sought the support of small-town and rural lower middle class, predominantly Protestant voters in the North, Center, and East of Germany, who had lost out in the wake of industrialization and were becoming increasingly disaffected from the traditional middle-class parties.[42]

By the time of the Great Depression, Hitler had won out over the left-wing Strasserites in moving the NSDAP toward becoming a more solidly lower middle class, less overtly "socialist," more consciously rural party. This resulted in the party's disproportionate support among farmers, craftsmen, teachers, and White-collar workers along with a significant minority of urban workers and the upper middle classes.[43] These strategic innovations, deployed through elaborate rallies, short films, airplane tours ("Hitler over Germany"), and torchlit processions, helped the party quadruple its membership to more than 100,000 party members and reach double-digit results in some regional elections.[44]

Hitler's political genius, his organizational ability, and the onset of a recession in 1928–1929 notwithstanding, the NSDAP would have almost certainly remained a second-tier party without the devastating social and economic consequences of the Great Depression. Moreover, the unpopular policies taken by Chancellor Heinrich Brüning's (1930–1932) minority government – some of which later proved sound – did little in the short term to alleviate the crisis. It was in this political context that Hitler's NSDAP experienced its first national electoral breakthrough, to some degree a "protest" vote against Brüning and other "bourgeois" parties that had failed to protect the German middle classes from socioeconomic chaos.[45]

Notably, there is little evidence that Hitler's virulent anti-Semitism or vocal racism played a decisive role in the electoral breakthrough of September 1930. More important was Hitler's fervent opposition to the Weimar system, Versailles Treaty, and Dawes (1924) and Young Plans (1929), which helped refinance but not eliminate German reparation payments, all of which were blamed for Germany's economic crisis. Also crucial was his radical opposition to Communism, which many middle-class Germans feared would soon lead to a Bolshevik revolution along Soviet lines.[46] In this respect, Hitler proved successful at tailoring his message to different groups, capable of portraying the NSDAP as the defenders of capital for the bourgeoisie and as anti-capitalist populists when it came to the lower middle and a minority of the working classes. What tied this paradoxical message together was the Weimar system, ostensibly run by Jews and internationalists, who, Hitler claimed, remained mutually responsible for the evils of capitalism and Communism.[47]

In the wake of these electoral successes, a number of conservative political, military, and business elites began to see Hitler as a potential partner in undermining the left and revising or fully abrogating the Weimar constitution in authoritarian fashion. In the fall of 1931, Hitler, Hermann Goering, and the chief of the Nazi Stormtroopers (SA), Ernst Roehm, met at Bad Harzburg with a number of industrial, aristocratic, and military elites, from the conservative German National People's Party (DNVP) leader Alfred Hugenberg and former Weimar Finance Minister Hjalmar Schacht to Kaiser Wilhelm II's sons and General Walther von Lüttwitz, who helped engineer the Kapp Putsch. Ultimately, Hitler found these "reactionary" elites insufficiently ardent in their commitment to national and social revolution. He was also keenly aware of public opinion, both inside and outside his party,

and desirous of retaining the Nazis' populist energy.[48] Instead of joining the other right-wing parties in a united "front," he, therefore, challenged the conservative President Hindenburg, who had rejected Hitler's initial request to form a government in October 1931, in the March 1932 presidential election. Hitler lost. But the impressive 36.8% of the vote he did receive in the March 1932 presidential election anticipated the 37.8% of the vote the NSDAP won in the July 1932 Reichstag election three months later, when the Nazis became Weimar's largest party by some margin.[49]

Indeed, many conservative elites, led by General Kurt von Schleicher and Bruening's replacement as chancellor, Franz von Papen, saw the NSDAP's growing electoral support as an opportunity to create a more popular basis for (far-)right policies by forming a coalition government with Hitler.[50] On the one hand, Hitler now found himself with an unprecedented opportunity to participate in an openly autocratic government. Papen had proved his antipathies to democracy by reversing the ban on Hitler's SA and SS in June 1932 and dismissing the center-left government of Prussia by an "emergency decree" in July. On the other hand, Hitler still did not trust Papen and knew that he and his conservative allies had little popular support. More importantly, he wanted the chancellorship for himself. With Goering's election as President of the Reichstag in August 1932 and Papen's inability to form a viable parliamentary majority without the NSDAP, Hitler believed Hindenburg would soon approach him hat in hand.[51]

Hitler's decision to trust his instincts and reject anything but the chancellorship was extraordinarily risky politically, and when Hindenburg called new elections ten weeks later, in November 1932, the Nazis lost more than two million votes and 30 seats. These losses, as Goebbels confessed in his diary, might have augured the end of the Nazi movement. As a mass "people's party [*Volkspartei*]" with a contradictory platform – neither wholly subservient to the reactionary forces of capital nor firmly committed to social revolution – the NSDAP remained more dependent on populism and protest than on a coherent ideology. With the modest improvement in the economic situation in Fall 1932, the NSDAP was clearly reaching the limits of its support.[52]

But Hitler stuck to his guns throughout the winter of 1932–1933, unemployment once again increased, and his potential coalition partners proved incapable of finding a sufficiently popular right-wing coalition without him, whether led by von Schleicher or Hitler's NSDAP rival Gregor Strasser.[53] In mid-January 1933 Hitler met successively with Hugenberg, Papen, and Oskar von Hindenburg, on his father's behalf, to discuss a Hitler-led coalition. Hitler's combination of reassuring promises and veiled threats convinced all three to make the case to President Hindenburg for a Hitler-led government. After a few days of negotiations, which included Hitler securing additional cabinet seats for Nazi colleagues, the deal was done. On January 30, 1933, Hitler was offered the chancellorship of the Weimar Republic in a coalition government with the conservative DNVP and three right-wing "independents."[54] The stage was set for Hitler's dictatorship.

Hitler as dictator

As we have seen, Hitler did not "seize power" at the head of a paramilitary insurrection in the way that Mussolini had in 1922 or Hitler himself had intended in his failed putsch of November 1923. He was named chancellor through constitutional means, on the heels of winning and then retaining more seats in the Reichstag than any Weimar party. In becoming chancellor, Hitler provided a conservative, minority government, which had been ruling by executive order for nearly three years, something *approaching* a majority coalition, as required by the Weimar constitution. Nor was there anything inevitable to Hitler's being named chancellor; it was always a contingent matter, almost entirely dependent on the president and the other conservative elites who had been presiding over the gradual dissolution of Weimar democracy for nearly three years. If not for Papen and Hindenburg's antipathies to the left, desire for popular support, and belief that Hitler could be manipulated to their own ends, he would not have achieved power in 1933.[55] In short, without the machinations of conservative elites, Hitler's success as a democratic politician, transforming the NSDAP from a radical right-wing fringe movement into Weimar's largest party, would have likely come to naught.

To be sure, many of the constitutional guardrails that still existed on January 30, 1933, would gradually be dismantled by Hitler over the next few months and years during the process of so-called coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) of party and state. But the creation and perpetuation of Hitler's autocratic rule after 1933 would rely nearly as much on consent as on coercion. If Hitler resorted to arbitrary state violence, he also pursued and institutionalized demagogic populism, including intermittent elections and quasi-democratic plebiscites. If many policies now resulted directly from Führer orders – not so different than the hundreds of emergency decrees that characterized the Weimar Republic – Hitler nonetheless tolerated the persistence of certain legal norms. Instead of immediately abrogating the Weimar constitution, for example, Hitler called new Reichstag elections in March 1933, in which the NSDAP *still* failed to win a majority (although, with the DNVP, they did now have a bare 51% majority). Barely two weeks later he sought and won a two-thirds Reichstag majority in support of a constitutional amendment permitting the Reich government to pass laws without the consent of the legislative (the infamous Enabling Act of March 23, 1933); only the Socialists opposed it.[56]

Hitler's efforts to "coordinate" the party and the state between March 1933 and August 1934, while seeming inexorable in retrospect, were actually quite desultory, more in keeping with the (moderate) functionalist than intentionalist interpretations outlined earlier.[57] Whether it was terrorizing local Socialist offices, eliminating rival youth or labor organizations, or appointing Nazis throughout the state bureaucracy and education system, very little of what occurred in these 18 months was planned in advance, with as much reliance on regional and local initiatives as top-down implementation by Hitler.[58] It is also clear, per the Marxist interpretations above, that Hitler remained self-conscious about preserving the support of bourgeois elites, whether in industry and finance, the churches, the state

bureaucracy, or the army.[59] Hitler may not have fully trusted these conservative institutions, but he certainly recognized the need to ally with them, at least for a time, in order to consolidate his power and rebuild the military.[60]

On the other hand, the Nazi radicals who embraced the revolutionary impulse in National Socialism were not pleased with Hitler's alliance with conservative elites and the bourgeois classes. Hence, Hitler had to make a number of compromises, weaving a path between the radical elements that gave the NSDAP its populist energy and the existing state and private sector elites who retained a substantial grip on power.[61] Thus, Hitler focused less on carrying out a "Nazi revolution" than attacking the revolutionary left, notably the Communists, who were banned after the infamous Reichstag Fire of February 27, 1933; soon thereafter, the coalition government went after the Socialists.[62] Hitler also conciliated big business by breaking up unions, keeping wages down, and offering government contracts for rearmament.[63] He opportunistically tried to co-opt Christianity, notably though a formal treaty (*Reichsconcordat*) with the Vatican and by encouraging the creation of a pro-Nazi Protestant (German) Church.[64] Even insofar as Hitler eliminated preexisting youth organizations and made the Hitler Youth official, the requirement to join the Hitler youth was not approved for another three years.[65]

The left-wing "old fighters" in the party, in particular the SA under Ernst Roehm, initially expressed their frustration by attacking Communist and Socialist party offices and Jewish shops. These frustrations likewise became manifest in implicit and explicit criticisms of the conservative governing coalition and seemingly pro-capitalist course of the regime, including suggestions that the SA should replace the traditional army.[66] By spring 1934, some conservative elites were getting worried, culminating in Franz von Papen's famous Marburg Speech of June 17, 1934. In this speech, which Hitler and Goebbels tried to prevent being reported in print, Papen condemned SA calls for a "second revolution," the loss of civil liberties, Nazi attacks on "intellectualism," and Hitler's refusal to subordinate the party to the state, warning that there was no point in supporting a temporary dictatorship in order to prevent a Marxist revolution only for the NSDAP to carry out a Marxist program by other means.[67]

Although Goebbels and Hitler vilified Papen and his allies vociferously, their immediate response was not to turn against their conservative allies or the military-industrial complex but to overthrow the radical elements in their own party. On June 30, 1934, Hitler ordered the arrests and murders of Roehm, Strasser, and dozens of other SA leaders and left-leaning Nazi radicals, to be carried out by the Gestapo. Remarkably, this night of murder and mayhem, the first and for some time last major instance of officially sanctioned state violence, was generally received positively by the army, the churches, finance, and industry. In fact, after explaining the circumstances behind the June 30 purge to the Reichstag, Hitler received Hindenburg's official stamp of approval for rescuing Germany from a "second revolution."[68]

Hitler's decision to unite the offices of Chancellor and Reich President after Hindenburg's death a few weeks later, in August 1934, was likewise contingent,

at least nominally, on a nationwide plebiscite (there were more than four million "no" votes), after which the army agreed to take an oath to Hitler as commander in chief of the military. That is, in securing his dictatorship, Hitler continued to rely on support from major bourgeois constituencies as well as public opinion, whether cultivated through plebiscitary, propagandist, or welfarist means.[69]

Certainly from August 1934 forward, Hitler's de jure power was enormous, likely stronger than Stalin or Mao's at any point in their dictatorships. As the Nazi jurist Ernst Huber put it, after August 1934 "Führer power is exclusive, all-encompassing, and unlimited; it is sovereign."[70] The question was how he would de facto employ such ample powers. Would he, as the aforementioned "intentionalists" argue, act as a quintessentially "strong" dictator, imposing his will regardless of circumstances or popularity? Or would he, as "functionalists" have contended, continue to preserve his popularity and seek to navigate a path between different interest groups, allowing important constituencies to "work toward" him to resolve conflicts? In this view of the Third Reich as a "polycratic" state, Hitler was merely the ultimate arbiter among many overlapping party and state institutions, rarely exercising his de jure or de facto power as baldly or arbitrarily as Stalin or Mao.[71]

It is important to emphasize that the Third Reich's expansive police apparatus under the Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler, notably Reinhard Heydrich's Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD) and Heinrich Müller's Secret State Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei* or Gestapo), surveilled the population and stamped out most forms of open resistance with impunity.[72] And yet, there were limits to the reach of the police, especially before the outbreak of World War II, whether due to lack of manpower, nominal deference to legalities, or the complexities of the culture of denunciation on which the Nazi terror apparatus relied.[73] There was also Hitler's desire to maintain his popularity through cultivating a feeling of belonging (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and real improvements in employment, wages, and welfare support – all of which rendered efforts at collective resistance, whether from traditional elites or the working classes, ineffective.[74]

Here we must take account of Hitler and Goebbels' efforts to construct the myth of an infallible Führer, carrying out a providential mission to lead Germany to greatness (even if some of his acolytes occasionally got things wrong).[75] We cannot ignore the role of periodic, quasi-democratic plebiscites after 1934 – for example, the obviously rigged but nonetheless popular 1936 plebiscite following the successful remilitarization of the Rhineland.[76] Nor can we dismiss the role of mass organizations, from the Hitler Youth and German Labor Front to the National Socialist Women's League and the military, in inculcating a feeling of national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and loyalty to Hitler.[77]

At least until the late 1930s, when inflation and then the war began to eat into economic recovery and increases in consumption, Hitler's autocratic rule was likewise reinforced by declining unemployment and rising standard of living. Indeed, Hitler's dictatorship benefited from the support of generous welfare programs for workers and families, including government-sponsored health care, family subsidies, and paid vacations. This factor should not be underestimated.[78] Hitler was

intent on maintaining his popularity moreover, not only among his traditional lower middle class, Protestant constituencies, urban professionals, or industry, but also among labor and Catholics, whose ideology and loyalty he consistently questioned. For this reason, he was ready to make compromises, whether with workers, who wanted higher wages and better working conditions; Catholics, who wanted religious autonomy and crucifixes in their schools; or German women, who wanted to return to work and refused to let their Jewish husbands be deported.[79]

With the exception of certain core themes such as the malevolence of the Jews, hatred of Bolshevism, and the need for German "living space," Hitler's ideology was therefore malleable and opportunistic. He often expressed contradictory views depending on what he had just read, with whom he had just met, or the political circumstances. According to some functionalist accounts, Hitler genuinely lacked interest in many aspects of day-to-day policy and legislation. He rarely assembled his cabinet and often charged multiple individuals, sometimes one in a party office and one in a state office, with solving the same problem. For example, Hitler famously appointed his largely unqualified party colleague Hermann Goering as "Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan" in September 1936, giving him enormous power to marshal resources for rearmament, even as he kept on the brilliant liberal economist Hjalmar Schacht as both Reich Finance Minister and President of the Reichsbank, who played a central role in managing the same policies.[80]

One of Hitler's adjutants, Fritz Wiedemann, believed that such confusion was unintentional, the result of Hitler's lackadaisical personality and disinterest in everyday administration.[81] But Otto Dietrich, Hitler's press secretary, has suggested that Hitler's approach to governance, his proclivity for "dual appointments" and overlapping responsibilities ("the greatest confusion that has ever existed in a civilised state"), was not the result of "negligence." It was a conscious effort to "create a tangle of struggles for position and conflicts of authority" in order to undermine "the objective authority of the higher departments of government – so that he could push the authority of his own will to the point of despotic tyranny."[82]

Whether or not it was intentional, Hitler's dictatorship continued to rest on the same popular, plebiscitary, "cult of personality directed solely toward himself" that helped him claim leadership, initially, within his party in the first half of the 1920s; then within the broader völkisch movement in the second half of the 1920s; and finally the chancellorship in the last years of the Weimar Republic.[83] The dualism of party and state, only selectively subsumed under the same officials, such as Goebbels (Party Propaganda Chief and Reich Culture Minister) and Himmler (SS Chief and State Police Chief), helped Hitler maintain his authority. To return to Kershaw's concept of rival party and state actors "working toward" Hitler as charismatic Führer, it becomes clear that his dictatorship relied on both individual agency and structure, on orders from above and efforts from below.

Before concluding it is worth discussing briefly Hitler's role with respect to the two most infamous outcomes of his dictatorship, World War II and the Holocaust. As indicated earlier, many Marxist-inflected interpretations suggest that both events were the inevitable outcome of totalitarian state capitalism incapable of

reproducing itself without genocidal imperialism – that is, without accumulating more territory, resources, and slave labor, on the one hand, and eliminating Judeo-Bolshevist scapegoats, on the other. In this materialist interpretation, Hitler's racist ideology and conscious planning ("intention") become less important in explaining the acquisition of living space, forced labor, and mass murder than the dreadful logic of advanced capitalism and imperialism, as epitomized by German fascism. Marxist explanations of Hitler's foreign policy and wartime decision-making consequently anticipate later structural-functionalist accounts, which tend to see the increasing scope and brutality of the war as a function of institutional competition to obtain resources and (slave) labor to maintain German living standards (morale). In this environment, adequately feeding and housing tens of millions of putatively "inferior" surplus populations in the occupied territories – the Jews in particular, but secondarily Poles, Russians, and other "sub-human" races – became increasingly less of a priority.[84]

On the other hand, we have a long tradition of "intentionalist" and "moderate" functionalist accounts, as noted earlier, which highlight the decisive role of Hitler's ideology and intentions. Hitler was keen on driving forward an increasingly risky foreign policy aimed at acquiring living space in Eastern Europe and, subsequently, embarking on an exclusionary, unnecessarily brutal, and ultimately genocidal regime of occupation, enslavement, and racial engineering.[85] In his efforts to create a Greater German Empire through war and genocide, Hitler's will often did win out over more pragmatic political and socioeconomic considerations. Or, to put it another way, Hitler's racist ideology and fanatical anti-Semitism clearly abetted the plans of Nazi technocrats seeking a pragmatic "solution" to managing scarce resources and putatively "sub-human" populations in the midst of "total war."[86]

Conclusion

In attempting to gauge Hitler's influence on future autocratic regimes, including the ways in which Hitler's dictatorship anticipated certain features that have characterized other "modern" dictatorships, we return to the four characteristics described at the outset. First, Hitler had remarkable charisma and oratorical skill, far superior to most right-wing German and Austrian politicians who otherwise shared his virulently anti-Communist, völkisch, anti-Semitic ideology. This charisma and oratorical skill made Hitler an outstanding propagandist and natural leader, a factor that helps explain many contemporary right- and left-wing authoritarians who emerged in societies with at least (semi-)democratic traditions, including Mussolini, Juan Perón, and Fidel Castro.

Indeed, given Weimar Germany's status as an industrialized liberal democracy, no factor is more essential to Hitler's success than his recognition of the need to achieve and preserve popularity by democratic or at least quasi-democratic (plebiscitary) means. Though preceded in this regard by Napoleon, Bismarck, and Mussolini, among others, Hitler was the first right-wing dictator to transform his party, through (mostly) free and fair elections, from a fringe movement to the largest

party in a modern democracy, achieving nearly 40% of the popular vote. Combined with his clever manipulation of propaganda and mass media, Hitler's success would become a model in this regard for many future autocrats, from Vladimir Putin and Tayyip Erdoğan to Hugo Chávez, who *initially* rose to power as the head of popular (populist) left or right-wing movements via democratic elections.

A third factor in Hitler's success was his conviction that an authoritarian movement could best take and maintain power through a hierarchical organization under a single leader. Despite achieving power by mostly democratic means, Hitler always insisted that democratic praxis, whether in regard to internal party politics or statecraft, was antithetical to creating an effective party organization or authoritarian state, a principle he carried with him into his role as Führer, Chancellor, and Reich President. Finally, the fourth distinctive factor explaining Hitler's success was his ruthless pragmatism. This pragmatism included a willingness to employ violence, even mass, genocidal violence, wherever he deemed it necessary, whether in the Beer Hall Putsch, Night of the Long Knives, T-4 Euthanasia Program, invasion of Poland and the Soviet Union, or the "Final Solution." But Hitler was also ready to compromise to achieve his broader domestic and foreign policy goals, especially when the regime's popularity was at stake. Even if Hitler never abandoned his core ideological preoccupations, he was always flexible in his efforts to realize them.

Hitler's ability to achieve and maintain power in one of the world's most modern industrialized societies, characterized by a robust liberal constitution and (for a time) functional, pluralist democracy, raises a fifth factor, independent of Hitler, that must be taken into account in examining the growth and perpetuation of autocratic regimes: namely, that modern, industrialized societies and the most stable-seeming liberal democracies are far more susceptible to right-wing than left-wing authoritarianism. While left- as well as right-wing dictatorships have emerged in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, in Western and Central Europe as well as North America, only right-wing autocrats have ever achieved – or come close to achieving – power. The recent resurgence in far – or in twenty-first century parlance, "alt(ernative)" – right movements in Europe and North America only reinforces this observation and indicates that the chief threat facing (post-)industrial democracies in a post–Cold War world is not left- but right-wing autocracy, epitomized by Hitler and his twenty-first-century epigones.[87]

Notes

1 Leon Trotsky, *The Militant*, vol. VI/24 (April 29, 1933), 4: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1933/03/guardian.htm.
2 Ibid.
3 C. Fuchs, "The Relevance of Franz L. Neumann's Critical Theory in 2017: 'Anxiety and Politics' in the New Age of Authoritarian Capitalism," *Communication, Capitalism, and Critique*, vol. 15/2 (2017): 637–650, 639.
4 Tim Mason, "The Primacy of Politics: Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany," in Jane Caplan (ed.), *Nazism, Fascism, and the Working Class: Essays by Tim Mason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53–76; W. Carr, "The

Cooperation of Big Business," in Allan Mitchell (ed.), *The Nazi Revolution* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 117–123.

5 Fuchs, "The Relevance of Franz L. Neumann's Critical Theory in 2017," 642.

6 Ibid., 639–640; Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1944).

7 See Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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87 I want to thank Joel Davis and Madison Goff for their help in editing and preparing the manuscript.

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3

MAO ZEDONG

Communist Party dictatorship (1893–1976)

Covell F. Meyskens

Mao Zedong's dictatorship emerged out of the troubled political conditions that China faced in the early twentieth century. Seeking to address both intense imperialist pressures and violent domestic divisions, Chinese elites advocated a paternalistic approach to reuniting the country and strengthening its international standing. While elites in China held different positions on what had to be done, they agreed that an enlightened leadership should oversee the molding of the Chinese people into a more modern, cohesive, and disciplined group that prioritized serving national development and security. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embodied this historical trend with the Marxist-Leninist belief that its mission was to lead China toward Communism. The CCP only gained the state authority to act on this conviction when it established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 after waging decades of war and revolution against the nationalist Guomindang (GMD) of Chiang Kai-shek and the Japanese Empire. This political experience produced an enduring CCP leadership core that took Mao's thought as their guiding doctrine and had shared their formative years running political campaigns that rallied people around defending and improving China and its international stature – popular political desires that carried over into the PRC.

During the Mao era, the CCP repeatedly used campaigns to mobilize resources nationwide, demarcate legitimate political conduct, and suppress politically incorrect activities. The overriding goal of political campaigns was constructing a socialist society led by the industrial proletariat. Conflating itself with the proletariat and austerity with being proletarian, the CCP reorganized society into rural and urban workplaces, channeled resources away from the countryside to urban industry, and curbed consumption to spur heavy industrial growth. The party also classified people as members of a "good" or "bad" political class, and it assigned them to an urban or rural workplace – designations that stuck for decades and influenced people's life chances. Taken together, these measures extended the state's reach into

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local society, while at the same creating a cellular, party-centered structure that made Chinese citizens inclined to treat politics as a local party affair and think of their political position in terms of their party-given political classification.

Mao briefly broke with this cellular structure during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, in which he urged national criticisms of the regime. This loosening of acceptable political practice did not last, as Mao and his colleagues ordered the repression of critics and mobilized the entire nation in the Great Leap Forward, which sought to create a Communist society with higher living standards and give China a secure, leading, international position. When the Leap morphed into a huge famine, CCP leaders shored up their authority by resuscitating the economy and limiting the extraction of rural resources, while also enhancing Mao's personality cult and pushing blame onto localities and the Soviets.

When Mao became concerned that his colleagues' policies were leading to a capitalist revival, he and his supporters reoriented his cult in the Cultural Revolution toward purging the party-state of people who putatively sought to benefit from a state-led capitalist restoration. This political maneuver led to people drawing on Mao's ideas to attack authority figures for a plethora of reasons. Through all the tumult of the Cultural Revolution, Mao, nevertheless, still maintained a monopoly on legitimate violence – a power he exercised to violently pacify factional conflicts. Although this imposition of military authority redirected political affairs back toward more manageable channels, this policy also caused much disenchantment with Mao's leadership. Mao and the party-state's continued domination of national flows of information and material resources, however, ensured that Mao's Communist Party dictatorship lasted until his death in 1976.

Paternalistically making a modern China

To understand how Mao came to head up a Communist Party dictatorship, it is necessary to discuss the turbulent world into which he was born in 1893. Before Mao turned two years old, China's last dynasty – the Qing – lost its position as the top East Asian power in the Sino-Japanese War. In the wake of China's defeat, European powers took advantage of its weakness and carved out spheres of influence. Concerned that the country might soon be wiped off world maps, some Chinese elites argued that China had to follow the way of the world's great powers and establish a new regime whose authority was based on popular sovereignty.[1]

What Chinese elites had in mind was usually not rule by the people but rather rule of the people by enlightened leaders. Prominent turn-of-the-century intellectual, Liang Qichao gave voice to this viewpoint when he called in 1905 on Chinese elites to investigate "the methods followed by other nations . . . select . . . superior points and appropriate them to make up for our own shortcomings."[2] In this way, national leaders could "make a new people" out of China's population that would be better prepared to thrive in the truculent world of modern international affairs.[3] A constitutional monarchy was Liang Qichao's preferred political instrument for constructing a wealthier, stronger, and more internationally competitive China.

Although Liang's dream of a revitalized monarchy was not realized, as the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, his penchant for paternalistic solutions to addressing China's problems endured in the Republic that emerged out of the dynasty's ashes.[4] Most notable in this regard was revolutionary politician Sun Yat-sen. According to Sun, China's problem was that its people were "a sheet of loose sand and so have been invaded by foreign imperialism and oppressed by" great powers. What China needed was for a revolutionary group to fashion China's populace "into an unyielding body," like a firm rock.[5] The fracturing of Republican China into warlord regimes in the 1910s reinforced Sun Yat-sen's resolve that his party – the Guomindang – had to discipline the ways of modernity into the Chinese people.

Sun stated in 1918: "As a schoolboy must have good teachers . . . so the Chinese people . . . must have a farsighted revolutionary government" that instills in them the importance of national loyalty and dedication to constructing a powerful and prosperous China.[6] Only with a more disciplined and obedient citizenry could China overcome internal divisions and regain international prominence. The GMD received support for its nation-building efforts from the Soviet Union in the early 1920s when the GMD only controlled the southern province of Guangdong. Moscow sent advisers to help train its military, teach political mobilization techniques, and transform the GMD into a regimented Leninist party. Soviet representatives also came to assist in founding the CCP in 1921, an event at which Mao was present.[7] During its first few years, the CCP was organizationally weak, ideologically loose, and reliant on the Soviet Union, and so it had to accept Moscow's proposal to form a United Front with the GMD in 1923 to rid China of warlords and imperialists.[8]

While many CCP members were reluctant to ally with the GMD, this partnership provided sustained experience mobilizing workers and peasants and significantly boosted party rolls.[9] When GMD armies militarily took over much of the country in 1927, its new leader Chiang Kai-shek saw the CCP's influence as a threat and made annihilating them into a lifelong objective.[10] Pushed underground, CCP leaders remade the party from an organization that, in Hans van de Ven's words, "was made up of friends who were equals in all respects" into a Marxist-Leninist organization whose central leadership "represented the correct party line and . . . possessed the right to . . . give instructions to . . . members, who were . . . to accept its authority in all areas of life."[11]

Like other Marxist-Leninist parties, the CCP thought that history's ultimate destination was Communism and that its political mission as the revolutionary vanguard was directing society to this final historical phase. Throughout the 1920s, CCP leaders adhered to the Marxist-Leninist view that they should mobilize the industrial proletariat in an urban revolution. Mao famously advocated an alternate revolutionary strategy in 1927, predicting in his report on the Hunan peasant movement that several hundred million Chinese peasants will soon "rise like . . . a force so swift and violent that no power . . . will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation."[12]

Faced with this massive revolutionary force, the CCP had three choices: "To march at their head and lead them. To trail behind them. . . . Or to stand in their way and oppose them."[13]

Mao's analysis of the peasantry shows the dual character of his understanding of its revolutionary power. On the one hand, Mao's comments can be read as a cry for the CCP to shepherd the peasantry's political energies toward socialist revolution.[14] On the other hand, they can be read as a sign of Mao's awareness of how popular forces could exceed the party's direction, a political possibility which Mao would later use to devastating effect during the Cultural Revolution against his fellow party members.[15] However, when Mao wrote about Hunan peasants, he was not yet a top party leader. The party center was still in Shanghai, encouraging urban uprisings.

After several failures, party leaders fled in 1932 to the Jiangxi Soviet where Mao and military commander Zhu De were engaged in rural revolution. New arrivals quickly took over local leadership positions, as they outranked Mao and had Soviet ties and training. Mao, however, elevated his political stature by building the Red Army and successfully waging guerilla war against two GMD annihilation campaigns.[16] In 1934, GMD forces, nevertheless, overwhelmed the Jiangxi Soviet (also often referred to as the internationally unrecognized Chinese-Soviet Republic, set up by Mao and Zhu De in November 1931). The CCP began the Long March – a 6,000-mile trek through harsh landscapes, with the GMD in hot pursuit, to a base area in Yan'an in the northwestern province of Shaanxi.

The Long March had three important consequences for Mao's political rise. First, in Guizhou, a mountainous province in southwest China, the party held the Zunyi conference in which Soviet-trained party members were criticized, and Mao was granted a spot on the CCP's Standing Committee as well as command over the Central Red Army.[17] Second, the Long March's travails inculcated in participants a spartan determination to advance China's socialist revolution with any available resources, a mindset which the CCP would later try to socially engineer into all Chinese citizens. Third, the social bonds forged in the violent crucible of the Long March became the bedrock of elite politics in Mao's China, as participants occupied CCP leadership positions into the 1990s.[18]

The Long March would have probably not been so consequential if the Japanese had not invaded China in 1937. Pushing the GMD into the southwest, Japan's assault opened up a vast rural region for the CCP to build up political power in the name of national defense as well as by helping with rural welfare.[19] Mao's dominance within the CCP, however, was only solidified in the 1942–1944 rectification campaign during which Mao finally rose above Soviet-trained officials. The rectification campaign was also fundamental to establishing Mao's personality cult, as party members were indoctrinated into a worldview that presented Mao's leadership as crucial to besting China's warlords, defeating imperialism, and building a new socialist Chinese society.[20] Another important consequence of the war against Japan for Mao's political ascension was that it seriously weakened the military and economic capabilities of the nation's existing dictator –Chiang Kai-shek and his

party the GMD – which the People's Liberation Army (PLA) defeated in the civil war that erupted after the Japanese Empire collapsed in 1945.[21]

Making China socialist in the 1950s

When the CCP founded the PRC in 1949, it quickly launched a flurry of political campaigns. This practice would define Mao's tenure in power with one campaign coming after the other in quick succession.[22] Campaigns set out the goals of the party-state and charted out which social practices were legitimate and which were marked for rehabilitation or elimination. While some campaigns were local, for instance those targeting ethnic minorities, the party's propaganda apparatus promulgated many national campaigns, delineating what objectives local cadres should concentrate on, where they should allocate resources, what social groups to mobilize, how they should motivate participation, and how to talk about campaign activities. Although the language of campaigns never turned into the sole medium of national communication, it did generate standardized linguistic patterns for official functions and became an integral part of everyday life.[23]

One of the CCP's most momentous rural campaigns was land reform, which lasted from roughly 1946–1952. Rural cadres were instructed to conduct land reform as laid out in Mao's report on the Hunan peasant movement. As Mao stated in this foundational text, revolution was not a refined affair like a "dinner party": it was "an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."[24] In accordance with this idea, local cadres led peasant associations in a wave of terror against landlords and other local powerholders to establish a new political order in which land was distributed more equitably. Through this process, the party also expanded the state's leverage in local society, as land reform's beneficiaries became the party's local representatives.[25] However, the central party set limits on its rural influence. Markets persisted, private ownership remained, and material incentives were still used to stimulate labor productivity. These three conditions all made a wider swath of rural residents amenable to the CCP's new regime.[26]

In urban areas, Mao and the CCP also undertook campaigns to cultivate regime support and assert political control. As in the countryside, physical violence and psychological pressure were regular features of urban campaigns, making it difficult to ascertain whether people were complying with party dictates out of compulsion, their own volition, or some combination of the two. The CCP sought to garner popular backing in cities by initially circumscribing its clout, creating what it called a people's democratic dictatorship under which private ownership continued to exist and the urban bourgeoisie, working class, and peasantry would all contribute to state-led capitalist development.[27] Some urban intellectuals, business people, and former GMD officials viewed the early PRC favorably because their desires to strengthen China's economy and bolster its geopolitical position were echoed in party propaganda.[28] Some overseas Chinese returned to the PRC for similar reasons, while others considered the job opportunities of the emerging party-state as a way to advance their career, like their counterparts within China.[29]

Meanwhile, Mao and other party leaders thought that they knew the historical path that the entire country had to follow. China had to move toward socialism and later Communism and construct a dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1949, the CCP still had at its disposal a very small working class. The party's solution to China's underdevelopment was to paternalistically substitute itself for the proletariat, such that proletarian consciousness, values, and interests were what the CCP leadership said they were, and party leaders determined how to build a proletarian dictatorship.[30] In Mao's view, the CCP should achieve this political objective by adhering to the developmental program presented in Stalin's *Short Course* on how the Soviet Union had rapidly constructed a socialist country, a process that was advanced by Moscow sending technical advisers and machinery and training Chinese in the Soviet Union.[31]

Key to China's transition toward socialism was restructuring its political economy. Private ownership had to be phased out and replaced with public ownership because private property was ideologically linked to the capitalist profit motive, the pursuit of individual interests, and the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, state-run enterprises were by dint of the CCP's administration designated as serving the collective. In line with this political position, the party launched a series of campaigns between 1953 and 1956 that remade urban and rural society into publicly run urban work units and rural collectives, so that their resources could be mobilized for collective goals. Talk of collective aims might seem to suggest the existence of a high degree of socioeconomic equality throughout China. The CCP, however, produced a clear socioeconomic hierarchy

Stratification was based on the Marxist-Leninist idea that the industrial proletariat was the most politically important group in a socialist society, and so the party's dictatorship had to allocate more resources to its development. CCP leaders thus allotted very few resources to the countryside and instead funneled resources, especially grain, away from rural collectives to augment urban industry.[32] In accordance with this favoring of urban areas, the government also instituted a household registration system in which almost everyone was made a member of a specific urban work unit or rural collective.[33] As the CCP prioritized industrial growth, it provided guaranteed rations and welfare to urban workers with permanent positions while the central state told rural collectives to rely on local resources, which resulted in barebones living. Temporary urban workers, likewise, earned lower wages and were deprived of welfare coverage.[34]

Within urban areas, there also existed a hierarchy of work units with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) obtaining more resources than urban collectives and heavy industry gaining more than light, since heavy industrial development was thought to be more valuable for building socialism, partially because of its centrality to national defense.[35] One policy that the party did impose nationally that induced social leveling was limiting resource allocation to so-called non-productive uses. These included consumer industries, housing, and welfare services. The government suppressed investment in these sectors because they took resources from expanding industrial production, which CCP elites conceived of as the top priority

for building China's proletarian dictatorship, and because they equated austerity with proper proletarian conduct.[36]

Meanwhile, in rural areas, the party's attribution of a class status to every person divided society, as people with "good class" backgrounds, namely lower or middle peasants, had better access to party membership, the PLA, and government jobs, whereas people classified as landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, or rotten elements were regularly attacked in struggle sessions and assigned more trying work.[37] Overall, the CCP's division of society into different social groups had one very significant consequence. It brought about the parcellation of society into groups with competing interests, which looked to the party to address their political grievances.

As part of the party's dictatorship, the state also restricted interactions between different work units that were not officially sanctioned. This state-centered system of socialization had a few notable effects for the upholding of the party's dictatorship during Mao's time in power. First, it gave society a honeycomb-like structure in which vertical ties between work units predominated, and horizontal connections were curbed. This setup imparted society with a cellular character in which local cadres either sought to defend their localities from extraction by higher levels of the state or endeavored to make higher-level policies serve local interests. In both cases, the net result was that members of work units tended to have an inward-looking disposition, thinking of politics in local terms and making political demands at the local level.[38]

The CCP, however, did undertake two major campaigns that encouraged Chinese citizens to air discontent with the regime at a national level. The first campaign began after Soviet Premier Nikolai Khrushchev spoke out against Stalin's cult in his 1956 secret speech. Seeing how Khrushchev's criticisms prompted revolts in Eastern Europe, Mao decided to launch the Hundred Flowers Campaign and elicit public complaints about the PRC.[39] When social dissent exceeded Mao's expectations, he initiated the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 to stamp out public criticism, labeling as "rightists" especially intellectuals but also provincial and county cadres, who were dispatched to the impoverished countryside for re-education. This political shift caused many intellectuals and administrators to learn that when the party asked for criticism of its policies, it was best to remain silent and comply with state directives, a social tendency that had disastrous consequences during the Great Leap Forward, started in 1958.[40]

On Mao's troubled road to socialism

The Leap was Mao's attempt to transform China into a Communist utopia whose industrial output would overtake "Britain in fifteen or more years."[41] China did not have the technically trained labor force nor the production, transportation, or communication capacities to economically modernize so quickly. Faced with this developmental predicament, Mao advocated making up for domestic shortages by mobilizing all the nation's resources in a militarized labor-intensive campaign to

increase production and build economic infrastructure, which motivated workers by collective objectives instead of material incentives.[42] In taking this developmental direction, the CCP would not only forge China's own road to socialism, but it would also build on its wartime experience of mass mobilization campaigns during which the party had compensated for a lack of technical expertise and machinery by relying on native methods and local resources.[43]

Mao's elite colleagues carried out the Leap for a variety of reasons, as did the larger society. First, many leaders supported the acceleration of China's transition to Communism. Second, officials competed to exceed production quotas to demonstrate their loyalty to Mao and the Communist project. Third, some officials and citizens were concerned that if they opposed the Leap, then they might be characterized as a "rightist" and punished like during the recent Anti-Rightist Campaign. Fourth, Mao drew on tensions with the GMD and the United States in the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1958 to make the Leap into a matter of not just domestic development but national security. Fifth, urban and rural militias were massively expanded and employed to coerce Chinese citizens into partaking in the Leap. Lastly, the Leap spoke to widespread popular aspirations for China to have higher living standards and become a well-developed country that was internationally influential and recognized for its accomplishments.[44]

In the end, the Leap's results were not at all what Mao intended. Instead of creating a Communist society, the Leap caused a massive famine that killed 30 million people at least and led other CCP leaders to question Mao's capabilities in economic affairs.[45] Beijing blamed economic problems on Moscow, which withdrew technical advisers in 1960, and it shifted responsibility onto natural disasters and local cadres, thereby directing public discontent to outside China's borders while simultaneously making public dissatisfaction into a local affair and placing responsibility on natural phenomena beyond human control.[46]

Public knowledge about the famine was also limited, as the media did not discuss it, and the honeycomb character of Chinese society restrained information flows between urban and rural areas, which suffered much more due to the party's urban bias. Especially worried about how the famine might undermine the morale of the PLA, which principally came from the countryside, the Minister of National Defense Lin Biao initiated a campaign that echoed the Rectification Movement of the 1940s. Troops were required to regularly read Mao's works and reflect on how much China had improved since the CCP had liberated it from Chiang Kai-shek and his American imperialist sponsors. Through this process of historical comparison, soldiers were supposed to acquire a deep commitment to serving Mao and building socialism despite any hardships. This practice was so successful that Mao and his supporters would later extend it to the whole nation in the lead-up to the Cultural Revolution.[47]

In the early 1960s, PRC Chairman Liu Shaoqi and other party leaders were focused on a more pressing matter – engineering an economic revival after the Leap. While living standards remained low, the government was careful to not remove too much grain from the countryside. Household plots were reallowed

after having been eliminated as part of the Leap's push to mobilize all resources – a policy that had left households without the means to grow their own food. Rural markets were also again permitted. Material incentives were reintroduced. Investment in agriculture was raised. Capital investment and accumulation were decreased. There was less emphasis on the political redness of experts, and the party even flirted with the idea of endorsing a rural practice that had emerged as a survival tactic during the Leap – contracting pieces of land to households to fulfill state quotas. This last policy, however, was a political bridge too far for Mao.[48]

If China followed this path, Mao thought that the party would be abandoning its project to make China socialist. The CCP, from Mao's standpoint, had also to push back against the expansion of rural markets that were allowing new rural elites to form that were more concerned about profits and individual interests than the party's proletarian collective objectives. To check these tendencies, Mao launched the Socialist Education Campaign in 1962 because he was worried that China was backtracking from a socialist country into a capitalist nation. Outside work teams were brought in to lead struggles against local cadres who were accused of colluding with rich peasants to enrich themselves. Charged with leading this initiative was Liu Shaoqi, who worked against Mao's efforts to mobilize the masses against local cadres, because Liu was concerned that rural clashes might derail China's post-Leap economic recovery.

Mao was so dissatisfied with Liu Shaoqi's actions that he accused him of being among the people "in positions of authority within the Party" who were taking a capitalist road.[49] The idea of "capitalist-roaders" in the CCP leadership came out of China's struggles with the Soviet Union over the direction of international socialism in the early 1960s. While Soviet Premier Khrushchev sought to reduce tensions with Washington, Mao depicted China as the new leader of international socialism, and he called for revolutionary wars in the decolonizing world. Mao also claimed that a privileged bureaucratic stratum had come to power in the Soviet Union that was in favor of restoring capitalist inequalities. Concerned that similar political tendencies were developing in the PRC, Mao intensified his criticisms of CCP elites, who allegedly were attempting to move the country toward Soviet-style revisionism in 1964.[50]

While Mao reproached his fellow comrades behind closed doors, his personality cult shone brighter in the limelight, as the whole country was ordered to learn from the PLA and especially from a regular solider named Lei Feng, who died in an accident in 1962 and left a possibly fabricated diary in which he declared his ardent devotion to Mao, the CCP, and serving the people. Mao's cult received another boost with the publication of what became known as the *Little Red Book*, which started with an appeal from Lei Feng to go all-out in accomplishing Mao's commands. In 1965, public adulation of Mao spread across the country with the reading of his works and efforts to embody his directives becoming normal everyday practice.[51]

In 1966, Mao turned his personality cult on CCP elites in the Cultural Revolution, championing attacks on people who had "sneaked into the Party, the

government, the army, and various spheres of culture" that strived to "seize political power and turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."[52] Mao and his supporters first mobilized elite students in Beijing to confront school administrators. Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and a few other party leaders tried to use work teams to channel students into Red Guards units that condemned people with "bad class" backgrounds, like in previous campaigns. Mao's allies struck back, urging the removal of work teams from campuses and the formation of competing Red Guards. Over the fall of 1966 and the winter of 1967, Red Guards were established in schools, factories, government offices, and rural collectives, as Mao's backers encouraged Red Guards to fan out across the country and share their revolutionary experiences struggling against people they perceived to be "capitalist-roaders" in positions of power.[53]

Mao hoped that youth involved in the Cultural Revolution would purge the party-state of people who were leading China toward a capitalist restoration while at the same time generating a new revolutionary generation that would remain dedicated to achieving his policies even after he died. In practice, Red Guards employed Mao's ideas for a multitude of different purposes. Some toppled party leaders, as directed by Mao's elite supporters. However, Red Guards also engaged in many other activities. They settled old scores, abused people with "good and "bad" class labels, pleaded for higher wages and permanent positions in SOEs, ransacked homes and seized "bourgeois" materials, beat up people with "bourgeois" hairstyles and clothing, and pushed out colleagues who were blocking their career advancement.[54] This list could go on and on. The point is that during the Cultural Revolution, Mao's ideas did not have a well-defined set of meanings. Rather, political factions and individuals instrumentalized Mao's statements to advance their manifold interests.

In 1968, Mao and the people around him decided that factional struggles had to be contained, partially because of rising Sino-Soviet border tensions. The CCP employed this national security rationale when it deployed the PLA to establish new local power structures, a decision which unleashed a wave of violence that lasted until 1971 and killed many more than the Red Guards.[55] With the military in charge, urban youth were shipped to the countryside to undergo reeducation at the hands of local peasants and contribute to local development. Although some youth were still committed to following Mao's orders, many others lost faith in view of constant factional fighting, while others were disabused of their fidelity to Mao when the PLA was dispatched to crush the Red Guard movement. Others became disillusioned with Mao's dictatorship when they arrived in the countryside and saw how underdeveloped it still was nearly two decades after the PRC's founding.[56] Mao's political prestige was further tarnished when the National Defense Minister Lin Biao, who was designated as his successor in 1969, fled after an apparent failed coup in 1971 and died in a plane crash.[57]

Despite all these issues, Mao still held onto power for the last half decade of his life. He was partially able to maintain control because veteran party leaders remained beholden to him for their authority. The same was true of people who

Mao's supporters helicoptered into elite circles during the Cultural Revolution. Mao played off both against each other, weakening their respective power bases. These factional conflicts gave politics in the early 1970s a whiplash character, as the country lurched from one campaign to another, a process that made Chinese citizens only more cynical about the purpose of Mao's revolution.[58]

On the other hand, the CCP's capability to still execute campaigns showed the durability of the party-state. As Mao and his allies retained sway over the propaganda apparatus, they were still able to disseminate their campaign directives and political commentary nationwide and shape what counted as legitimate political language and activities in localities. That the party's dictatorship could still mobilize China's populace in this way was inextricably linked to a few features of state–society relations in the PRC that endured all the way to Mao's passing in 1976. Chinese citizens remained governmentally tied to certain urban and rural workplaces for their subsistence. The party also continued to closely regulate the movement of physical resources and information between cities and the countryside as well as within them. Last and most definitely not least, CCP leaders, despite all the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, remained committed to employing the powers of the party-state to paternalistically fashion a new socialist Chinese nation.

The afterlives of Mao's dictatorship

After Mao's demise, CCP leaders abandoned certain features of his dictatorship. Especially consequential was their relinquishment of the party's revolutionary mission. While the propaganda apparatus still talked about socialism, it was delinked from a revolutionary impulse, as reform replaced revolution as the party's dominant political framework. As part of this transformation, the CCP abolished political labels related to class status; it stopped stressing the importance of class struggle and Marxist-Leninist objectives, and the industrial working class lost its political prominence and had its special welfare entitlements phased out.[59] The party also did away with the honeycomb organization of society in Mao's China and granted more influence to market forces in the distribution of resources, flows of information, and socioeconomic stratification.[60] Keenly aware of the dangers of a personality cult, Deng Xiaoping and other veteran party members transitioned toward a collective leadership system so that no individual would again have ultimate authority over the party-state's formidable infrastructural power.

This last transformation has proven less durable than the other changes, as Xi Jinping has recently recentered China's regime on his own person. Xi's ability to make this political shift is linked to what the CCP did not discard of Mao's dictatorship. Although party elites relaxed their hold on the national circulation of resources and information, they did not give it up, as they still maintained a paternalist worldview and considered the Chinese people to be incapable of self-governance. CCP leaders also still strive to keep political discontent local to maintain their authority, and they emphasize national security threats to persuade people that CCP leadership is the best way to ensure China's defense, prosperity, and stability. Until Chinese

nationalism is no longer conflated with the necessity of CCP rule, the Mao era will continue to cast a long shadow over Chinese politics.

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PART II

Pathbreaking autocrats of the twentieth century

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4

FIDEL CASTRO

From grassroots dictatorship to Communist autocracy (1926–2016)

Lillian Guerra

In mid-July 2019, then President Donald J. Trump denounced four female representatives to the United States Congress. They all identified as proud members of historically vilified ethnic minorities. Trump equated their criticism of his support of White supremacists with "hatred for America." The president tweeted that the congresswomen should all "go back to where they came from," ignoring the fact that three of the women came from the United States and the fourth, a practicing religious Muslim and former refugee, was a US citizen.[1] Later, Trump defended his Twitter tirade at a North Carolina campaign rally, saying, "They don't love our country. I think they hate our country," inciting crowds to reply with the chant, "*Send her back! Send her back!*"[2] Other rally goers yelled "Traitor! Treason!" when Trump called two of the congresswomen out by name, further augmenting the view that the combination of their race, culture, and gender was to blame.[3] Later, Trump insisted the congresswomen's political views made them "not capable of loving our country" and hailed his own slogan-chanting – Trumpist crowd as made of "incredible patriots."[4] Far from new, such scenes marked Trump's rise to autocratic status among his constituents from the earliest months of his 2016 presidential campaign.[5]

For any scholar or observer of the now over 60-year-old Cuban revolution and its Communist government, the spectacle of a head of state and his supporters comparing the act of political criticism to treason and telling them to "get out" of the country if they don't "love it" should feel deeply ironic as well as disturbingly familiar. After all, Fidel Castro himself relied on the term "traitor" to dismiss critics. He used the word *escoria* (literally human scum) for the first time in 1961 to describe those who protested his one-party, one-man Communist vision of social justice by leaving Cuba.[6] Moreover, the adoring crowds that greeted Fidel Castro's rise to power regularly relied on shouts of "¡Paredón! ¡Paredón!" (Execute them! Execute them!) in the first several years after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 to

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express solidarity with him against critics, counterrevolutionaries, and all potential enemies, real or suspected.[7] At the time of the Mariel Boatlift – the mass exodus of Cubans who traveled from Mariel Harbor to the United States between April and October 1980 – crowds shouted "¡Qué se vayan! Qué se vayan!" (Get out! Get out!) to the almost 125,000 young Cubans who registered to leave. By then, the paradigm of patriots versus traitors was so entrenched in every-day political culture that when Fidel Castro explained that all who wanted to leave "lacked the revolutionary genes" necessary for citizenship, no one outside of Cuba seemed to notice.[8]

At the time, few observers were inclined to note as extreme either these ideas or the million-person marches that accompanied them, despite the use of mobs to "repudiate" the would-be immigrants with hours-long (or even days) verbal assaults and government-approved hate speech that charged the mostly young Cubans who wanted to leave as "anti-social" perverts, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) collaborators, bums, and imperial dupes. Reasons for the failure to notice, let alone condemn the violence and hate, were as much the product of leftists' and progressives' deepening support for the anti-colonialism of Fidel Castro's regime, as they were the result of the attitudes of conservative Cuban exiles and Americans. While the former saw backing Fidel Castro as tantamount to subverting US credibility, the latter shared a mutual disdain for the refugees' working class, frequently non-White character, and their support for certain socialist rights (such as free health care, daycare, and schooling), which were deemed Communist and thus "un-American" in the United States.[9]

The establishment and early development of Castro's autocracy in Cuba

The standoff between the "Right" and the "Left" in the United States that Donald Trump's presidency and *trumpismo* catalyzed has an antecedent in the Cuban-American Cold War and the ways in which Fidel's autocracy gained clout amid what should have been seen as a crisis. Without recourse to this history, contemporary events make no more sense than the intermittent bouts of apparent hegemony secured by Cuba's Communist state through the persona of Fidel Castro, its "Maximum Leader [*Jefe Maximo*]." An essential aspect of the rule of autocrats is the rapidity with which Fidel Castro and other aspiring autocrats threatened not only long-fought struggles for open debate, political accountability, and transparency in governance but also respect for ideological differences and electoral freedom. This is because a sense of urgency, even apocalyptic urgency, must undergird their access not only to power but to people's belief in its transformative, liberating capacity. Aside from the urgency that makes rapid-fire, take-it-or-leave-it policy-making from the top appear sensible to the average citizen, there is another equally essential twin pillar of autocracy: the celebration of the extinction of pluralism and ideological heterogeneity in the name of redemption and unity around the Jefe Máximo – in this case, Fidel.

To be clear, my point in discussing Trump at all as an entry point for understanding Fidel Castro's aspiration to a Communist autocracy and his ultimate success, at least until 1991, lies in the need to recognize that the rise of a totalitarian dictatorship in Cuba was not inevitable. Nor was it the mere result of circumstances created by US opposition to Cuban national sovereignty (*prior* to as well as after Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959) and the Cold War. Rather, between 1959 and 1989, a period marked by rising Soviet aid, advice, and eventual economic integration into the Soviet bloc, Fidel Castro played *the* central role in sidelining his own movement of activists and guerrillas, known as the 26th of July Movement, that had brought him to power in 1959. In practical terms, he did this by covertly substituting unconditional militants of Cuba's Stalinist Communist Party for individual allies and fellow leaders whom he ordered jailed and often executed. Indeed, secrecy was so indispensable to this process that Fidel Castro spent the first 18 months of the Revolution denying that Communists or the Soviets had any role in Cuba and was instead US-inspired slander.[10]

In December 1959, Fidel Castro personally judged and silenced one of the most important comandantes of his movement, the former university professor and agronomist Huber Matos. Matos' crime was that he resigned his post after writing Fidel Castro a letter in which he begged him to come clean about the covert appointment of Communists to major posts in the armed forces and other branches of power that had no role in the fight against the Batista dictatorship prior to 1959 and officially, under orders from Moscow, opposed that fight until the last two months of the war.[11] That letter, like Matos' testimony in which he named Communists, later became public. Fidel Castro ensured neither would matter by dispensing with a judge and jury altogether, sentencing Matos to 20 years in prison and accusing *him* of treason against the Revolution for attempting to provoke a US intervention by using the specter of Communism.[12]

While these machinations matter, the fact that Communist supporters of Fidel Castro's Communist affiliations remained deliberately hidden from the public for the better part of two years after 1959 may have mattered more. The successful creation of an initially participatory authoritarian government – which I view as a "grassroots dictatorship" – as well as its transformation by 1971 into a Communist autocracy depended largely on the role of the Cuban people. Citizens had to become convinced of the need to surrender major rights: these included the right to protest the government; to act independently of it through their own organizations and institutions; and to operate a free, autonomous, and critical press. Revolutionaries organized into militias, workplace organizations, unions, and block-to-block surveillance squads called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), and women's groups eventually took on the character of "mass organizations." These government associations, similar to Soviet ones, quickly began equating any sanctioning of such liberal rights with treason. Moreover, they organized carnivals, parades, and national and local "mock funerals" that celebrated the extinction of liberal freedoms. In the case of the mock funerals, participants literally buried the

names of once-revered newspapers and private property owners in caskets, blessed by fake priests and decorated with floral wreaths.[13]

Very quickly, by the mid-1960s, whenever overt criticism or a challenge to Fidel Castro's policies, rule, or the officially inalterable nature of his government arose, there was no place left to express it. At the same time, Fidel fueled belief in his own historic transcendence by comparing himself and his crusade to end racism and economic injustice through the elimination of private property rights and civil society to the Christian messiah Jesus Christ and co-opted the language and moral authority of Catholicism.[14] "Whoever condemns a Revolution like this one betrays Christ and declares himself capable of crucifying that very Christ once again," he said to the national meeting of recently organized state sugarcane cooperatives amid shouts of "¡Paredón! ¡Paredón!"[15] Less than a year later, by April 1961, Fidel would endorse atheism as an ideal promoted and enforced in schools and public life by the state, eventually inscribing it in Cuba's Communist Constitution of 1975, which stayed in effect until the crisis of 1991.

In that year, faced with the Soviet Union's collapse and imminent economic demise, Fidel Castro's Council of State famously reversed course, courting foreigners for joint venture projects, dollarizing the economy, and, perhaps most shockingly, giving its own party militants the "right" to profess the Catholic faith. Recognizing the hypocrisy of this latter policy was not endorsed by Cuba's Catholic hierarchy, even as it welcomed "secularization" as an alternative to suppression and discrimination.[16] As always, the strategic priorities of Fidel's autocratic streak kicked in just at the right time: ideological coherence was never as important as staying in power.

After decades of suffering persecution and legally sanctioned discrimination, Cuba's few remaining Catholics and other faithful were not impressed by the objectives of the Cuban state. Castro's state needed to offer citizens the distraction of hope, even if officials believed all religion was false. Moreover, the state had to entice foreigners, who otherwise would never visit still-Communist Cuba, that it no longer was so rigidly Marxist. Inviting the Church back also allowed near-starving citizens access to Caritas, the world's largest charity operated through the Catholic Church and the critical material aid of other religious missions. In short, autocracy at its best showed its reliance on an anti-ideological offensive: the result was a series of reversals that, like Fidel's original embrace of the Russian bear, millions of observers found hurtful.

Real, existing Marxism in the way of social services and the ideological fabric of the Communist Party frayed irreparably in the years since 1991. There is no doubt that *fidelismo* fused quickly and, ultimately, indistinguishably with state Communism and Marxist-Leninism in its first three decades, 1961–1991. *Fidelismo* was the quintessential mish-mash of anti-colonial, socialist values and demands for "unanimity" that characterized Fidel Castro's rule. Systematically forged from the deliberate elimination of Cuba's flourishing civil society between the fall of 1959 and the spring of 1961, *fidelismo* and *marxismo-leninismo*'s authoritarian principles became inextricable halves of an autocratic whole. How a majority of Cuban

citizens ensured this would happen and why are not mysteries, nor did the process necessarily hinge on Fidel's apparent "charisma." Cubans not only believed that Fidel promised the best alternative to the pre-1959 status quo of material deprivations and the absence of national sovereignty but also that it was the only option available.

The fall of Cuba's civil society and the deputization of citizens, 1959–1975

In the first six months after the flight of the US-backed military dictator General Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro ensured the perpetuation of his role in what should have been a provisional revolutionary government mostly through two means. First, he saturated the media with his presence, appearing on television news shows where he delivered answers to journalists' questions in one-to-three-hour segments. He also frequently addressed the nation, often in order to discredit the members of his cabinet and military who publicly doubted him. From radio and television to newsprint, magazines, and published speech transcripts, Fidel's words engulfed the media, recrafting the landscape of events and their potential interpretation among citizens according to Fidel's strategically unannounced plans. The disappearance of an independent Cuban press mattered because Cuba's long history of protesting government corruption and complicity with foreign corporations went hand in hand with the repression of liberal rights long *before* 1959. The willingness of the press to report on citizens' protests and thereby side with the protestors, often to the detriment of journalists' and editors' lives, enabled not only protest but the survival of a promise of democracy in even the darkest republican times. Often, activists from Julio Antonio Mella and Antonio Guiteras to Eduardo Chibás and José Antonio Echeverría *shamed* the apathetic citizen into protesting (or at least supporting protests) by reminding them that the right to protest, indeed the *need to protest*, was inherently Cuban. It was the essence of Cuban identity or *cubanidad*.[17] To do otherwise was to abandon not the state or the nation but the Self.

Scholarship on the periods before and after 1959 suggests key turning points that hold vast implications for the erosion of a *cubanidad* rooted in the right to protest and its co-optation by Fidel Castro. Demagoguery and symbolic invitations to citizen empowerment through identification with Fidel, the *icon* of protest rather than protest itself, became substitutes for structural democracy as early as December 1959 through May 1960, the months in which Cuba's press and the right to protest outside of pro-government rallies disappeared. Thus, on Christmas Eve 1959, the first small mobs carried out a newspaper burning in Camagüey. Led by women from Vilma Espín's La Unión Revolucionaria Femenina, these events barely made the news and were greeted with a mixture of contempt, disgust, and general befuddlement on the part of the population. Many observers and bystanders must have asked, "¿Quiénes son esta gente? No tenia nada más que hacer?" (Who were these people? Do they not have anything better to do?).

Yet the first wave of newspaper burnings and the public's reaction to them serve to explain the slow and short march of Cuba's independent press to its death and takeover by the government between January and May of 1960.[18] Although the press had often been called the "fourth branch of government" for its historic, watchdog role over democracy in Cuba, attitudes across the nation soon changed. They began to change when Fidel Castro first refused to condemn such actions and then went further. In a nationally broadcast radio interview on January 19, 1960, Castro commended a group of typographers at the newspaper *Información* who had refused to publish any foreign wire reports and then demanded the right to insert an editorial statement after each article with which they disagreed because it criticized the revolutionary state.[19]

This constituted the first step in what became a pattern of worker-led censorship, more newspaper burnings, press takeovers, and massively attended mock funerals of one newspaper after another. The protests of typographers and subsequently other media workers centered on the content of the allegedly treasonous articles. They claimed that secret members of the Cuban Communist Party were rising in positions of power, especially in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces, or FAR), and that Fidel Castro not only knew about it but was relying on them to consolidate state power and eliminate the participation of his own 26th of July Movement, despite his constant assertions to the contrary. For Fidel Castro, such reports were "noticias falsas" and "calumnia" (fake news) of the day. Editors and owners of the media, he claimed, were participating in a secret campaign to "defame" him and usurp Cuba's long-promised return to sovereignty.[20] All those who defended the press, Fidel Castro claimed at the time, were enemies of the people, traitors to the nation, and ultimately worthy of expulsion from a country that they did not love. His words ensured that early examples of government-sanctioned censorship through newspaper burnings and verbal or physical assaults on the press would not be contained.

Consequently, as burnings and takeovers continued apace, newspapers defended themselves by simply using Fidel's former statements against him, deftly citing the date and location where he made them. The power of *Diario de la Marina*'s front-page section "Palabras de Fidel" (Words of Fidel) rested in the irrefutable contrast between Cuba's 1960 reality and Fidel's 1959 pledges, such as "what is a soldier doing with a 45-revolver strapped to his waist, scaring everyone around him? We are too civilized to have rifles and machine guns on the streets"; "general elections will be celebrated in 18 months"; "it is false that I want to make a political army"; and "I am not a Communist."

Yet by the early months of the Revolution's second year, Fidel himself was packing a 45 everywhere he went; armed militiamen and soldiers with long guns were on every corner of the capital Havana; the Soviet vice premier Anastas Mikoyan made an unprecedented state visit and signed a $100-million trade pact, ostensibly paving Cuba's way for a "balanced" relationship with *both* capitalist and Communist countries; special schools of Marxist instruction for Cuba's vanguard volunteer teachers opened in Oriente's Minas del Frío; and Fidel's statement that "political

education *is* education" became a Ministry of Education slogan. In short, the contrast between Fidel the rising "humanist" of 1959 and Fidel the converted Communist of 1960 would have been funny if it had not been so painful.[21] Yet Fidel Castro's aspirational goals of forging an autocracy remained the same.

The consolidation of autocracy in Cuba in the 1960s

During the Cuban Revolution's first decade of the 1960s, the extremes of Fidel Castro's exclusionary vision of political citizenship and the culture of legal-ideological discrimination against critical revolutionaries and "gusanos [worms]" took shape. "Gusanos" were a category that came to include all disaffected citizens, from counterrevolutionaries hired by the CIA to lukewarm doubters. This development occurred amid a context of siege – after Cuba's April 1961 victory over a US-directed invasion of exiles at the Bay of Pigs – and it soon also morphed into a culture of siege. Not surprisingly perhaps, only in the hours before the first landings of the United States' invasion force on April 16, 1961, did Fidel Castro praise the Soviet Union for its instrumental military aid and declare the "socialist" character of the Cuban state.

However, Fidel had consolidated this new character of the Cuban state already many months before. In the wake of the nationalization of the Cuban press in May 1960, economic policies with game-changing, anti-capitalist consequences began to take form. The consequences of an unwillingness to negotiate the terms of debate or the need for a dialogue quickly led to the fulfillment of Fidel's radicalizing prophecies: the nationalization of foreign oil companies in July 1960, followed by the confiscation of all foreign assets that August, and, eventually, the expropriation of all medium-to-large-sized Cuban-owned businesses. That all of these events occurred over the course of only five months, between July and November 1960, reflected Fidel Castro's decision to ally with not only the Soviet Union, which could offer him military supplies, but also, more importantly, the militants of Cuba's historic, famously Stalinist Communist Party, known as the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP). He had no intention of remaining loyal to the men and women who filled the ranks of his own anti-authoritarian, pro-democratic, anti-imperialist, nationalist *but* decidedly non-Communist or simply anti-Communist 26th of July Movement.

In fact, Fidel Castro waited to announce the Revolution's "socialist" character until the eve of a US invasion before a trusted crowd of militias, rather than addressing average, unsuspecting Cubans. He also did not announce his own reinvention as a "Marxist-Leninist until death" until December 2, 1961, half a year later, on national TV. His timing and context speak not only to his and the public's awareness of the undeniable hypocrisy and deception inherent in Cuba's descent from constitutional pluralism into Soviet-allied Communism but also to the consolidation of Fidel Castro's rule as a self-styled autocrat. If the facts and the ascent of covert militants of the PSP into positions of power, influence, and policymaking had been known to the Cuban public, he would not have gotten away with

it. At the same time, the state's absolute control over the press and sloganeering in schools, in workplaces, and on the streets made it appear that Fidel's choice of ideology was never a primary or realistic concern for most Cubans. "Si Fidel es socialista, ¡pónme en la lista!" (If Fidel is a socialist, sign me up!), euphoric conga-lines of rally attendees famously said.

Totalizing expressions of boundless hubris coupled with feigned humility may have bordered on the megalomaniacal from the beginning of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Yet this combination was essential to crafting a paradigm of patriotism that invited citizens to surrender control to the higher, purer, historically comforting authority that Fidel Castro claimed to represent. This was also essential for jettisoning the kinds of legal guarantees and political culture that had for years stitched together Cuban nationalism and pluralism with the dream of government accountability and electoral democracy.

In addition to control over the press and therefore the nature and meaning of protest, Fidel Castro anchored his rule in the orchestration, manipulation, and co-optation of political rallies. He learned the value of the rally when the first few months of 1959 saw the spontaneous outpouring of millions of Cubans onto city streets, especially in Havana, Cuba's capital. At first, citizens turned out to support the still fragile regime's quest to displace a self-assigned, pro-US military Junta and then to support the trial and execution of hundreds of Batista's former security forces, responsible for the deaths and torture of thousands of civilians and opponents, despite the US State Department's objections. Indeed, the United States' position only revealed Washington's hypocrisy and past complicity with the Batista regime's atrocities all the more.[22]

In the first six months of 1959, citizens regularly rallied to support the government's regulation of prices, its takeover of foreign-owned utilities, and, most of all, a long-anticipated land reform that aimed to break up massive plantations and create a small holding class of peasant farmers. Indeed, so concentrated had land ownership become by 1959, despite Cuba's 1940 constitutional mandate for limits on estate size, that the revolutionary government's May 1959 law affected only 3% of all property owners. That is, 97% owned too little land to be touched by the reform.[23] Of course, the majority of those affected were Cuba's oligarchical elite and foreign- and US-owned companies like the massive United Fruit Company or the Kleberg family's million-acre ranch.[24] Irate, and accustomed to managing their properties much like a state within a state for years, US companies and citizens turned to Congress and the White House, where they found highly attentive ears.

For this reason, the leaders of Fidel Castro's original 26th of July Movement made great efforts to organize a mass rally of unprecedented size in support of Cuba's First Agrarian Reform initiative. From May to July, they successfully transported half a million peasants to Havana and recruited thousands of Cuba's urban middle and professional class to feed, house, and escort them on tours in the week leading up to the rally commemorating the 26th of July Movement. This was the anniversary of Fidel Castro's disastrous assault on the Moncada Military Barracks of Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953. Yet amid heightening excitement, Fidel

Castro abruptly and inexplicably resigned his post as prime minister, effectively turning a national celebration of the triumph of a pro-capitalist, if anti-imperialist and anti-corporate, cause into a collective referendum on his right to extra-electoral rule. The spectacle served its primary purpose, as defined by Fidel. When he attended the rally and Raúl Castro dutifully introduced him, asking the massive crowd whether he should return to power, they cheerfully and perhaps unthinkingly complied.[25]

On that day, Fidel Castro and his tightly knit group of former guerillas-turned-advisors celebrated what *they* saw as the beginning of their revolution against the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista and symbolically ascribed to the Cuban people their designated role: to applaud, witness, observe, and comply. The anniversary they commemorated was entirely Fidel's own: the 1953 suicide assault on the Moncada Barracks that led to the deaths of more than 80 participants and the temporary imprisonment of Fidel Castro, his brother, and the handful of fellow survivors. Yet the deaths of more than 80 men lent greater glory to the miraculous survival of Fidel and his compatriots.

After that July 1959 rally, the meteoric rise of the Moncada event in the discourse of official state media and Cuba's new Communist pedagogy of the 1970s and 1980s had no rival. "Todo comenzó con Moncada" (Everything began with Moncada) became a state slogan, more than one popular book title, and an inescapable truth only the most courageous historian (let alone common citizen) could deny. Echoing his legendary defense speech after the 1953 assault on the Moncada barracks, Cuba's leaders eventually declared the infallibility of Fidel and his closest associates in the 1970s with the slogan "Absueltos por la Historia" (Absolved by History) in a campaign that covered the landscape of schools and urban life with posters and billboards. The campaign also adopted the refrain, "The Cuban people will live with their Revolution or every last woman or man will die along with it."[26]

In other words, Fidel Castro contended that he and his followers were the personal embodiment and historical fulfillment of the sacrifices that hundreds of thousands of Cubans had made since the launching of Cuba's first war for independence in October 1868 to build a socially just, more racially equal, democratic society. Fidel had made this same declaration at his very first speech on La Plaza de Céspedes in the early dawn hours of January 1, 1959. He repeated that claim on October 10, 1968, exactly 100 years after Carlos Manuel de Céspedes had freed his slaves in return for their pledge to fight for Cuba's freedom. Fidel did so while standing in the same spot where Céspedes made that declaration at La Demajagua plantation.[27] Thus, Fidel Castro not only endowed himself with the mantle of Cuba's earliest, official "founding father" but, as such, also assigned a uniquely heroic incarnation and messianic resurrection to himself. This was the self-designated, self-analyzed, self-promoted historical evidence that legitimated his right to rule.

As Rafael Rojas eloquently argues, Fidel Castro was by the force of will both Cuba's savior and the Cuban Revolution's only *real* citizen because he was the sole political subject endowed "*with the uninfringed, unconditional right to have rights*."[28]

Similarly, Harvard's renowned political scientist Jorge Domínguez contends that when Fidel Castro launched a series of dramatic reforms in the 1990s that "he hated," he did so not because he had a religious conversion or had changed his ideological criteria but only because he was unable to rule according to his whims, however he liked. But for the previous third of a century, Fidel Castro had indeed managed to rule according to his whims.[29]

The committees for the defense of the revolution

Perhaps the brilliance behind Fidel Castro's achievement in crafting an autocratic Communist state out of a participatory authoritarian and largely hegemonic dictatorship had less to do with Castro himself than with the creation and massive expansion of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), unique in the socialist world, that began in September 1960. For decades, CDR made fulfilling Fidel Castro's will its primary objective and ubiquitous slogan: "Comandante-en-Jefe, ¡Ordéne!" (Commander-in-Chief, Order us!). The brainchild of covert agents of the PSP, CDR initially made membership "voluntary," although the centrality of their political evaluations to retention or promotion at workplaces and schools quickly ensured mass participation.

More than being simply instruments for measuring loyalty through the gathering of information, however, CDR deputized the old and young alike, making housewives, teenagers, workers, the elderly, and the retired into on-the-ground police informants, government inspectors, and unarmed neighborhood watchmen who went on nightly guard duty, eyeballing their neighbors' movements, habits, and encounters as if the nation's security depended on it. Mostly, CDRs were general enforcers of policies against such acts as unauthorized gatherings of five or more Cubans, the carrying of boxes and other "suspicious" items in and out of homes, the receipt of correspondence from foreigners (especially *gusano* family members living abroad), and, after the criminalization of all small businesses in 1968, any entrepreneurial activity. Charged with policing neighbors' social relations, habits, and movements, CDRs defended national security against counterrevolution by recognizing that threats to the longevity, stability, and legitimacy of the Revolution could be equally damaging, whether such threats were real or only perceived ones.

This logic laid the foundation for the normalization of a national security narrative central to daily life and the linking of one's consciousness to the will of Fidel Castro. According to CDR instructional manuals and a special CDR school that trained nationally distinguished *cederistas* (CDR activists) in surveillance gathering, attacks on bad behavior that prevented citizens from fulfilling the duties Fidel had assigned them and attacks on government buildings amounted to the same thing.[30]

Despite the unpopularity of their intrusive character, CDRs expanded almost exponentially after 1962, reaching more than one-third of the adult population.[31] Citizens' initial reasons for joining were likely self-protective: after all, the best way to fend off others' political scrutiny was to join the scrutinizers. By 1968, however,

when Fidel Castro launched the Revolutionary Offensive, a package of radical reforms meant to discipline citizens ideologically and make Cuba more Communist overnight, membership in CDRs became mandatory. Upon banning all forms of self-employment, Fidel personally endowed CDRs with the task of confiscating Cuba's remaining 58,000 privately owned small businesses, most of them created in the void caused by the US Embargo and Communist mismanagement after 1960.[32] Once again, CDRs led the nation's return to the slogan of "¡Paredón! Paredón!" as they took over beauty salons, food stalls, plumber shops, and bars in the name of Fidel Castro.[33] Perfectly articulating Fidel's own argument that he served as a surrogate for citizens at the top of the state, one *cederista* addressed the national directorates of the CDR and Communist Party after being appointed the manager of a confiscated small business: "Now, when I walk down the street, I feel as if I were Fidel! . . . Yes! I feel like Fidel!"[34]

By the early 1980s, registration of children as CDR members shortly after birth (complete with the atheist equivalent of a baptismal ceremony) ensured that spying on one's neighbors and regularly checking on the ideological reliability of one's own revolutionary consciousness would become an integral part of the human nature of most Cubans.[35] In other words, CDRs were meant to ensure that Fidel Castro's will was and should be one's own. Nonetheless, the Ministry of the Interior, the mammoth agency overseeing all intelligence and counterintelligence operations, did not simply take the loyalty of *cederistas* for granted. Although CDR rolls were open to all, some activists also served in an additional, covert, formal capacity as operatives of Cuban State Security, endowed with the means and obligation to spy on the volunteer spies.[36]

The institutionalization of Fidel Castro's autocratic rule and its validation in Cuba's culture of siege as the greatest bulwark against US aggression may have found its highest expression in 1975. That year, the Cuban Communist Party held its first congress as the voice of an officially integrated member state of the Soviet bloc and finally drafted a constitution that stripped citizens of all individual freedoms by the sheer act of failing to mention them. Following the Party's "election" of Fidel Castro by unanimous vote as its first secretary and Cuba's prime minister, veteran PSP founder and elder statesman, the Polish-born, former Soviet spy, Fabio Grobart, waxed emotional. He granted Fidel Castro sole responsibility for "directing us toward the victory of the Revolution, the definitive national liberation of Cuba, socialism and the formation of our glorious Communist Party." Because Fidel had permitted "the irreversible triumph of Marxist-Leninist ideas" in America, Grobart claimed that "this Party today *is* the Party of Fidel Castro."[37] Grobart then raised the bar of sycophancy to dizzying new heights by explaining:

> [Fidel] has known how to forge the profound and unbreakable friendship between Cuba and the fraternal Soviet Union, between Cuba and all other socialist countries. . . . He has raised up the honor and prestige of our *patria* to never-before-seen pinnacles in our history. . . . Over all of these years, educating and stimulating us with his example, he has participated personally

> in all our battles, all our work. . . . He has educated us in the example of his self-abnegation, tenacity, firmness and capacity, with his intransigent and consequential application of Marxist-Leninist principles. . . . He has been and is the teacher; he is a constant educator of cadres and militants of our Party and the Union of Young Communists. He has taught us how to be a truly revolutionary party, a truly Marxist-Leninist party.[38]

Implicit in Grobart's flattery was the elevation of Fidel Castro above all other living men, an endorsement that he was not only the genuine New Man in Socialism whom all should emulate but a historically unique Communist Christ. The fact that Grobart began his career in Cuba in the 1920s as a spy for Stalin's Soviet Union makes his words even more significant: they speak to the rise of Fidel Castro's reputation and power within the Communist world on terms comparable to its many other autocrats.

Conclusion

As an extension of Fidel Castro's will and an embodiment of his whims, the Communist Party of Cuba staked its rise to power on the willingness of citizens to believe that Fidel's all-or-nothing, with-me-or-against-me view of Cuba's place in the world was both a permanent political state of being and one worth defending as a one-man, one-party state against the allegedly constant threat of US invasion. After strategically and covertly securing the collapse of liberal constitutional freedoms and the structures of civil society, Fidel and his allies policed and eliminated real and perceived threats to his power through a vast system of complicity that deputized supporters and average citizens into extensions of Cuba's security and intelligence apparatus. Through such means (as well as many others unexamined here for reasons of space), the paradoxically "enforced hegemony" of Cuba's revolutionary regime incarnated the will of a singular authority, even as it insisted on the voluntary unanimity of the popular masses.

Today, the many ironies, hypocrisies, and *volte de faces* of the Cuban Communist state since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 cannot be ignored in any assessment of the longevity of Fidel Castro's rule nor the relative resilience of taboos surrounding its criticism in the public milieu of contemporary Cuba. Yet the fact that the very millionaires and foreign corporations that Fidel Castro once lambasted and demonized have become the partners of GAESA, the massive capitalist conglomerate owned and managed by Raúl Castro's Revolutionary Armed Forces, does not undermine the evidence that Fidel Castro managed to establish an autocracy in Cuba. On the contrary, it reinforces it.

In the last 30 years, Cuba's highest-ranking Communist militants, military officials, and intelligence directors have secured a transition from an economy dominated by government ownership principles and total control to a state-capitalist system that allows for self-employment, cooperative farms, and licensed

entrepreneurs. They have also managed to exert continued checks on the rise of economic competitors and rivals among the non-state-owned sector by relying as much on new methods of repression, including the use of surveillance technology, as they do on the very principles that made Fidel Castro's autocracy possible at all. These were, above all, the illegality and incapacity of citizens to resurrect the features and structures of civil society without necessary resources and, not least, of running the risk of repression, sanction, or having to flee abroad as refugees. While the rationale of patriots and traitors and fear of a US invasion may no longer hold any cache with the majority of citizens, that of "state against nation" has been on the rise, particularly since Fidel Castro's transfer of formal state authority to his brother Raúl Castro in 2009 and Fidel's own death in November 2016.

Cubans today live without Fidel Castro as many once lived with him, particularly since the fall of the Soviet Union – more impoverished than possibly ever before, but also more privately defiant and publicly demoralized. Yet no Cuban anywhere arguably lives untouched by his legacy. Like all autocrats, Fidel Castro seemingly empowered citizens by promising a truer version of liberty and equality, which he claimed would prevail through systematic and unquestionable adhesion to the justice and innate credibility of one man's power. Also like all autocrats, Fidel's rise to power entailed the degradation and eventual destruction of democracy in the name of ensuring a vision of reality that demands adherence, first to his will and whims and then to the silencing of doubt, dissenters, and critics. Facts and the ability of the citizen to decipher them independently of the leader-state are anathema to any such popularly rooted versions of autocracy, regardless of the ideological differences and radically distinct political contexts from which they emerge. As our discussion of the press, rallies, and the creation of CDRs has shown, what is "real" matters to such leaders only in so far as it serves a narcissistic or strategic end.

Perhaps, the moral of the many political parables Cuba's revolutionary history presents can be found in how perceptions, needs, and the sources of the power of citizens merge to define a hero for the cause of freedom and justice. Although such heroism cannot in reality be confined to any single man, autocrats like Fidel Castro persuade their constituents that the opposite is true. Then they make sure that there is no alternative to their own rule by policing, repressing, and persecuting not only those who offer alternatives but even those who simply imagine one. As the history of both Cuba and the United States shows – after all, they are eternally intertwined – true heroism can only be found on a collective scale, as it was so many times in Cuba's past when thousands of Cubans rose up to discuss, create, guarantee the rights of the individual, claim national sovereignty, and envision a government elected to reflect the free political expression of a *collective* will. Cuba's history and the events in the United States on January 6, 2021 – when insurrectionists incited by US president Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol building – demonstrate that the struggle for democracy does not and should not depend on any one human being. It must and should depend on the commitment, will, needs, equality, and consciousness of all.

Notes

1 "Donald Trump Slammed as Racist After 'Go Back Home' Tweets at Democrat Congress Women," *Bloomberg/South China Morning Post* (July 14, 2019): www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3018567/go-back-where-you-came-donald-trump-tells.
2 "'Send Her Back': New Chant Erupts at Rally," *The Wall Street Journal* (17 July 2019): www.wsj.com/livecoverage/campaign-wire-election-2020/card/1563410679.
3 Oliver Darcy, "Media React to 'Send Her Back' Chant at Trump Rally," *CNN Business* (July 18, 2019): www.cnn.com/2019/07/17/media/donald-trump-north-carolina-rally-reliable-sources/index.html.
4 "Trump Renews Racist Attack on Squad: 'They're Not Capable of Loving the US'," *The Guardian* (July 22, 2019): www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/21/trump-racist-squad-democrats-omar-ocasio-cortez-tlaib-pressley.
5 At an August 2016 rally in Kissimmee, Florida, a Trump attendee approached a seated group of reporters and shouted in their faces, "Go home! You are traitor! I am an American patriot!" When asked his name, the man shouted, "I am a Patriot! And your name is Traitor!" See Tim Hains, "Trump Rally-Goer to CNN Reporter: 'I am a Patriot! You Are a Traitor!'" (August 12, 2016): www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/08/12/trump_rally-goer_to_cnn_reporter_i_am_a_patriot_and_you_are_a_traitor.html.
6 Fidel Castro Ruz, "Fidel Castro en la proclamación de Cuba como territorio libre de analfabetismo," *Obra revolucionaria*, vol. 49 (1961): 10.
7 Although the term first made its appearance in January 1959, rallies to support the trials and execution of Batista's war criminals, it became a commonplace crowd response by the fall of 1959, when the PSP led efforts to radicalize the terms, combined with the increasing urgency in Cuba's domestic political climate. See Michelle Chase, "The Trials: Violence and Justice in the Aftermath of the Cuban Revolution," in Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph (eds.), *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counter Insurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 163–198; Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption and Resistance, 1959–1971* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2012), 47–49, 82, 86–87, 94. For a primary example of how the chant and the rejection of critics as "traitors" functioned in Fidel Castro's speeches, see Fidel Castro Ruz, "Discurso de Fidel," *Lunes de Revolución* (January 5, 1961): 42–48.
8 See this quote and full transcript in "Fidel, el Primero de mayo: Con el pueblo, no se juega," *Bohemia* (May 9, 1980): 53–54.
9 I substantiate this argument at length in *Patriots and Traitors in Revolutionary Cuba, 1961–1981* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, *in press*). See also Abel Sierra Madero, "'Here, Everyone's Got *Huevos*, Mister!': Nationalism, Sexuality and Collective Violence in Cuba," in Michael Bustamante and Jennifer Lambe (eds.), *The Revolution from Within: Cuba, 1959–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 244–276.
10 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 122.
11 Lillian Guerra, *Heroes, Martyrs and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946–1958* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 198–214.
12 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 77–92.
13 Ibid., 125, 130, 301, 313, 345.
14 Ibid., 139–150.
15 Quoted in Ibid., 146.
16 Cardinal Jaime L. Ortega Alamino, "Católicos en el Partido Comunista de Cuba?" in *Te basta mi gracia* (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, S.A., 2002), 82–85.
17 Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Lionel Soto, *La Revolución*

del '33: Caída de Gerardo Machado, vol. 1 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971); Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba, 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1972); Ilan Ehrlich, *Eduardo Chibás: The Incorrigible Man of Cuban Politics* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Julio Fernández León, *José Antonio Echeverría: Vigencia y presencia* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 2007); Guerra, *Heroes, Martyrs and Political Messiahs*.

18 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 107.
19 Ibid., 121–122.
20 Ibid.
21 Quoted in Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 121.
22 Chase, *The Trials*; Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba,* 47–49.
23 Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba,* 60.
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5

AUGUSTO PINOCHET

The emergence of one-man rule in Chile (1915–2006)

Patricio Silva

On September 11, 1973, a military coup put a dramatic end to the socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile. Until that day, the figure of General Augusto Pinochet was practically unknown to most Chileans. In the following years, this rather colorless and uncharismatic army general evolved as the indisputable leader of an extremely repressive regime. During his 17 years in power, 3,200 political opponents would be assassinated, while another 30,000 people would be tortured.[1] Pinochet's name would soon become synonymous worldwide with that of a merciless dictator.[2]

The universal repudiation generated by Pinochet was not only the result of the gross violation of human rights committed under his regime.[3] It was also due to the fact that he had deposed an internationally respected political personality. Allende and his attempt to establish a socialist society by democratic means had raised great expectations among left-wing circles in Latin America and Europe, and so the news of Allende's overthrow immediately triggered a wave of condemnation of the Chilean military regime among many political leaders and intellectuals around the world.[4]

The one-man rule established by Pinochet in Chile strongly differed from the power structure introduced by other military regimes in the region. In countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, the armed forces made use of collegiate mechanisms of decision-making. In this manner, the different military rulers adopted a *primo inter pares* position vis-à-vis the other Junta members. This allowed the latter also to exert a considerable amount of power in the decision-making process.[5] Following the coup in Chile, it seemed for a moment that the Chilean armed forces were also going to adopt a collegiate rule. However, Pinochet did rapidly manage to deploy a series of legal and administrative mechanisms aimed to eclipse the role of the other Junta members. This allowed him to amass an unprecedented amount of personal power in a short period of time.

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Not only was the Pinochet regime exceptional in terms of its longevity, stability, and capacity to deeply transform local socioeconomic conditions, but Pinochet's economic and political legacy has also proved to be quite enduring.[6] Pinochet adopted an orthodox free-market model in 1975, which led to a radical modernization of the country's economy. Five years later he introduced a new constitution in order to institutionalize his rule. Today, 30 years after the 1990 recuperation of democracy, Pinochet's neoliberal economic model and constitution (though amended) are still in force.[7]

Pinochet also managed to politically outlive the end of his own regime. Since Chile's return to democracy in 1990 until his death in 2006, Pinochet continued to play an influential role in Chilean politics. The 1980 constitution allowed him to retain his position as army commander in chief for eight years after his retirement as president. He was also made a "senator for life," which came with parliamentary immunity.

Even today, the figure of Pinochet continues to divide Chileans. Part of the population regards Pinochet as a great patriot who saved the nation from anarchy and Communism and succeeded in bringing prosperity to the country. For others, Pinochet was a cruel tyrant who destroyed Chilean democracy and brutally repressed his own people. For the past few decades, these dichotomic judgments about Pinochet's historic legacy have remained practically unchanged.

The breakdown of Chilean democracy

Until the late 1960s, most Chileans were convinced that a military coup was inconceivable in their country, due to its exceptional democratic and institutional record. From the early nineteenth century up until 1973, the Chilean armed forces were known for possessing a high level of professionalism, discipline, and obedience to the democratically elected civilian authorities.[8]

Allende's election in 1970 placed both the country's democratic institutions and the political neutrality of the armed forces to a major test. Allende won with practically a third of the total votes, doing slightly better than the right-wing candidate. Being a professed Marxist-Leninist, Allende had promised to initiate the transformation of Chile into a socialist state. The Chilean Congress, controlled by right-wing and center forces, was entitled to choose between the two candidates who obtained the highest number of votes, as no one had obtained an absolute majority. Despite their many reservations, most members of Parliament ratified Allende's victory.

The armed forces maintained their traditional position of non-involvement in political matters and subordination to the legitimate civilian authorities, allowing Allende's installation in March 1970. Two days before Parliament ratified Allende's victory, the commander in chief of the army, General René Schneider, was assassinated during a failed attempt to abduct him by right-wing extremists. The plotters, who had connections to the CIA, aimed to force an uprising of the army and a subsequent military takeover.[9] Instead, the assassination of General Schneider

intensified the determination of Parliament and the armed forces to follow through with the constitutional process.[10] This encouraged Allende to be confident that the armed institutions would remain loyal to their traditional neutrality and apolitical stance for the duration of his administration.[11]

Following an optimistic start, the Allende government was soon confronted with growing political tensions in the country. Both the nationalization of local and foreign firms and the implementation of a radical land reform in the countryside had engendered strong resistance from right-wing parties and entrepreneurial groups. Significant sections of the large middle class also turned their back on Allende as the economic situation rapidly deteriorated. Ultimately, the rapid radicalization of both supports and detractors of the Unidad Popular government brought the country to the brink of civil war.[12]

In November 1972, Allende decided to incorporate several military leaders into his cabinet in a desperate attempt to avoid the final collapse of the institutional order. Among them was General Carlos Prats, Commander in Chief of the Army, who became Minister of the Interior, the most important cabinet post. However, the incorporation of active military men into the government put the armed institutions in an extremely uncomfortable position. Many officers did not want to be associated with a government that they in fact detested, and their participation in the cabinet made the armed forces de facto contributing agents of the rapidly failing Allende administration.[13] As Oppenheim points out, the invitation of the military to join the government had unintended negative consequences, including the acceleration of politicization within the armed forces. This move could also be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the need for military in a scenario where civilians are unable to resolve a political crisis.[14]

In a climate of growing political unrest, sectors of the population began to demand Allende's resignation, while some right-wing leaders openly encouraged the military to put an end to his government. General Prats was mercilessly attacked by the right-wing media, and his authority within the army weakened due to his loyalty to Allende.[15] Ultimately finding his position untenable, Prats presented his resignation to Allende on August 23, 1973. That same day, Allende appointed General Augusto Pinochet as the new commander in chief of the army. Pinochet was merely appointed at the time because he was the next general in the line of command. He had a long-standing military career and was perceived within the government as a general with a strict legalist orientation.[16] No one could have predicted at that moment that only 19 days later he would take part in the military uprising that put an end to Allende's Unidad Popular government.

There is general agreement among scholars that Pinochet was not involved in the original conspiracy against Allende.[17] Everything seems to indicate that he joined the putschist forces only a few days before the military takeover. The coup plans were led by a group of navy admirals, some air force generals, and a small number of army generals.[18] They waited until just before the coup to inform Pinochet, as they feared that he could remain loyal to the government.[19] In this way, it can be said that Pinochet became the leader of the military coup almost by

accident. Years later, Pinochet published *El día decisivo*, in which he provides his own account about the circumstances surrounding the military takeover. In that book he bestowed himself with a leading and crucial role in the conspiracy against Allende.[20] However, his version has never been endorsed by other military leaders who were directly involved in the complot.[21]

In the early hours of September 11, 1973, the Navy initiated the uprising in the main port of Valparaiso. Soon after, the army, the air force, and the police joined the rebellion. At midday, a number of jet fighters bombarded the presidential palace, and a few hours later Allende took his own life, after having refused to surrender.[22] In the evening, Pinochet appeared in front of the national and international press together with the leader of the navy, Admiral José Toribio Merino; the air force, General Gustavo Leigh; and the police, General César Mendoza. Together, they presented themselves as the new rulers of the country.

Pinochet and the personification of power

The first edict issued by the new military authorities announced the establishment of a ruling Junta under the presidency of General Augusto Pinochet. The reason for his leading position within the Junta was not directly related to his own person but rather that he was commander in chief of the army, the oldest and most important branch of the Chilean armed forces.[23] But even Pinochet's appointment as the Junta's leader was not entirely unproblematic. The chief of the air force, General Gustavo Leigh, indicated during the internal deliberations that he was appointed as chief of the air force before Pinochet became chief of the army and should therefore receive preference. However, Leigh's attempt to become head of the Junta based on seniority did not succeed. The other Junta members supported the idea that it was the army which, at least at the beginning, was entitled to direct this collegiate body.[24] In the following years Leigh had several clashes with Pinochet, as the air force commander continued to challenge Pinochet's increasing concentration of power.[25]

Pinochet initially claimed that the presidency of the Junta would rotate among its members. As he pointed out in an interview soon after the coup:

> The Junta works as a single entity. I was elected . . . but I will not be the only president of the Junta: after a while, Admiral Merino will be, then General Leigh, and so on. I am not an ambitious man; I would not want to seem to be a usurper of power.[26]

It was not long before Pinochet reneged on this promise.

During the first months after the coup, it was not clear how long the military planned to stay in power. The military and their right-wing followers were divided between two possible courses of action. On the one hand was the so-called restorative option, which would require the military to stay in power only as long as it took to restore institutional order to the country. The Junta used a variety of legal

arguments to justify this position. They accused the Allende administration of having systematically violated the Constitution and the rule of law and pointed to resolutions adopted by Parliament, the Supreme Court, and Comptroller General prior to the coup in which the Allende administration was criticized for its lack of respect for legal and administrative procedures.[27]

On the other hand, the most radical right-wing sectors and the hard-liners within the armed forces defended the so-called refoundational option. Adherents to this strategy believed that the Junta faced a unique historic opportunity to stay in power for an indefinite period of time. They argued that a longer authoritarian period was needed in order to radically reshape the country's political, economic and cultural systems. Their aim was to eradicate forever the traditional presence and influence exerted by the left-wing sectors on Chilean society.[28]

Although Pinochet never publicly revealed his stance on this issue, he put in motion a series of institutional changes that clearly indicated an intention to remain in power for a long period of time. His decision to pursue the long-term "foundational" path also became evident following the publication of the Junta's "Declaration of Principles" on March 11, 1974, exactly six months after the coup. In this doctrinarian document the military government expressed its nationalist and anti-Communist orientation and its purpose to reorient Chilean society away from leftist principles. The declaration also stated that "the armed forces do not put an end date to their government, as the task to rebuild the country in moral, institutional and material terms will require a profound and lengthy action."[29]

After reaching this milestone, Pinochet accelerated his strategy to consolidate his leadership within the government for the coming years. A key move was the promulgation of the "Statute of the Ruling Junta" of June 1974. This document established that the executive power in the country was in the hand of the Junta's president. It also specified a long list of rights and entitlements that the person in charge of the Junta enjoyed. They resembled the rights of the country's president before the coup. This legal document did not establish a fixed term for Pinochet's position as head of the Junta, and it did not provide a mechanism for the other Junta members to remove him. Finally, Pinochet was given the title of Supreme Chief of the Nation. Only six months later, a new decree was introduced, changing his title of Supreme Chief of the Nation into President of the Republic. General Leigh was again the only Junta member who questioned this further enhancement of Pinochet's power, but he was overruled by the rest of the Junta. As Arriagada indicates, this new designation distanced Pinochet further from the other members of the ruling Junta in the pyramid of power.[30]

Pinochet's key pillars of support

The enormous power exerted by Pinochet within the Junta was only possible as a result of the supremacy of the army with respect to the other branches of the armed forces. Pinochet was fully aware of the fact that his first and most important source of power was his institutional control of the army. For that reason, following his

designation of President of the Republic, he zealously kept his position as commander in chief of the army and thus of the Chilean armed forces. Moreover, he adopted a very active and decisive role in the promotion committee, deciding who obtained the rank of general and who had to pass into retirement. By making use of this mechanism, he got rid of several senior officers who could have challenged his leadership in the future.

Pinochet also decided to expand the number of generals in the army, from 25 in 1973 to 52 by 1985.[31] He did this to accelerate the advancement of a new generation of army generals and to strengthen even further the position of the army vis-à-vis the other branches of the armed forces. But it is important to emphasize that the army's subordination to Pinochet was mainly based on institutional grounds. As Arriagada points out, Pinochet exerted his domination of the army by "manipulating a highly evolved professional military tradition and its core values of subordination and obedience to political power, noninvolvement in politics, and discipline and strict hierarchy."[32]

The second pillar of support was composed by a broad variety of political organizations and social sectors that had struggled against the Allende government. This included all societal sections from extreme right-wing movements to moderate center parties. All of them were pleased and relieved with the military coup, which they saw as a true liberation. In this way, following the coup all right-wing political parties expressed their inclination to collaborate with the new military authorities. It is telling that they did not even protest when the Junta closed down Parliament and declared all political parties "on recess." They were certain that they would be able to continue influencing the course of events by participating directly in the new government. The military authorities made use of civilian support to command the many ministries and state agencies following the dismissal of thousands of officials who were supporters of the former Allende administration.

Among these political forces was the ultranationalist movement, "Patria y Libertad," led by Pablo Rodríguez. This extreme right-wing organization had fiercely resisted the Allende government by organizing groups of hoodlums to confront left-wing supporters on the streets. Rodríguez and his followers supported strengthening the economic role of the state and proposed the formation of a mass political movement in support of Pinochet, similar to Franco's Falange in Spain. Rodríguez's proposals, however, were not received with enthusiasm by Pinochet. The Allende government had already put many of the economic activities under state control. On the contrary, the Junta had expressed a desire to privatize state assets and to strengthen market mechanisms. Moreover, Pinochet feared that the creation of an official political organization could lead to the politicization of the armed forces. He also foresaw that this sort of political organization could easily become unwieldy and difficult to control.[33]

The more moderate Christian Democratic Party (PDC) could hardly hide their satisfaction with the fall of Allende. In the months previous to the coup, Allende had conducted desperate negotiations with the PDC chairman, Patricio Aylwin. Allende had hoped to reach a political agreement which could have offered a way

out of the political deadlock. Those talks did not succeed, however, as the PDC had in fact already concluded that the only way out of the crisis was Allende's resignation. Following the coup, some PDC leaders even sent letters justifying the coup to their European Christian democratic counterparts. They presented the military takeover as a necessary solution to put an end to the chaos in the country. Many Christian Democrats had expected that the military would stay in power for just a short time, followed by an announcement of general elections, and many expected the PDC leader, former president Eduardo Frei, to win the election.[34]

It soon became clear, however, that this expectation did not correspond to reality. With the passing of time an increasing number of PDC political figures began to distance themselves from the military government as the repression and the violation of human rights had acquired a structural character. By 1976 the PDC had officially broken any link with the military government, and soon after some leading Christian Democrat figures also became victims of state repression.[35]

The so-called *gremialista* (guild) movement exerted the largest amount of influence on the military Junta. This ultraconservative Catholic movement, visibly influenced by Franco's Spain, emerged in the late 1960s among lecturers and students from the Catholic University of Santiago. The *gremialistas* were among the most active and effective opponents of the Allende government. They successfully organized protests and strikes by small- and medium-sized shopkeepers and truckers. This severely affected the distribution of food and other basic products in the country, which contributed to the overall chaos. The *gremialistas* were led by Jaime Guzmán, a young and charismatic law professor at Catholic University. He became the major ideologue of the regime and one of Pinochet's closest advisors. Guzmán was one of the main writers of the Junta's "Declaration of Principles" and of many other legal documents adopted by the military government.[36]

Some of the most loyal and enthusiastic allies of Pinochet and his military regime were the entrepreneurial groups and their powerful organizations. They expressed from day one their full support for the Junta. This was the direct result of the intensity of the threat they experienced during the Allende government, as most of their properties were expropriated. As Stepan points out, nowhere in Latin America did the social and economic elite feel so much threatened as in Chile during the Allende years. The Chilean elite had faced a mortal menace "from above" (the Allende government) and a severe threat "from below" (the radical masses demanding more expropriations and the establishment of a socialist system).[37] Thus, the Chilean elite regarded Pinochet as a *Deux ex machina* who, at the very last moment, had saved Chile from the consolidation of Communist rule. As Constable and Valenzuela point out, "the freshness of their trauma kept them loyal to their liberators, and even the most prominent businessmen were reluctant to offend the military, for fear of being labelled dissidents or traitors."[38] In this way, Pinochet could count from the very first moment on the Chilean business elite's support and loyalty.[39]

In the international scene, the military regime initially obtained the tacit approval and support of the United States. The US government and the CIA had backed

and financed the opposition forces during the Allende administration, and they had actively promoted a military coup. Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and the CIA developed a plan to exacerbate the economic crisis in Chile by cutting supply lines to local industry, suspending suppliers' credits, and disturbing Chile's commercial relations with other Western nations.[40] In 1975, the US Senate published the report *Covert Actions in Chile 1963–1973*.[41] This large document provides a detailed account of the several actions deployed by the CIA to prevent the triumph of Allende during the 1964 and 1970 presidential elections. It also discloses in detail multiple covert economic, financial, and political actions deployed by the US government to destabilize the Allende administration.

Henry Kissinger paid a visit to Pinochet in June 1976, stressing the good relations between both governments.[42] However, US–Chilean relations turned sour when Chilean secret police assassinated Allende's former minister of foreign affairs, Orlando Letelier, in September 1976 while Letelier was in Washington, DC.[43] This constituted the first known act of foreign-state-sponsored terrorism ever to take place in the American capital.

During the Carter administration (1977–1981) US–Chilean relations reached a historical low, as Washington imposed a weapons embargo and other restrictions on Chile as a result of the country's systematic violation of human rights. Official US aid to Chile also decreased dramatically. Aid loans that had totaled $ 20.6 million in 1976 declined to $600,000 in 1977.[44]

During the Reagan years, relations between Washington and Santiago improved again. Reagan eliminated the prohibition imposed on Chile by President Carter to obtain loans from the US Export-Import Bank and renewed the invitation to the Chilean navy to again participate in the UNITAS navy exercises with US war vessels. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Jean Kirkpatrick, visited Chile in June 1981, and in October that year the American government asked Congress to put an end to the weapon embargo imposed five years earlier.[45] However, in the final stage of the Reagan administration, Washington suddenly began to distance itself from Pinochet and support the Chilean moderate democratic opposition forces. This change in US policy toward the military regime was imposed by the US Congress on the Reagan administration. The former had decided to condition any possible improvement in US–Chilean relations on clear signs of an improvement in the country's human rights situation. The United States also demanded that the Chilean government hold accountable those responsible for the assassination of Letelier. Neither demand was met.[46] This shift in US policy toward the Chilean government became particularly visible in May 1983 following Pinochet's brutal repression of the first mass demonstrations against his administration.[47]

Following the 1974 coup, most Western European countries immediately condemned the violation of human rights in Chile and offered asylum to the thousands of Chilean political refugees who managed to escape the ensuing purges. Nevertheless, most countries maintained their diplomatic relations with the new military government, along with their trade and financial ties. The international

business community reacted quite positively to the regime change, particularly after Chile's adoption of a free-market economic model, which actively stimulated foreign investments.

Pinochet however failed in his attempt to obtain the support of the Catholic Church – this despite the military regime's self-proclaimed objective to defend the Christian values and the Catholic orientation of the Chilean nation. Since the very first day, the head of the Chilean Catholic Church, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, expressed his unambiguous disapproval of the coup, along with the human rights abuses committed by the military regime.[48] A month after the coup, Silva Henríquez, together with other religious leaders, created the Comité pro Paz, which offered assistance to those who were persecuted by the military rulers. Pinochet ordered the closure of the institution in 1975, accusing it of being infiltrated and controlled by Marxist elements. In response to this measure, in 1976 Silva Henríquez created the Vicariate of Solidarity, which until the end of the Pinochet rule provided support and shelter to victims of the regime.[49]

There is general agreement among scholars that, together with the army, the secret police (DINA) and the group of economists in charge of the regime's economic policies constituted the most important pillars for the consolidation of Pinochet's one-man rule.

The DINA: Pinochet's personal secret police

Following the coup, all branches of the armed forces and the police deployed their own intelligence services to repress left-wing militants who went underground in an attempt to organize the resistance against the dictatorship. These security divisions operated for months without any central coordination or exchange of information. In June 1974, the Junta decided to create the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Directorate, DINA). This new intelligence service carefully recruited personnel from every branch of the armed forces and police. Its main goal was to coordinate the intelligence activities against so-called subversive groups. The DINA was originally put under the direct supervision of the ruling Junta. Hence, its personnel were no longer subordinated to their original military institutions that lost de facto any control on them and their activities. From the start, members from the army were preeminent within the DINA.[50]

In reality, the DINA was subordinate to Pinochet as the Junta's president, and this became immensely helpful in his ongoing quest to consolidate his personal power.[51] DINA was headed by Manuel Contreras, an army colonel who, with the passing of time, became one of the most powerful and feared figures within the military regime. He obtained from Pinochet carte blanche to conduct covert, violent actions against left-wing opponents, which resulted in the torture and assassination of hundreds of people.

Pinochet also utilized DINA to monitor the movements of other high officials within the armed forces for possible dissidence or complots. Contreras has also been tied to the death of two army generals, Óscar Bonilla and Augusto Lunz.

Both generals were critical of DINA and its methods, and both men lost their lives under strange circumstances.[52]

DINA even pursued leading figures of the opposition outside of Chile, hunting them down in several Latin American and European countries. The organization was responsible for the deaths of former army chief General Carlos Prats and his wife in September 1974 after planting an explosive devise under the couple's car in Buenos Aires.

The same technique was used against Orlando Letelier. He and his secretary, a US citizen, lost their lives in September 1976 when a remote-control bomb exploded under their car in the streets of Washington, DC.

Contreras was also the brain behind the creation of "Operation Condor," a secret initiative shared with intelligence services of several South American military regimes at that time. Its main goal was to share information and coordinate actions to eliminate left-wing activists across the region.[53]

Following Letelier's murder in Washington, DC, the United States pressured Pinochet to eliminate DINA and to remove Contreras. In 1977, Pinochet decided to replace DINA with a new organization – the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) – while Contreras was forced to retire. Both changes, however, proved to be merely cosmetic, as the CNI continued committing assassinations and repression of political dissidents until its dissolution by the democratic authorities in 1990.[54]

The Chicago boys: the unexpected ideologues of Pinochet

The military regime inherited from the Allende government an economic and financial crisis. As Eduardo Silva points out, the Chilean economy suffered "hyper-inflation, lack of investments, low foreign exchange reserves, declining export earnings, and general economic disorder in the wake of Unidad Popular's failed attempt at socialist transformation."[55] The Junta initially chose to implement measures that would gradually ease the economy back into working condition. This included liberation of prices, the devaluation of the national currency, and the reduction of the public sector deficit by cutting public expenditures.[56] However, this gradual approach did not manage to halt the further deterioration of the economic situation.[57] In the middle of this crisis the Junta decided in April 1975 to appoint a group of neoliberal technocrats in charge of the "economic front," as Pinochet called it. They soon became known as the "Chicago boys," due to the fact they all had been academically trained at the University of Chicago.[58] They immediately started implementing an economic program based on neoliberal free-market principles.

After a few years, the neoliberal model proved successful, as the Chilean economy began to experience an unprecedented boom. Between 1978 and 1981, inflation decreased dramatically, the fiscal deficit disappeared, the balance of payments showed a growing surplus, and the export sector rapidly expanded.[59] The success of the neoliberal policies not only helped to increase the power and influence of the Chicago boys within the government itself but also contributed to the legitimacy of Pinochet's rule. Pinochet was very conscious of the fact that the consolidation of

his personal leadership depended to an important degree on his ability to improve the country's economic stability and international financial standing.[60]

The most important instrument used by the Chicago boys to achieve some degree of legitimacy for the neoliberal model was mass consumerism. The opening of the Chilean economy for foreign products allowed many Chileans to acquire for the first time a variety of consumer goods not previously available – everything from clothes to television sets, to perfumes and cars. The massive importation of consumer goods was made possible by the simultaneous expansion of consumer credit. The latter was a byproduct of the privatization of banks and the welcoming of foreign banks into the country. The pervasive presence of foreign goods in Chile created a general sensation of prosperity, as many of these goods were made accessible to the popular masses for the first time.[61]

The Chicago boys also played a pivotal role in the attempt to legitimate Pinochet's regime by disseminating neoliberal ideas against Communism and collectivism. They argued that by adopting a neoliberal economic system based on what they regarded as universal principles and impartial rules, Chile managed to put an end to the constant pressure exerted by sectoral interests on the state. In addition, they defended the neoliberal tenet that the achievement of economic liberty represented a precondition for the existence of political liberty and real democracy. The existence of Pinochet's authoritarian regime was presented by the Chicago boys as an indispensable requirement to introduce and consolidate a free market economy. They believed that once the new market economy had achieved maturity, the prolongation of the authoritarian rule would be unnecessary and restoration of democratic rule would be possible.[62]

The Chicago boys stressed time and again the alleged "apolitical" nature of their economic policies. According to them, their policies were strictly based on scientific principles and were made to guarantee a good functioning of the economy. Pinochet certainly welcomed the scholarly and technocratic tone used by his economic team. This alleged apoliticism was conducive to Pinochet's intent to depoliticize Chilean society and eliminate doctrinarian elements in the discussion about how to foster economic growth.[63] Pinochet also saw the political and strategic benefits of the deindustrialization of the country, as proposed and implemented by the Chicago boys. This represented in his view an important blow to Marxism and the left-wing labor unions.[64]

As could be expected, the Chilean economic elite strongly supported the Chicago boys' achievement of economic growth and access to foreign loan, as the privatization of state companies benefited large economic and financial conglomerates. Elites obtained control of a large number of former state enterprises by buying them at low prices and by obtaining funding from external creditors.[65]

Pinochet's search for legal-constitutional legitimacy

The economic success achieved by the Chicago boys did certainly contribute to enlarge the basis of support for the regime among the population. However, these economic achievements were not enough to legitimate the existence of a

protracted military dictatorship. After all, Chile possessed a long and solid tradition of respect for democratic procedures and the rule of law. For this reason, Pinochet felt that he needed to vest the new regime with some kind of legal legitimation.[66]

Immediately after the coup, Pinochet made sure to obtain the unstinting support of the judicial system and the Supreme Court, which approved each of the constitutional and administrative changes introduced by his government. At the same time, the judiciary systematically ignored the requests from religious and humanitarian organizations to investigate and condemn the brutalities committed by the military regime.[67] This support from the judicial system became especially important as the international community repeatedly issued condemnations of Pinochet's regime and the United Nations' General Assembly continually adopted resolutions condemning Chile's systematic violation of human rights.[68]

Pinochet also attempted to give a more civilian face to the government by creating the Council of State in September 1975. This advisory body was composed of well-known right-wing political figures, including two former presidents of the Republic, Gabriel González Videla (1946–1952) and Jorge Alessandri (1958–1964). The original idea was that the Council would advise the ruling Junta. However, in the final text of the resolution, it was stated that it would only deliver its advice to the President of the Republic.[69] Former Christian Democrat, President Eduardo Frei (1964–1970) was also invited to be part of the Council, but he refused, citing the military's refusal to accept the Council's advice.[70] This marked the final break between the Christian Democrats and the military regime. From then on, Frei and his party adopted an increasing oppositional stance against Pinochet, which eventually resulted in the persecution of many of its leading figures.[71]

Pinochet ultimately decided to respond to the ongoing international criticism of his regime with a national referendum to prove that he was supported by the majority of Chileans. The referendum took place in January 1978. In it, Chileans were asked to "endorse President Pinochet in his defense of the dignity of Chile, and reaffirm the legitimacy of the Government of the Republic." According to the official figures provided by the regime, 78% of the more than 5.3 million participants of the plebiscite supported Pinochet.

General Leigh had opposed the referendum. He realized that Pinochet was using it mainly to strengthen his popularity and power to the detriment of the Junta. The influential Comptroller General also unexpectedly rejected the initiative, claiming it was unconstitutional. Pinochet forced the latter to resign, while his successor immediately approved the idea with some minor amendments.[72]

In May 1978, Leigh sent a memorandum to Pinochet, demanding the end of military rule within five years and asking to revoke Pinochet's right to vote in the Junta, among other measures. Pinochet consequently asked Leigh to tender his resignation. When Leigh refused, Pinochet and the rest of the Junta signed a document discharging him on the grounds of disability. This was the only measure allowed by the "Statute of the Ruling Junta" to dismiss a fellow member. It had been introduced initially only for cases of physical or mental disability. As a

sign of solidarity, 11 air force generals declined to replace Leigh as member of the Junta, opting for retirement instead. It took Pinochet some time to find someone in the air force willing to replace Leigh, eventually settling on General Fernando Matthei.[73]

A decisive milestone in his search for legal legitimacy was Pinochet's "Speech of Chacarillas" of July 1977. In that important event he announced a blueprint for the further political institutionalization of his regime. In his vision, the future democracy had to be "authoritarian, protected, and technified." Moreover, the country's future political system would continue to be supervised by the military and would have no place for left-wing political forces.[74] He identified three phases in his road map. During the first phase (1977–1981), the 1925 Constitution would be gradually replaced by a series of constitutional acts. During the second phase (1981–1985), a legislative chamber would be installed with civilian representatives appointed by the government. In the final phase (from 1985 onward) a further constitutional normalization would take place, including the realization of a number of elections.[75] Pressure for institutionalizing the regime came in particular from the *gremialista* movement and its leader Jaime Guzmán, who wanted to legally consolidate the new order for the years ahead.[76]

Pinochet's next step was the introduction in 1980 of a new constitution. A commission composed of professors of constitutional law and former right-wing politicians worked for many years to construct the document. The text of the new constitution mainly expressed the views of the *gremialista* movement and the Chicago boys. The influence of neoliberalism in the making of the constitution was such that it was officially named "The Constitution of Liberty" after Friedrich Hayek's eponymous work.[77]

With this new constitution, Pinochet hoped to obtain the legitimacy to remain as head of the military regime for a very long time. The 1980 constitution established that in 1988 a plebiscite should take place, by which means Chileans would decide whether or not they wanted an extension of Pinochet's rule for another eight years. When the new constitution was adopted in 1980, the Chilean economy was booming and the regime's self-confidence and triumphalism was at its zenith. The government expected that by 1988 Chile would have reached high levels of economic prosperity and, hence, the population would enthusiastically support the continuation of military rule.[78] No one could have expected that, a year after the adoption of the new constitution, the country would be hit with a profound economic crisis. Although shaken, the neoliberal economic model survived the crisis, and the economy experienced a strong recovery in 1983, making the regime optimistic that Pinochet would be victorious at the 1988 plebiscite.

However, the economic crisis of 1981 had radically changed the political landscape. It generated for the first time since the coup waves of street demonstrations against Pinochet's government. A large number of people demanded the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy to the country. Even people who had substantially improved their economic conditions during the Pinochet regime started to challenge the government's rule.[79]

The return of democratic rule in Chile in 1990 was paradoxically facilitated by the existence of the 1988 plebiscite announced in the 1980 constitution. The constitution stipulated that, in the eventuality that the "no"-option would win, general elections should take place within 14 months. And that was exactly what happened. On October 5, 1988, the "no"-option in the referendum won, and on December 14, 1989, general elections took place, marking the return of democratic rule to Chile.[80]

Thus, Pinochet was forced by his own armed institutions to recognize the victory of the no-option during the 1988 referendum. The government delayed for long hours the announcement of the plebiscite's results. Many Chileans feared at that critical moment that Pinochet was going to declare himself victorious. It was the chief of the air force, General Matthei, who unexpectedly put an end to that painful waiting. While entering the presidential palace to meet the other Junta members, he suddenly turned to a large group of journalists posted at the entrance and announced that the "no"-option had triumphed. With this action, Matthei deliberately blocked any possible maneuver by Pinochet to ignore the results, forcing him to recognize his defeat.[81]

Immediately after this historical occasion, both the military government and the democratic opposition forces initiated their preparations for the general elections, which took place in December 1989. It is important to stress that by participating in the 1988 plebiscite and the 1989 elections, the democratic opposition implicitly recognized the validity of the 1980 constitution. This would prove decisive for Pinochet's future.

The December 1989 presidential elections were won by the candidate of the united democratic opposition Patricio Aylwin, who obtained 55% of the vote. Pinochet's candidate, his finance minister Hernán Büchi, won 30% of the vote. A third candidate, also representing the right, received 16% of the vote. The relative strength of the right in Chile was decisive for restraining the impetus of change by Aylwin's center-left coalition.[82] In March 1990, in a historic ceremony that took place in the presence of several foreign heads of state, Pinochet passed on the presidential office to the democratically elected President Aylwin.[83]

The same constitution, which finally allowed the return to democracy in the country, also decreed that Pinochet could remain as chief of the army and commander of the armed forces until 1998. The constitution also stated that after 1998, he would become senator-for-life, thus maintaining his parliamentary immunity. The same constitution did not allow the President of the Republic to replace the chiefs of the several branches of the armed forces. Moreover, the constitution was written in such a way that it made it practically impossible to introduce an amendment or replace it with a new legal order.[84]

The right-wing parties gained significant representation in both parliamentary chambers. Several attempts by successive democratic governments to reform the constitution failed as the right-wing MPs systematically voted against it. They continued to fully support the former military regime and protected Pinochet from any potential legal prosecution.

Following the democratic restoration, Pinochet kept firm control over the armed forces. His presence as chief commander of the army severely strained government military relations, as well as relations between the executive and the right-wing opposition. Pinochet constantly challenged the president and the ministers of defense, indicating that he did not fully accept the armed forces' subordination to civilian authorities.[85]

In 1998, Pinochet visited England for medical treatment. He possessed diplomatic immunity, traveling with a special passport as a member of the Chilean Senate. Nevertheless, Pinochet was detained by the British police, following an international request by the Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzón, who accused him of genocide. His arrest engendered great expectations worldwide that he might finally face justice for the many crimes committed during his regime.

Pinochet remained in London under house arrest for 16 months. After a long legal battle, the British Home Secretary, Jack Straw, finally decided to allow Pinochet to fly back to Chile on the basis of medical reports indicating he was not physically fit to face a trial.[86] Although he was received in Chile as a hero by his followers, he had visibly lost his aura of being untouchable. He was forced by the Chilean Congress to give up his seat as senator-for-life, and a series of new legal procedures were set in motion to investigate his responsibility for multiple assassinations during his regime. Until his death in December 2006, Pinochet continued to face trials but without once being convicted.

One of the most damaging blows to Pinochet's image came from the United States. In 2005, a US Senate Sub-Committee revealed 125 secret accounts at the Riggs Bank and other US-based banks belonging to the Chilean general with balances totaling almost $21 million.[87] For a long time, Pinochet had cultivated an official image of having been an authoritarian but honest ruler. Until that moment, most of his supporters had firmly believed that Chile's military government had been characterized by high levels of public probity.[88] Thus, the news about Pinochet's secret accounts had a devastating impact on many of his supporters. Although they had justified many of his other crimes, a considerable part of Pinochet's followers were not prepared to excuse him for having stolen public funds. The news of the secret accounts caused them to break ties once and for all with the former dictator.[89]

Conclusion

Pinochet can certainly be considered as one of Latin America's most repudiated dictators of the late twentieth century. He led one of the most repressive and prolonged military regimes in the region and in a country which was widely recognized for its long tradition of strong democratic institutions and professional armed forces subordinate to elected authorities. The attempt by Salvador Allende to radically transform the country into a socialist society led to a profound economic and political crisis. It resulted in a rapid erosion of the basic consensus upon which the Chilean democratic institutions had functioned until that moment. The increasing

confrontation between the Allende government and the right-wing opposition forces terminated with the military coup of September 11, 1973.

Most Chileans expected that the armed forces would rule the country for only a short period of time, followed by the normalization of the political situation and the restoration of democratic rule. Instead, Pinochet ruled the country for the next 17 years, installing an authoritarian, repressive dictatorship. The lack of previous governmental experience by the Chilean military had prevented the armed forces from acting in a more political manner vis-à-vis the country's different social and political sectors. For the military, Allende's Unidad Popular represented a threat for the nation. They regarded the government as a kind of fifth column of international Communism. Thus, following the military coup, the armed forces regarded the country to be at war, deploying exactly the same script developed for a military confrontation with a neighboring country.

The emergence of Pinochet's one-man rule was only possible as a result of the strict vertical organization of the Chilean armed forces in general and the army in particular. Pinochet's central position in the military government was not the result of charisma or a personal power grab. He was not even involved in the original plans to bring down the Allende government. It was a last-minute opportunistic decision adopted by Pinochet that allowed him to be at the central stage of the new military government emerging in September 1973. It was his position as chief of the army and hence of the armed forces that catapulted him to power. With the exception of a few military men like General Leigh, the entire military apparatus followed his orders with the same Prussian-like discipline with which they followed him prior to the coup.

Pinochet's regime would not have been able to stay in power for such a long time if some influential sectors of society would not have enthusiastically supported his rule from the very beginning. Pinochet could count on the support of not only the social and economic elites but also of a broad section of the large Chilean middle classes. The Allende years were traumatic ones for them, and they considered Pinochet a true liberator. Moreover, the profound economic transformation and modernization produced by his neoliberal reforms gave him extra legitimacy and support with the general population.

At the end, Pinochet became a victim of his own attempt to institutionalize his personal rule following the adoption of the 1980 constitution. It was this constitution that finally allowed the triumph of the opposition forces in the 1988 referendum and a year later in the general elections, ultimately restoring democracy to Chile. But it was also the same constitution that guaranteed him a continuing role in public life. Pinochet could remain in charge of the army and later become a senator for life. Following his arrest in London and the revelations of corruption, Pinochet lost the support of many of his former followers. Until his death in 2006, he faced a series of legal accusations for his responsibility behind the deaths of so many citizens during his time in office.

The triumph of the option for a new constitution during the October 25, 2020, plebiscite constitutes a historical step toward the eventual elimination of one of the

most contested legacies of the Pinochet era. However, the road to a new constitution will be long and difficult. The members of the Constitutional Convention, installed in June 2021, will have nine to 12 months to produce the new foundational charter. Only in August 2022 will a new plebiscite take place to approve or reject the new constitution. Although it is clear that a large majority of the Chileans want to get rid of Pinochet's constitution, it will not be easy for the members of the Constitutional Convention to reach agreement on the content of a new one. What is certain is that Pinochet's shadow will be present in many of the discussions surrounding the new constitution.

Notes

1 In 1991, President Patricio Aylwin created the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation to investigate the gross violation of human rights in Chile between 1973 and 1990. The prestigious lawyer, Raúl Rettig, chaired this commission which produced a comprehensive two-volume report. See Rettig Commission, *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993). See also Hugh O'Shaughnessy, *Pinochet: The Politics of Torture* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2000).

2 For instance, Chad's former dictator, Hissene Habre, was generally known as 'Africa's Pinochet'. See "An African Pinochet," *The New York Times* (February 11, 2000): 30.

3 For an in-depth analysis of the crimes committed during the Pinochet regime, see Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

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6 Remmer, *Military Rule in Latin America*, 113–150.

7 After decades of protests against the permanence of Pinochet's constitution, a great majority of the Chilean electorate decided in a plebiscite held on October 25, 2020, to call for a constitutional convention to write a new constitution.

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10 Paul E. Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile, 1964–1976* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 123.

11 In his speeches, Allende constantly complimented the armed forces for their strong legalistic tradition. For instance, during the celebration of his electoral victory, in a packed Santiago national stadium, Allende proclaimed: "Allow me, on this solemn occasion, to express the people's recognition to the Armed Forces, faithful to the constitutional norms and the rule of law." Santiago, November 5, 1970. Salvador Allende, *Primer*

discurso político del Presidente Dr. Salvador Allende (Santiago: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1970), 15.

12 A good account of the political and economic crisis during the Allende government can be found in Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes; Chile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). See also Stefan De Vylder, *Allende's Chile: The Political Economy of the Rise and Fall of the Unidad Popular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

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14 Lois Hecht Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile: Socialism, Authoritarianism, and Market Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007), 89.

15 Carlos Prats, *Memorias: Testimonio de un soldado* (Santiago: Pehuén, 1985), 40.

16 Genaro Arriagada, *Pinochet: The Politics of Power* (Boston Unwin Hyman, 1988), viii.

17 See for instance, Arriagada, *Pinochet*, 98; Varas, *Los militares en el poder*, 25; Arturo Valenzuela, "The Military in Power: The Consolidation of One-Man Rule," in Paul W. Drake and Iván Jaksic (eds.), *The Struggle for Democracy in Chile* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 32; Carlos Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), 79.

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19 Valenzuela, "The Military in Power," 65.

20 Augusto Pinochet, *El Día decisivo: 11 de Septiembre de 1973* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1980), 108. See also Raquel Correa and Elizabeth Subercaseaux, *Ego Sum Pinochet* (Santiago: Editora Zig-Zag, 1989).

21 See, for example, Sergio Arellano Iturriaga, *Más allá del abismo: Un testimonio y una perspectiva* (Santiago: Editorial Proyección, 1988). See also Gabriela García de Leigh, *Leigh, El general republicano* (Santiago: GLG Ediciones, 2017).

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23 Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 80.

24 Ibid., 182–183.

25 The permanent struggle between General Leigh and General Pinochet is analyzed in Verónica Valdivia, *El golpe tras el golpe: Leigh vs Pinochet* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003). See also Florencia Varas, *Gustavo Leigh, El general disidente* (Santiago: Editorial Aconcagua, 1979).

26 Quoted in Arriagada, *Pinochet*, 9.

27 Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime*, 34.

28 Manuel Antonio Garretón, "Political Processes in an Authoritarian Regime: The Dynamics of Institutionalization and Opposition in Chile, 1973–1980," in J. Samuel Valenzuela and Arturo Valenzuela (eds.), *Military Rule in Chile: Dictatorship and Oppositions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 177.

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31 Valenzuela, "The Military in Power," 33.

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33 Valenzuela, "The Military in Power," 46. See also Remmer, *Military Rule in Latin America*, 140.

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68 See Amorós, *Pinochet*, 463–467.
69 Valenzuela, "The Military in Power," 43. See also Vergara, *Auge y caída del neoliberalismo en Chile*, 106–111.
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71 Fleet, *The Rise and Fall of Chilean Christian Democracy*, 182–194.
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6

ROBERT MUGABE

Ruthless authoritarian who preferred democratic clothing (1924–2019)

Richard Bourne

Few babies, apart from the heirs to a hereditary absolutism, are born to be despots. When Robert Gabriel Mugabe was born on February 21, 1924, at the Kutama Mission, a Roman Catholic mission in Zvimba, in what was then Southern Rhodesia, his parents could have had little idea that he would grow up to be the autocratic president of an independent Zimbabwe.[1] This outcome was the product of circumstances, ideology, and his own personality.

Coming to power in 1980

The circumstances that led him to power lay partly in the nature of colonialism in southern Africa. His country had been conquered in the 1890s by Cecil Rhodes, prime minister of the Cape Colony and a visionary imperialist, who imagined a British Empire in Africa which would stretch from the Cape to Cairo. His vehicle was a chartered company, bringing in British settlers and exporting minerals and foodstuffs. Two years before Mugabe was born, the White settlers – then 35,000 while the African population was nearly 900,000 – voted convincingly for "responsible government" and against incorporation in the White-dominated Union of South Africa.

This gave Southern Rhodesia an odd status. It was a Crown Colony, not a fully self-governing dominion within the British Empire, like Australia or South Africa. But while its prime ministers were invited to attend the London conferences of such leaders, they were not of the same rank. London still had residual control, although it was not the iron power of the Colonial Office over territories lacking substantial and vociferous European populations. London promised not to legislate without the approval of the White Rhodesian government.

Growing up, and entering nationalist politics, the intelligent Mugabe was impressed by the overpowering dominance of race and White control. He was

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radicalized by a two-year teacher training course at the University of Fort Hare, the only university for Black Africans in apartheid South Africa, and three years in Ghana, shortly after its independence. Returning in 1960 he threw himself into factionalized African nationalist politics at a time when White politics were becoming more oppressive, in part due to fears stoked by the chaos of Belgian withdrawal from the Congo.[2] He joined ZANU, the more radical Zimbabwe African National Union rather than ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by the conciliatory Joshua Nkomo, who had built up support in newly independent African states.

In 1964, when the reactionary Rhodesian Front won elections largely restricted to Whites, both ZANU and ZAPU were banned and Mugabe began a decade of imprisonment. The Front declared independence the following year, which was not recognized by African states, the Commonwealth or internationally. Initially Mugabe was only the third ranking ZANU official, but it was during this period, when guerrilla war was developing in rural Zimbabwe, that Mugabe came out on top within his party. The party believed in the "democratic centralism" of Marxism, and it was when its key leaders were locked up for 23 hours a day that six of them voted, by three votes to one, to install Mugabe as president instead of the Rev Ndabaningi Sithole.[3] Mugabe was younger, not specially charismatic, but this crucial win illustrated the powers of his voice and brain, and his skill at managing small groups in a situation of stress.

ZANU, inside and outside Rhodesia, was disorganized. In 1974, following failed talks in Zambia which he had been allowed to attend as part of a peace effort, Mugabe moved to Mozambique where there had been a cease-fire in September, prior to independence from Portugal the following year. It was the base for ZANU's Chinese-trained rural guerrillas in the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). Mugabe's challenge was to establish his own authority, and some coherence, in the movement and its army. In 1974 he had been criticized at the Zambian talks by Julius Nyerere, the Tanzanian president, and there was an armed rebellion within ZANLA by a group who briefly captured the wife of Josiah Tongogara, the popular ZANLA commander. Rhodesian intelligence murdered Herbert Chitepo, ZANU's chairman in exile, in Zambia in 1975, removing a competitor to Mugabe.

Mugabe had to overcome suspicion from Samora Machel, president of Mozambique, who briefly put him in prison, and some of the younger ZANLA officers were hostile to his authoritarian, possibly already paranoid personality. Although not himself a warrior he used his brains and oratory to impose himself as commander of ZANLA as well as president of ZANU. His clear mind and steely determination saw him gain international recognition, first at peace talks in Geneva in 1977 and then in the decisive London talks of 1979, overseen by the British government following a meeting of Commonwealth leaders in Lusaka.[4] In London he threatened to walk out several times. He felt he might be cheated by the British, by the alliance of Bishop Muzorewa and Ian Smith of the Rhodesian Front, and by his own theoretical ally, Joshua Nkomo. He was not confident that he could come to power by elections, but did think military victory was within his grasp.

Persuaded by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shridath Ramphal, and threatened with a cut-off of aid from Mozambique and Zambia, Mugabe agreed to a cease-fire and quarantine for his troops. He won the 1980 elections overwhelmingly, with 71% of African votes in a turnout of 90%, and was declared prime minister of an independent Zimbabwe that April.

What were the factors that led to this victory, which surprised many, and what did it say about Mugabe? Probably the most important factor was ethnic. Mugabe was a Shona, from the Zezuru subgroup, and Shona were the dominant population in the country, providing most of the ZANU leadership. ZAPU's base lay in the smaller Ndebele, related to the Zulu warriors of South Africa, who had conquered the Shona in precolonial times. These elections gave a chance for Shona revenge. Few observers at the election could speak Shona, so they did not appreciate how Mugabe played this card, pointing out for instance that ZANLA had done most of the fighting in the war, unlike ZIPRA, ZAPU's well-equipped armed wing, and that it was more determined to transfer the White-owned farms.

Mugabe's own Leninist control of his party had been assisted by the death, in a "road accident" near Maputo, of the popular commander, Josiah Tongogara. Deadly "road accidents" became a feature of Mugabe's ruthless elimination of opponents after he took power in Zimbabwe, and it is generally thought now that this was an early example. But the largely peasant society which voted for ZANU did so because it was war-weary; local militants practiced intimidation, and voters sensed that if anyone other than Mugabe was the winner, he would continue the struggle. While ZANLA troops were quarantined, ZANU flooded the countryside with commissars committed to delivering electoral victory.

Amassing power, 1980–1987

It was in the period between 1980, when Mugabe was elected as prime minister, and 1987, when he became executive president of what was effectively a one-party state, that he amassed his power. This was not immediately obvious. The Lancaster House agreement in London included a bill of rights and certain guarantees for a White minority of some 17,000 people. There were 20 White seats in parliament, a fifth of the total, and Mugabe initially appointed three White ministers, and retained White heads of the army and intelligence service. Although he hated it, he agreed not to expropriate White-owned farmland for a decade, tolerating a "willing buyer-willing seller" gradualism.

More impressive, to those who had demonized him as a Marxist revolutionary who might abolish Christmas, was his speech at the celebration of independence and a sense that he was overwhelmed by his success.

> If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. . . . The ways of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten. . . . It could never be a correct justification that because whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the blacks must oppress them

> today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practised by white against black or black against white.[5]

His speech at the Rufaro stadium changed attitudes, and foreshadowed the approach of a freed Nelson Mandela in South Africa, more than a decade later.

But was it all a sham? As prime minister he had considerable power, buoyed up with international goodwill and the ability to introduce overdue reforms in education and health for the Black population, and get rid of reactionary White officials. Yet Zimbabwe was unsettled. Apartheid South Africa was adopting a Total Strategy to combat its enemies. It had taken in some of Rhodesia's ruthless Selous Scouts, and intelligence operatives who would not adjust to the new regime. Some from ZIPRA were starting a guerrilla war in Matabeleland, stimulated by the South Africans. So while a British military training team sought to merge the conflicted troops of ex-Rhodesia, ZANLA and ZIPRA, into a new Zimbabwe Army, Mugabe bet on another option.

He had been cold-shouldered by the Soviet Union and its most loyal satellites, such as East Germany, which had backed Nkomo's ZAPU. But in addition to China he had established military cooperation with the even more draconian Communist regime of North Korea, which he visited after he became prime minister. In 1981 he agreed with North Korea that it should train three battalions of Shona loyalists in ZANLA to become a Fifth Brigade in the new Zimbabwe army. In 1983 this brigade was used to terrorize and defeat what the government described as "super ZAPU" – a guerrilla force in the Matabele countryside.

This became horrific and large-scale human rights abuse, codenamed *Gukurahundi*, "Storm." In six weeks in early 1983, 2,000 civilians were killed in Matabeleland North, most in public executions. Torture and public humiliation were common. By the end of 1984 some 20,000 Ndebele had been killed.[6] The tragedy was largely hushed up. But it became a cover for the destruction of the fragile coalition at national level between ZANU and ZAPU. The White minority, who continued to vote for the Rhodesian Front in 1985 elections, did not speak up. The international community, which desperately wanted an independent Zimbabwe to succeed, as an inspiration for change in South Africa, stayed largely silent. Only Sweden, which had supported liberation movements in the region for years, made a public protest.

In December 1987, under pressure from church leaders and civil society, ZANU and the enfeebled ZAPU merged in a shotgun marriage as ZANU-PF, recalling the Patriotic Front which had been in existence in the London negotiations. Effectively this introduced a one-party state in all but name, though elections continued. Mugabe, ZANU and its politburo were in charge. He became executive president, replacing the ceremonial presidency of the Rev Canaan Banana, and thereby altering the Lancaster House constitution.

This first experience of power, from 1980 to 1987, demonstrated to Mugabe that so long as he controlled his party and the tools of force, he was invulnerable. The "democratic centralism" of ZANU gave him tight control of his party, while

its success in two lots of elections gave him a wider legitimacy. Newspapers had been nationalized, broadcasting was put under the Ministry of Information and Nigeria funded Ziana, a national news agency, to work for the government. He had the accolade of being a successful Front Line African leader, in the struggle against apartheid South Africa. In 1984 he had visited the United Kingdom and been a guest of the Queen, symbols of the former colonial power. Both the Western governments and the "socialist" worlds of the Soviet Union and China applauded him.

Challenge, and violent response, 1987–2008

Nonetheless the investments promised by the United States, as part of a land reform deal at Lancaster House, never happened, as the Reagan presidency succeeded Carter's. The United Kingdom did provide support, but private sector investment from outside Zimbabwe was disappointing. All this led to a build-up of resentment among under-employed Black Zimbabweans, especially those who had fought in the war and felt they had not been rewarded. For many of those living in the rural areas, the promise of land at independence had been a key pledge, both in the war and in the elections. At the same time the issue of race had not gone away, as White voters continued to support the irreconcilables of the Rhodesian Front, and Mugabe swept away the 20 White seats in the constitutional change which made him an executive president.

It was in the 1990s, and the period leading up to and immediately after ZANU-PF's loss of presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2008, that Mugabe faced his most severe challenge, and showed his most ruthless appetite for power. In 1991 he enjoyed a high point in international recognition, chairing the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare. The Queen attended, in her ceremonial role as Head of the Commonwealth. Nelson Mandela, now out of prison, turned up on the sidelines. Ironically, in view of what subsequently transpired, the conference resulted in a Declaration which touted a commitment to good governance, democracy and human rights. Shortly after, he acted as peacemaker, in the long-running civil war in Mozambique.

On the international stage the Berlin Wall had fallen, and South African apartheid was visibly dying. But when students attempted to demonstrate at the Commonwealth conference they were met by teargas. Kenneth Kaunda, long-serving head of a one-party state in neighboring Zambia, was defeated in multiparty elections while it was taking place. These were indications of trouble to come.

The Mugabe regime, from 1991 to 2008, faced multiple challenges: of economic and agricultural failure; of trade union, civil society and political resistance which came together in the formation of the *Movement for Democratic Change* (MDC) in 1999. There also was the formidable hostility from the former ZANLA troops, the so-called war vets, often unemployed, who felt they had been cheated of the spoils of victory. The Western-dominated institutions of the international community were also opposed to ZANU-PF's inflationary economics, occupation of

White-owned farms without compensation, and disregard for civil liberties. There was also an ideological threat, as a brief flowering of the liberal international order in the early 1990s seemed to make democratic centralism an outdated concept.

These challenges did not all come at the same time, but they combined, and the combinations were testing in a way that made the capture of power in 1980 seem easy. It is worth analyzing each of these threats in sequence, and then the response of Robert Mugabe and those around him.

The early 1990s saw the Mugabe government try a program of structural adjustment, part of the Washington consensus of privatization and cost recovery for government services that donor agencies were pushing throughout Africa.[7] The Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP), dubbed "Extreme Suffering for African People," stripped social services and welfare, hurtful in urban areas and cutting subsidies to peasant farmers in the countryside. It spawned a rash of strikes, and the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions, led by the brave and uncompromising Morgan Tsvangirai, escaped from government tutelage.

In 1997, with inflation rising and the economy unable to provide employment, the war vets pressed their demands for compensation. Mugabe felt unable to resist and each of them received Z$50,000, a sum which was unbudgeted and which the government could not afford. The value of the Zimbabwe dollar halved the following year. Attempts to create opposition parties in the early nineties were unsuccessful, despite the example of change and a new constitution in South Africa. The economic setbacks coalesced in a civil society struggle against a new Zimbabwe constitution and the creation of the MDC. Media, and especially radio and television, were largely under government control. Nevertheless, to the surprise of many, the government's constitutional proposals were decisively defeated in February 2000, by 54.7% to 45.3%.

For Mugabe this defeat undercut the legitimacy of the regime. He responded by unleashing a program of revolutionary violence against the White commercial farmers, who produced most of the country's food and commercial export crops – a Fast Track Land Resettlement Program. War vets and others moved on to these farms, chasing away the White owners. The government offered no compensation for the land, only for any barns, machinery or improvements, on the grounds that Cecil Rhodes and the nineteenth century occupiers had conquered, not bought it. Mugabe argued that the Lancaster House agreement had provided only a vague ten year guarantee for the White commercial farmers, and that had expired.

While outsiders looked on in horror as farmworkers were thrown out along with the owners, and output tumbled, Mugabe attacked the West and donor agencies like the IMF. "Let that monstrous creature get out of the way. Why should we continue to plead? Let us look elsewhere for resources," he had said in April 1999.[8] A vicious war of words developed with the United Kingdom, the former colonial power, where an initially sympathetic Labour Government under Prime Minister Tony Blair had taken office in 1997. But its Ministers became disillusioned with corruption and disregard for human rights. In 2003 Zimbabwe walked out of the Commonwealth, this voluntary association of Britain's ex-colonies,[9] and the first

decade of the new millennium saw a catastrophic decline in the economy,[10] and a Weimar-like inflation of the currency.

The government faced effective political opposition, in spite of repression and violence deployed on its behalf. In elections in 2000, ZANU-PF won 62 seats with 48% of the votes, the MDC took 57 seats with 47%. Two years later Mugabe beat Tsvangirai in presidential elections by 1.685M votes to 1.258M in a campaign which saw 54 murders, 945 cases of torture and 214 kidnappings. Six years later however, in 2008, ZANU-PF were defeated in parliamentary and local government elections by an MDC that had split. Crucially the Election Commission, in results slowly released for the presidential election, declared on May 2 that Tsvangirai had 47.9% of the votes, Mugabe 43.2%, and Simba Makoni, a former Finance Minister who had broken away from ZANU-PF, had 8.3%. As no one had won more than half the votes there would have to be a rerun.

Mugabe wobbled initially, meditating resignation, but Grace his young second wife[11] and his key lieutenants persuaded him that he personally and the regime as a whole would be at risk if Tsvangirai and the MDC came to power. He and the security services, the Joint Operations Command, launched the fiercest crackdown on his compatriots since the *Gukhurahundi* two decades earlier. A ZANU youth militia, the "green bombers," were especially vicious. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum reported 107 political murders and executions and 156 kidnappings and disappearances. Tsvangirai was prevented from campaigning in the Shona countryside. On June 22, a week before the election, he withdrew, saying that 86 of his people had been killed and 200,000 driven from their homes.

Survival, then overthrow, 2008–2017

It was a pyrrhic victory for Mugabe. The repression was widely reported internationally. President Mwanawasa of Zambia, currently chairing the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to which Zimbabwe belonged, described the result as an embarrassment. Under pressure from South Africa and other neighbors Mugabe was forced to bring Tsvangirai and a smaller MDC faction into a "unity government." But an attempt by the US and European Union to introduce UN sanctions was blocked by Russia and China.

Mugabe cleverly hung on to most of the real power, while permitting the MDC's Tendai Biti to try and rebuild the economy as Finance Minister, and other MDC ministers to restore education and social services. He would remain as executive president, while Tsvangirai became prime minister under him. ZANU-PF retained the ministries of foreign affairs, defense, local government, justice and police, mines (where gold and diamonds afforded rich pickings to the government), agriculture and lands (significant to ensure that the takeover of commercial firms was not undone).

As president, with his portrait hung everywhere and a fawning state broadcasting system, particularly effective through local language radio, Mugabe rode out the challenges of the decade from 1998 to 2008, by a mixture of strategies, of

which brutal repression became the most important. There were three elements worth analyzing: a stronger relationship with the military and security agencies; skillful management of ZANU-PF and the political situation; and advantageous positioning in the international scene.

In 1998, Zimbabwe joined the regional war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the side of Laurent Kabila, sending in up to 20,000 troops before their withdrawal as part of a series of peace moves four years later. Since coming to power, Mugabe had always been careful to nurture the military whose liberation leaders, like Emmerson Manangagwa and Solomon and Joice Mujuru also had factional roles in ZANU's politburo. They had put down "Super-ZAPU," guarded the Beira corridor inside Mozambique, and worked closely on internal security with the police to maintain the regime. The army was not an apolitical arm of the constitution, but a continuation of ZANLA from the civil war.

The point of his armed Congo intervention, in addition to strengthening Mugabe's regional status, was to keep his military sweet. Generals, and businesses associated with the party, could help themselves to the extraordinary mineral resources of the Congo, including diamonds, gold, cobalt, and coltan. All this was done with the approval of Laurent Kabila and, after he died in 2001, of his son Joseph who inherited the presidency; the Kabilas depended on Zimbabwe, its most reliable ally in the war, and Joseph had a bodyguard of Zimbabwean troops in Kinshasa.

The Congo war was supposed to be self-financing; in reality, it worsened the inflation in Zimbabwe. But it had a benefit for Mugabe in that it brutalized both generals and troops. It was a terrible war, with some 5.4 million deaths and widespread displacement of civilians, with impunity and human rights abuse. Soldiers who had been through it would think nothing of harming their own fellow-citizens, if ordered to do so.

In his struggle against the urban-based supporters of the MDC Mugabe's most vicious assault outside elections took place in 2005, with Operation *Murambatsvina* – "clearing out the rubbish." Justified as a town planning strategy, to get rid of shacks built without permission, and petty traders trying to make a living in spite of the inflation, it involved bulldozing homes and transporting their occupants into the bush. Up to 700,000 homes and livelihoods were destroyed in cities including Harare and Bulawayo, coincidentally under the control of MDC local authorities. But the government brushed aside the criticism of Anna Tibaijuka, Tanzanian director of UN-Habitat, whose report stated that the program had been carried out in an indiscriminate manner, with indifference to human suffering.[12]

Mugabe had not been a commander in the war, however, unlike Samora Machel in Mozambique or Nelson Mandela who led the ANC guerrillas, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Mugabe's key skills were political. During the early years of the twenty-first century, as production collapsed and inflation went off the scale, he deployed his guile and toughness to keep his party loyal and the opposition divided. Corruption, through the distribution of the best farms and cronyism in business, were incentives; deaths, from mysterious car crashes, were warnings.

In 2004, when he was 80 and big beasts in ZANU-PF were maneuvering for the succession, he slapped down Mnangagwa and appointed Joice Mujuru as Vice President, retaining control for the Zezuru clan to which he belonged.[13] He supported the ambitions of his younger second wife, Grace, who became president of the ZANU-PF Women's League in 2014, and whose struggle with Mnangagwa precipitated his overthrow by the army in 2017.

Within Africa he never lacked friends, especially among the liberation leaders of Angola and Mozambique who shared the same political orientation. Libya's Gadaffi advanced money to NOCZIM, the near-bankrupt oil parastatal.[14] Thabo Mbeki, the president of South Africa who sought to arbitrate between Mugabe and Tsvangirai in the first years of the new century, looked up to him, and his land takeovers and "indigenization" of businesses were welcomed by radical elements in Mbeki's African National Congress.

Although the Non Aligned Movement lost its raison d'être after the fall of the Berlin Wall it had residual sympathy for Zimbabwe, as Mugabe characterized its struggle as one against imperialists and racist Whites. This was an important ideological weapon in confirming popular support for the regime inside Zimbabwe. At the peak of the quarrel with the Blair Labour Government in the UK, Mugabe also used traditional homophobic cultural values, to justify claims that the government was run by "gay gangsters."

When the United States, the European Union and the UK started withdrawing assistance due to human rights abuse in the early 2000s, the regime railed against "sanctions," and used them as an excuse for its economic implosion. But at the same time Mugabe launched a "Look East" policy, inviting Chinese investment to make up for the loss of Western investment. This coincided with the huge expansion in the Chinese economy, although China was selective in placing its funds. Malaysia, Singapore, where Mugabe regularly went for medical treatment and Hong Kong, where Grace went shopping and her daughter studied, also succored the regime. These were authoritarian governments, less troubled by human rights concerns.

The Mugabe era came to an end in November 2017. He was then aged 93, showing signs of senility, and a military coup dressed in constitutional garb saw him bundled out of power with protection, honor and $10 million. But it was a continuity coup, with ZANU-PF still in control, and the street demonstrations of joy, assuming the coming of a real democracy, could not have been more mistaken.[15]

What led to his fall? Frequently out of the country for medical assistance, and falling asleep in key meetings, he no longer had the managerial skills for the party and the security agencies which had served him so well. He had permitted a creeping power grab by his greedy and unpopular wife Grace, to whom the military were adamantly opposed. With the support of a younger group in ZANU-PF she was gearing up to be his Vice-President, and heir at his death. She fell out with Emmerson Mnangagwa, a member of the Karanga clan within the Shona, opposed to her husband's dominant Zezurus. He was a rich and cruel man who had acquired hero status in the civil war and had many friends among the securocrats and kleptocrats.

When Mugabe fired Mnangagwa as vice president on November 6 he triggered the coup which overthrew him. Mnangagwa fled to South Africa. General Constantino Chiwenga, head of the army, refused to swear allegiance to Grace and confirmed that China, which was now bankrolling the regime, would stay neutral. When the tanks rolled through Harare, occupying the state broadcaster, arresting Grace and surrounding the presidential palace, there was no resistance. Vice President Mnangagwa was chosen president by ZANU-PF and neighboring states were assured that the constitution had been upheld.

Conclusion

So what does the Mugabe story have to say about the nature of power vested in a single man at the start of the twenty-first century? It is clear that, in spite of his declining mental qualities, he was acting as a "president for life" until the military unseated him, in part because ordinary soldiers could no longer be paid.

His monument is the continuing dominance of ZANU-PF, with its Leninist traditions, even though President Emmerson Mnangagwa, narrowly elected president in 2018 elections, may not have inherited his unchallenged control of the party. This shows that in Zimbabwe, as in countries as diverse as Vietnam and Cuba, "democratic centralism" can survive and flourish in the internet era of social media. Mugabe's party management skills involved bribes and threats, promotions and demotions. Mnangagwa, once his personal bodyguard, was demoted in 2005 before being used by Mugabe to manage the party's 2008 election campaign only three years later.

His use of violence was deployed at intervals throughout his period in power, from the *Gukurahundi* in the mid-80s to what seems to have been an attempt to poison Mnangagwa in 2017. There was large-scale violence against those he perceived as enemies, or where it could be used to consolidate support – against the Ndebele, against the White farmers, against the marginal urban population in Operation *Murambatsvina*. When the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions held an anti-government demonstration on September 13, 2006, some 83 workers were tortured and its president lost consciousness, bleeding, after being beaten overnight.

There was also selective violence against individuals, with beatings, executions and death by "car crash." One of the reasons that Morgan Tsvangirai won respect was his survival from several physical attacks on his person. The "car crash" strategy was clever, because poorly maintained roads and vehicles could justify "accidents"; Morgan was injured and his wife Susan died in an accident in 2009 which Morgan said was not suspicious. Much more suspicious was the death of General Solomon Mujuru, a ZANU faction leader, in a fire at his farm in 2011.

Ideologically Mugabe made much of a creed of national liberation, especially from Britain but widening his fire to include the United States, the European Union and Western financial agencies. This was an attractive line, for he presented himself as reversing the colonization of Africa. The land occupations and ejection

of White farmers were described as "the third *Chimurenga*," another anti-colonial struggle in a history that went back to the 1880s. Arguably he remained a Marxist throughout his life, but he managed to combine this with Roman Catholicism for himself, and exploiting the traditional spirit mediums of the Shona to win their votes and support.

Crucially he demonstrated that economic pressures from outside, and humanitarian concerns, were not enough to shake his rule. Ordinary Zimbabweans suffered enormously. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century between 3 and 4 million of his compatriots had left the country, over a quarter of the population, the largest number going south to South Africa. Hunger and malnutrition became common in a country which had been a breadbasket for the region. The causes lay in the chaotic land reform, and drought. In February 2009, a particularly bad month, it was estimated that 70% of Zimbabweans depended on food aid. ZANU supporters received preference in getting this food.

But he rode this out, just as he rode out that extraordinary inflation which outsiders assumed might topple his regime. Inflation took off in the late 1990s. By the end of 2000 the IMF stated that gross domestic product had fallen by 5.5%, and the consumer price index in June 2001 was up by 64.4% year on year. The government had been printing money without reference to underlying assets and, later in the decade, hyperinflation set in. Whereas the highest value note was Z$20,000 in 2006 it had reached Z$100 million two years later, and people were carrying round bricks of money to buy essentials. Just prior to formation of the unity government the Reserve Bank gave up defending the national dollar, and the US dollar and South African rand became the means of exchange. Queuing, empty shops and the destruction of pensions were inevitable results of this hyper-inflation.

For those close to the regime this collapse, with currency manipulation for insider dealers, was an opportunity. It strengthened the corrupt and kleptocratic aspects which Mugabe exploited. Enrichment for people like Mnangagwa and Solomon and Joice Mujuru, for those who had acquired farms under land reform, or businesses under indigenization policies, was an element that the president could utilize. The stabilization under the government of national unity, 2009–2013, bought him time to take advantage of other assets.

The most important of these assets was the rich diamond find at Marange. Initially the diamonds were dug out by freelance miners, with gems smuggled out of the country. But Mugabe nationalized the mines in 2007, sent troops to keep out the freelances, and did a deal with companies with Chinese links. None of the money went to the Ministry of Finance, under the MDC's Tendai Biti in the government of national unity and, as one academic put it, "One can conclude that the security agencies remained the primary, if not the sole beneficiaries of China's mining of the Marange diamonds."[16] After his defeat in the first round of the 2008 elections Mugabe had more reason to keep the security agencies onside.

The net result of the Chinese alliance, the diamond find and the relationships between the government and the farmers and businesses which depended on the government, was to render nugatory all hopes that external economic pressure

could shift the ZANU autocracy. It had always been an issue, in political debate at the time and academic analysis afterward, as to how far the boycott movement and external economic pressure had forced White South Africa to come to the negotiating table at the end of the 1980s. What was clear, some 30-plus years later, that this was not a strategy that was working in its smaller northern neighbor.

Given the scale of Zimbabwe's economic implosion the survival of Mugabe's regime had wider implications. It showed that an authoritarian system, backed by ruthless security agencies, was invulnerable to pressures from the Western democracies. In 2001 the United States Congress passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act. This cut off multilateral assistance from several agencies in which the US was a major shareholder,[17] and targeted Mugabe and named allies for human rights abuse. This and other measures did not achieve regime change. The persistent idea that sanctions can effect change in Russia, after its invasion of the Crimea, or North Korea, which has continued with its nuclear and intercontinental missile testing, should be doubted in the light of experience in Zimbabwe.

Four factors of significance

So what does the Mugabe story demonstrate, in terms of the theory of twenty-first century authoritarianism? There are particularities about the history of Zimbabwe and southern Africa which are not replicated elsewhere, even in other states created after decolonization. There are four factors of special significance: the role of liberation movements; the ability to amass power while retaining a façade of democracy; the potency of regional and international alliances; and relationship with the instruments of force, especially the military.

Zimbabwe is not alone in having a ruling party, born of a liberation movement and hostile to racism, which has been in power since independence. The same is true of South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and Angola. However all these others, even those with a Marxist complexion like Mozambique and Angola, have seen some rotation of leadership. Until he was failing mentally, and overthrown by the military, Robert Mugabe remained dominant in the central committee of ZANU-PF. He had become, in effect, a president for life. But liberation movements have a unique status in modern political taxonomy, maintaining public support despite corruption and the failure to deliver promised services. This was a rock on which his system was built.

The second instrument in the toolbox of his authoritarianism was his willingness to maintain a façade of democracy. Some scholars, such as Professor Stephen Chan, have argued that he was almost pernickety in his desire to go through the democratic motions.[18] This approach could confuse critics and outsiders into believing that there was a real chance that, if his party could be defeated at the polls, he would be dislodged from power. It also enabled him to see where there was opposition, inside his party and outside, and how the public viewed some of his henchmen. For example Emmerson Mnangagwa, ultimately his nemesis, was quite

popular in the party but was twice defeated by an MDC candidate in the 2000 and 2005 elections. This was in spite of intimidation in the Kwekwe constituency and a failed attempt to burn the MDC candidate alive.

The government nominated members of the Zimbabwe Election Commission and controlled broadcasting. But when the polls went against him, especially in 2008 in the first round of elections, he was ready to authorize campaigns of violence. He was not prepared to relinquish power, but enjoyed the appearance of being the people's choice. Inner-party democracy was something he could manipulate, playing off factions that were built round those ambitious to succeed him. This strategy only failed when it looked as though he wanted his widely distrusted wife Grace, who had no "struggle credentials" but had created a power base by being his gatekeeper and mother of his four children, to succeed him as president.

A third element in his lengthy system lay in his ability to build and maintain long-term international alliances. This was true of immediate neighbors, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo where he had been essential to the survival of Laurent and Joseph Kabila, and Mozambique and Angola. While Mozambique had provided crucial base areas for ZANLA and refugees during the civil war, he returned the favor in the 1980s when he provided succor to FRELIMO and a garrison for the Beira corridor during Mozambique's own civil war.

His relations with post-apartheid South Africa were more nuanced, for the African National Congress had been aligned with ZAPU, not ZANU, and he disliked Mandela for his racial reconciliation policies at a time when he was whipping up anti-White feeling in Zimbabwe. He was jealous of Mandela's global reputation, which he saw overtaking his own. He exploited his elder statesman status with President Mbeki, who was trying to arbitrate between ZANU and MDC, and was untroubled by the increasingly corrupt President Zuma.

Further afield his long-standing alliance with China made him invulnerable to attack on human rights grounds in the UN Security Council, and its investments were a bulwark against economic collapse at home. The Soviet Union had backed ZAPU in the civil war yet, when Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia in 1999, he found support from a fellow-authoritarian. He was also able, like Fidel Castro, to enjoy the residual South-South friendship of those who recalled the ideals of the Non Aligned Movement.

Fourth, of course, was his grasp and command of the security-military apparatus. There was a nexus between party, securocrats and kleptocracy. Mugabe had never been a general, but before the 1980 elections which created an independent Zimbabwe he had stamped his control over both ZANLA and his ZANU party. This was a lasting achievement, sustaining his personal authority into old age. He changed police chiefs, spy chiefs and generals to suit himself, playing off individuals and factions. His system only came undone in 2017, in his advanced old age, by which time he was 93.

His favoritism to his second wife Grace, on the verge of being made Vice President, decisively angered the senior military who had fought in the civil war, committed crimes together and enriched themselves. In his final crisis they were also at

risk of being unable to pay their troops, in the economic collapse. They could not afford to let Mugabe continue in power. Further, the narrow Shona clan base, in the Zezuru clan to which both Robert and Grace belonged, had created internal party jealousies which could not be contained. In the final struggle it was rapidly clear that he had lost his authority over the military, his principal instruments of coercion.

Mugabe's bloodless overthrow did not put an end to authoritarianism and human rights abuse in Zimbabwe.[19] His monument lies in the system that survives him.[20]

Notes

1 Mugabe's father was born in Nyasaland, now Malawi.
2 Congo became independent in June 1960; its first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was executed in January 1961.
3 Mugabe and Sithole did not participate and there was one abstention.
4 The Lancaster House talks in London lasted from September 10 to December 15, 1979.
5 The Rufaro speech, broadcast on radio and TV, was short and can be viewed for instance on www.mbaretimes.com/2020/04/18/Robert-Mugabes.
6 Totally accurate statistics for victims will never be known. An extensive discussion of data appears in Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), 11–41.
7 Zimbabwe's Minister of Finance, from 1983–1995, was Bernard Chidzero, who had been at school with Mugabe. He oversaw the switch from a statist command economy to the unpopular ESAP, and was backed by the UK and Commonwealth governments to become UN Secretary-General in 1990, when he was defeated by the Egyptian, Boutros Boutros-Ghali.
8 In an interview in 2002 Mugabe distinguished between the "iniquitous" IMF, particularly because it wanted to force him to cut education, always his high priority, and the more benevolent World Bank (see: www.businesstimes.co.zw/Mugabe-the-imf-is-an-iniquitous-institution-with-no-right-to-existence-at-all/).
9 Three Commonwealth leaders had tried to keep Mugabe in this post-colonial club; President Mbeki of South Africa thought that Zimbabwe was being treated more harshly than Pakistan, ruled by General Musharraf, which had been allowed to rejoin the Commonwealth.
10 Gross domestic product declined from US$10 billion in 1997 to US$2 billion in 2008, and life expectancy fell from 60 to 34. Richard Bourne, *Catastrophe – What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), 198.
11 Grace Mugabe, born in 1965, was 41 years younger than Robert; his popular first wife Sally, born in Ghana, had died of kidney failure in 1992.
12 The 98 page report was handed to the Zimbabwe government on 21 July 2005, which replied with a lengthy rebuttal.
13 Emmerson Mnangagwa, who succeeded Mugabe after he was overthrown had attacked white-owned farms and bombed a train in 1965, at the start of the civil war; Joice Mujuru claimed to have shot down a helicopter in 1974 and in 1977 married Solomon Mujuru, deputy commander of ZANLA.
14 This loan was made in 1998; in the 21st century the mismanagement and losses of parastatals added to the collapse of government finances.
15 There has been a series of violent attacks on demonstrators by police and security forces, and arbitrary arrests in the Mnangagwa era. In September 2019, for example, Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of assembly and association, criticised "excessive, disproportionate and lethal use of force against protestors, through the use of tear gas, batons and live ammunition" – hrw/org/news/2019/9/27/um-expert-shocked-abuses-zimbabwe.

16 Quoted in Sue Onslow and Martin Plaut, *Robert Mugabe* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018), 117.
17 Most importantly these included the IMF and World Bank.
18 Chan has argued this frequently, for instance stating the Mugabe could only overcome his personal demons "by securing, by any means, the validation that votes marked in his name can bring" – Stephen Chan, *Robert Mugabe, a Life of Power and Violence* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2003), 214–215.
19 Continuing human rights abuse has blocked Zimbabwe's attempt to rejoin the Commonwealth, whose Commonwealth Charter and opposition to military takeovers have been key motifs in the 21st century.
20 In August 2020, for example, repression continued, with an award-winning anti-corruption journalist, Hopewell Chin'ono, in prison along with many others who had denounced corruption. The World Food Programme forecast that 60 per cent of Zimbabweans would be "food insecure" by the end of the year.

Further reading

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7

JOSEPH KABILA

The "Raïs" of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (born 1971)

Charles Tshimanga

On January 26, 2001, at the age of 29, Joseph Kabila became the fourth president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).[1] The new president was little known to his fellow Congolese citizens. His discretion and inaccessibility to the press added mystery to his personality. During his presidency, his supporters called him the Congo Raïs (Chief) or Shina Rambo.[2] As for his detractors, they point to his ruthlessness and his history of ruling the Congo with an iron fist. In a scathing article that examines Joseph Kabila's rule, Pierre Englebert writes, among other things, that Joseph Kabila's governance was characterized by absenteeism and delegation, theft, patronage, violence, and repression.[3]

In 1996, Joseph Kabila returned to the Congo with his father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who seized power through "revolutionary" means. After the assassination of his father in January 2001, Joseph Kabila took over a country that had been a failed state since the late 1980s. In this essay I argue that during Joseph Kabila's 18 years in power, the Congo has more than ever become a "gatekeeper state," to borrow Frederick Cooper's expression.[4] An authoritarian, he is the gatekeeper that allows the Congo to communicate with the outside world. He saw the Congo not as a country to be developed but rather as a source for his and his family's personal enrichment. The Hobbesian social contract that he put in place suffocated the country and stifled the possibilities of Congolese inventiveness.

Joseph Kabila: a brief biography

Joseph Kabila's origins, including his parentage and place and date of birth, are the subject of persistent controversy. According to the official version, Joseph Kabila and his twin sister Jeannette (Jaynet) were born on June 4, 1971, in Mpiki in South Kivu, to Laurent-Désiré Kabila and Sifa Maanya. Erik Kennes writes of the controversy surrounding Joseph Kabila's origins and kinship and that without an

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irrefutable birth certificate, the rumors have never ceased. Erik Kennes claims that Laurent-Désiré Kabila fathered at least 25 children with seven different women.

Jean Omasombo writes that Joseph Kabila is known as an intelligent, sporty man, who is passionate about cars and has a great admiration for revolutionary heroes like Thomas Sankara, Che Guevara, and Yoweri Museveni. According to available sources, Kabila lived in Tanzania and Uganda between the late 1970s and the 1990s and holds Tanzanian nationality. He received his primary and secondary education in Tanzania and completed military service in the Tanzanian army at Makutopura camp. Like his sister Jeannette, who reached the rank of Captain, he is believed to have also received military training in Uganda.[5]

Joseph Kabila therefore spent many years abroad in the neighboring countries of the Congo. He can be traced back to the "First Congo War" of 1996–1997, a period in which his father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, headed the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (AFDL), the "rebel" group that wanted to put an end to Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship in DR Congo, which lasted from 1965 to 1997.[6] He is found alongside Rwandan James Kabarebe, who wanted young Joseph, who was then 25, to take part in military operations led by the AFDL on Congolese soil with the support of the Rwandan army. Kabarebe said of his protégé that he "had the hardest time learning how to fight."[7]

With assistance from Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian, and Angolan armies, Laurent-Désiré Kabila removed Mobutu Sese Seko from office. In May 1997, he became the third president of Zaire, which he renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In June 1998, L.D. Kabila sent his son Joseph for military training to Beijing, China.

It is important to underscore the role that the First Congo War played in the return of Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his son Joseph to Congo. Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his AFDL did not initiate the First Congo War of 1996–1997 (which is also called the "war of liberation"). This military conflict was not a popular uprising instigated by a Congolese leader. To the contrary, it was a war led by the armies of neighboring countries – Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, as well as Angola – each with its own agenda. These countries wanted to get rid of President Mobutu Sese Seko, who had long been causing trouble in the subregion, for their own reasons. In fact, the AFDL did not even exist until October 18, 1996, a day after the fall of Uvira, which fell into "rebel" hands.

The AFDL was a politico-military coalition that was established in order to take charge of the rebellion's first victory and to put a Congolese face on a foreign invasion. It stemmed from a Memorandum of Understanding that was signed at Lemera (Congo) on October 18, 1996, by L.D. Kabila's People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) with three other parties: the National Resistance Council (CNRD) of André Kisase Ngandu (who would be assassinated in 1997 by Rwandan soldiers for being too independent);[8] the Revolutionary Movement for the Liberation of Zaire (MRLZ) of Masasu Nindaga; and the Democratic Alliance of the People (ADP) of Déogratias Bugera. The AFDL appointed L.D. Kabila as spokesperson of the new politico-military coalition.[9]

The help L.D. Kabila received came with strings attached, namely from two of his so-called friends, Rwandan president Paul Kagame and Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni. Gérard Prunier, René Lemarchand, and Filip Reyntjens, to name only a few, elaborate on this important point in their insightful accounts.[10] L.D. Kabila told the Congolese people that he had liberated them from Mobutu's dictatorship and that he was going to rebuild and modernize the Congo. However, for Paul Kagame, the goal, as analyzed by René Lemarchand, was to "overthrow . . . the Mobutist dictatorship and [to replace it] by a Tutsi-led protectorate."[11] In other words, Kagame's ambition was to turn the Congo into a small province of Tutsi power based in Kigali.

The Congolese people felt profound resentment over the Rwandan and Ugandan presence in their country. On social media, they described their country as being occupied. This resentment prompted L.D. Kabila to reconsider his position vis-à-vis his former "friends." René Lemarchand and Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja argue that L.D. Kabila's refusal to satisfy the expectations of his former Rwandan and Ugandan "friends" prompted the Second Congo War, also known as the Great War of Africa or the African World War, which began on August 2, 1998.[12] During the Second Congo War, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi invaded the Congo, with several "rebel" and armed groups participating in the fighting.

Approximately half of the country was occupied until 2003, when the war showed its ugly face to the world. According to the UN and human rights organizations, the two Congo Wars left 5.4 million dead, several hundred thousand Congolese women raped, and millions of people internally displaced. During the war, the Congolese fled to the bush and several hundred thousand people died of starvation and lack of health care. The Second Congo War precipitated Joseph Kabila's return to Congo in August 1998, where he was appointed General Major and Chief of Staff of the Congolese army at the age of 27. His rapid promotion was surprising, considering the very short time – fewer than three years – he had spent in the military.

In April 1999, about two years after becoming president, L.D. Kabila dissolved the AFDL, calling it "a conglomerate of opportunists and adventurers." He replaced the AFDL with the "Comités du Pouvoir Populaire [Committees of Popular Power]," which L.D. Kabila saw as the link between the government and the people. L.D. Kabila even repudiated the AFDL, the organization that helped him become DR Congo's third president.[13]

The Second Congo War showed the limits of L.D. Kabila, who became increasingly isolated, both regionally and internationally. Moreover, domestically, L.D. Kabila faced many challenges, including an economy that was in bad shape. It was in this difficult context that he was assassinated on January 16, 2001, by one of his bodyguards.

Accession and consolidation of power

At the time of his father's murder, Joseph Kabila was a young man of 29 who was fluent in English and Swahili but did not speak French, the official language of the

country, nor Lingala, one of the national languages spoken in Kinshasa, the Congolese capital. He had returned to the Congo with his father, who seized power with the help of foreign troops. When he became President of the republic, he did not have an electoral base on which he could rely to rule the country. However, for a time, his young age raised hope among the Congolese, who believed the new president would lead the country in a new direction. But by the end of Kabila's term in January 2019, the Congo was left to deal with his legacy: corruption remained rampant, poverty grew, and, most importantly, he had set up a Hobbesian social contract and ruled the Congo with an iron fist. Under Joseph Kabila, DR Congo remained, more than ever, a gatekeeper state.[14]

Joseph Kabila inherited the Congolese presidency on January 21, 2001, in what resembled a monarchic succession. Several theories exist on how Joseph Kabila succeeded his father. The most common version suggests that his father's closest aides and allies had chosen Joseph Kabila as his father's successor, believing that his lack of experience would lead to his failure.[15] When he became president, the country faced many challenges. Almost half of the national territory was occupied by the armies of neighboring countries, notably Rwanda and Uganda, which had their own plans for the Congo. Various rebel groups had their own demands, while the unarmed opposition wanted the DR Congo to be governed by democratic principles.

The new young president had to meet the expectations of all these different actors and interests. His 18 years in power, from January 26, 2001, to January 24, 2019, show to a certain extent his ability to control Congo's political environment. Moreover, he displayed a strong will, which calls to mind Niccolo Machiavelli's theory of the prince/ruler; Kabila understood that remaining in power could not be left to chance. Immediately upon inheriting the presidency, he made surprising decisions that diverged completely from his father's. Among other things, he dismissed his father's former advisers and allies and began the normalization of bilateral relations with key allies such as the United States, France, Britain, and Belgium, among others. At the subregional level, he began a diplomatic offensive that put Rwanda and Uganda, whose troops had occupied the eastern provinces during the Second Congo War, on the defensive.

Political talks took place between Congolese actors in Lusaka, Zambia, and in Pretoria and Sun City in South Africa. On December 16, 2002, a Global and Inclusive Agreement (AGI) was signed by Congolese participants. Based on the AGI, parties agreed

> to combine their efforts in order to achieve national reconciliation. To this effect, they decided to set up a government of national unity which will organize free and democratic elections after a period of transition the duration of which is fixed [in the Agreement].[16]

The transition was expected to last two years, a period that could be extended twice by a period of six months.[17]

The AGI established five major transition objectives: (1) the reunification and reconstruction of the country; the reestablishment of peace; and the restoration of territorial integrity and State authority in the whole of the national territory; (2) national reconciliation; (3) the creation of a restructured, integrated national army; (4) the organization of free and transparent elections at all levels, allowing a constitutional and democratic government to be put in place; (5) the setting up of structures that will lead to a new political order.

Joseph Kabila is credited for brokering the December 2002 AGI in Sun City, South Africa, which ended the Second Congo War, even though violence continued in eastern Congo. However, the 2002 AGI exposes one of the main characteristics of Joseph Kabila's presidency. The AGI was a compromise that kept Joseph Kabila as interim president with four vice presidents: one representing the government, one the rebel group RCD-Goma, another the MLC of Jean-Pierre Bemba, and another for the civil society. Gérard Prunier examines commentaries from newspapers reporting on the Peace Agreement. These papers underscored that it was a joint effort and that the government that resulted from the Peace Agreement was made up of people who had looted their own country and were predatory rebels and corrupt civil servants.[18]

During the transition, Joseph Kabila managed to consolidate his power, thanks to powerful allies. Nzongola Ntalaja argues that powerful international (and national) backers, including US diplomats in Kinshasa, enabled Joseph Kabila to dismiss popular opponent Etienne Tshisekedi from the 2006 elections, as well as thwart Jean-Pierre Bemba, president of the Liberation Movement of Congo (MLC), in his quest to become president. Nzongola Ntalaja contends that it was in this context that Kabila was able to "win" the fraudulent elections of 2006 and 2011.[19] In 2006, Kabila succeeded in placing Abbot Apollinaire Malu Malu, one of his political strategists, at the head of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) responsible for overseeing the elections. On the eve of the proclamation of the results of the presidential and provincial elections of 2006, the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Frédéric Etsou-Nzabi-Bamungwabi, made the following statement about the results of the presidential elections: "There are maneuvers, results we know are not what the Independent Electoral Commission is trying to publish. As a pastor, I do not accept lies, you need the truth." Bishop Etsou-Nzabi-Bamungwabi criticized Abbot Malu-Malu and seemed to "endorse the opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba's claims that international forces were seeking to ensure the victory of the interim president, Joseph Kabila, who was eventually declared the winner."[20]

The 2002 Peace Agreement foresaw the adoption of a transitional constitution that was promulgated in April 2003. That constitution was replaced by a permanent constitution that was approved by referendum in December 2005 and promulgated on February 18, 2006. It can be noted that the constitution of February 2006 was the end result of a long search to escape from political crisis and to install the rule of law and democracy in the Congo. In Article 1 it states that "the Democratic Republic of Congo is, in its borders on June 30, 1960, a State of law, independent, sovereign, unified and indivisible, social, democratic, and secular."[21]

In her examination of this constitution, Delphine Pollet-Panoussis observes that "the authors of the Congolese constitution want to maintain a State of law under all circumstances, even exceptional ones."[22]

To avoid the abuses of the past, Article 220 of the constitution cemented certain provisions relating to the constitutional amendment. It reads:

> [T]he republican form of the State, the principal of universal suffrage, the representative form of Government, the number and length of terms of the President of the Republic, the independence of judicial power (and) political and trade-union pluralism, cannot be the object of constitutional amendment. Any constitutional amendment seeking to limit the rights and freedoms of the individual, or to limit the choices of the provinces and decentralized territorial entities is officially prohibited.[23]

For Pollet-Panoussis, these

> limits on constitutional amendment very clearly constitute the conditions for realizing the rule of law. Since then, in DRC, any constitutional amendment aiming to challenge the rule of law is out of the question. The constituent wishes to preserve the rule of law at any price, even his own.[24]

Nevertheless, on January 03, 2011, just ten months before the presidential elections of November 2011, Joseph Kabila proposed an amendment to the constitution for a presidential election in one ballot. On January 12, 2011, the National Assembly accepted the proposal. On January 16, 2011, after only two weeks, it was voted on and written into the constitution. Article 71, which anticipated the presidential election in two ballots, was replaced by a single vote in one ballot and reads: "The President of the Republic is elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast."[25] In other words, the multi-round run-off vote system was replaced, which means that the candidate with the largest percentage of votes – even if that proportion is less than 50% – would win the seat. Only those elected from Joseph Kabila's presidential majority took part in the vote. Those of the opposition refused to do so. It is worth mentioning that it took barely two weeks for the Constitution to be revised, defying democratic norms. It is believed that Joseph Kabila, who was very unpopular, felt that a single ballot vote would give him a greater chance of winning the presidential elections.

Etienne Tshisekedi, the leader of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), the main opposition party, stood for election in the chaotic presidential elections of November 28, 2011. However, the CENI (electoral commission) declared Joseph Kabila the winner with 48.9% of the votes, and concluded that Etienne Tshisekedi had obtained 32.3 percentage points. But Etienne Tshisekedi contested the results and proclaimed himself president. The Carter Center, a non-governmental organization founded by former US president Jimmy Carter, stated that the results "lack[ed] credibility."[26] For his part, the archbishop of Kinshasa,

Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, declared that the results of the Electoral Commission conformed "neither to truth nor justice."[27] Joseph Kabila's proclamation as winner of the presidential elections raised the question of his legitimacy and plunged the Congo into a grave constitutional crisis.

Despite the 2011 fraudulent elections, the opposition expected Kabila to leave power at the end of his second and final term in December 2016. However, Kabila and his allies within the presidential majority (MP) came up with a plan to revise the electoral law with the purpose of, according to them, conducting a census prior to the 2016 presidential elections. The opposition protested this plan because it conditioned holding the 2016 presidential elections on census results. A popular insurrection evolved in the streets. Violent confrontations took place between the police and protesters, many of whom were students. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (BCNUDH) documented killings of at least 40 civilians in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Boma, and Matadi. These were mainly people protesting against President Joseph Kabila's refusal to leave office at the end of his official term on December 19. Additionally, 107 protesters were injured or maltreated, and at least 460 were arrested, according to Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the UN High Commission on Human Rights.[28]

In 2016, Joseph Kabila held back-to-back talks with the opposition. During the first talk, led by African Union mediator and Togolese diplomat Edem Kodjo, a "political accord" was reached, allowing Kabila to remain in power beyond his second and final term until new elections were held. The Congolese referred to this accord as "glissement," the French word for "slippage." Still, the opposition and the Congolese diaspora opposed this accord, and it came to nothing. In response, Joseph Kabila initiated another round of talks led by the Catholic Church to find a political solution to the constitutional crisis provoked by Kabila extending his term limit. On December 31, 2016, the Catholic Church reached a deal called the "Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement" or "the CENCO Agreement." Among other things, CENCO stipulated that stakeholders would commit to respecting the constitution and the laws of the Republic and would organize presidential, national, provincial, and local elections by December 2017. It also reaffirmed that because he had already completed two terms, Joseph Kabila could not run for a third term.[29]

However, Kabila did not appear inclined to abide by the CENCO Agreement or to step down. In July 2017, Corneille Nangaa, the president of the electoral commission, announced that the elections could not technically be held before the December 31, 2017, deadline as called for in CENCO. In 2017, the Lay Coordination Committee (CLC) was created. The CLC is an association of religious followers that is not an official offshoot of the Catholic Church. The CLC demonstrated on Sundays after mass, including priests and with bibles and palm fronds in hand to demand that CENCO be upheld and that elections be credible and transparent. Repression of the protests was violent, and some CLC members, including activist Rossy Mukendi Tshimanga, were killed by police. A warrant was issued for leaders of the CLC. The diaspora in the United States, some of whose members

belong to the Central African Studies Association (CASA), initiated a "Declaration of Support for the CLC," signed by 100 academics teaching in universities in the United States, Canada, France, Belgium, Great Britain, the Netherlands, the DRC, and Cameroon, among others. The "Declaration of Support for the CLC" was published in local newspapers in Kinshasa, and copies were sent to the DRC's Embassy in Washington, DC, and to Nikki Haley, the then US Ambassador to the United Nations. The CLC's objective to install the rule of law in the Congo was shared by the diaspora.

Taking power by force while claiming revolutionary legitimacy, Laurent-Désiré Kabila and his son Joseph Kabila did not adhere to the democratic culture that was being established with great difficulty in the Congo. During his 18 years in power, Joseph Kabila made a name for himself by constantly violating the constitution, inflicting regular violence on the Congolese people, and committing human and civil rights abuses on a daily basis.

Looting the country and enriching himself and his family

Before taking power in May 1997, Laurent-Désiré Kabila never missed an opportunity to vilify Mobutu and Congolese politicians, frequently declaring that after three decades in power, they had failed to develop the nation and were behaving as if the Congo was a conquered country without regard for its inhabitants or an emotional connection to the country. Where are things since President Mobutu's departure? The Second Congo War began a little over a year after Laurent-Désiré Kabila seized power and lasted until his assassination in January 2001. On the other hand, his son Joseph Kabila ruled the Congo for 18 years, a long period that allows us to analyze his legacy and ask: "Did Joseph Kabila turn the page on the Mobutu years and offer a new social contract to the Congolese?"

DR Congo under Joseph Kabila was much as it was during the Mobutu years, and corruption was one of the main characteristics of Joseph Kabila's presidency. Corruption pervaded his regime, and it did not provide basic services to the Congolese people who were and are still living in extreme poverty. According to data compiled by *Trading Economics* and *Transparency International*, the Congo places in the top 20 "of the most corrupt countries in the world," with a sustained average of number 157 from 2004 to 2017.[30] This high rate of corruption exposes the evils plaguing the Congo, a country where six out of seven Congolese live on less than two US dollars a day. Meanwhile, Joseph Kabila, his family, and political cronies have eviscerated a dying economy and live in staggering opulence, which has been documented by *Bloomberg News*, Congo Research Group, and the Panama Papers.[31] This same group has also repeatedly displayed great disdain for the population.

A 2016 trial in the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, provides strong evidence of Joseph Kabila's corruption and of one of his closest aides and foreign business partner. In this trial, the United States sued Och-Ziff Capital Management, a US hedge fund for corruption and paying bribes to government officials in five African countries, including the DRC. (Och-Ziff ultimately pled

guilty.) Over a period of ten years, these corruption schemes led to the payment of more than 100 million dollars to high-ranking DRC officials to secure access to, and preference for, investment opportunities. The DOJ filing reads as follows:

> In or about and between 2005 and 2015, DRC Partner, together with others, paid more than one-hundred million U.S. dollars in bribes to DRC officials to obtain special access to and preferential prices for opportunities in the government-controlled mining sector in the DRC. Beginning in December 2007, Och-Ziff, through Och-Ziff Employee 3 and Och-Ziff Employee 5, had discussions with DRC Partner about forming a joint venture between Och-Ziff and DRC Partner, through DRC Partner's companies, for the purpose of acquiring and consolidating valuable mining assets in the DRC into one large publicly traded mining company. The underlying premise of the proposed joint venture was that DRC Partner had special access to attractive investment opportunities in the DRC through his relationships with officials at the highest levels of the DRC government. In return for access to these attractive investment opportunities, Och-Ziff would finance DRC Partner's operations in the DRC. Och-Ziff Employee 3 and Och-Ziff Employee 5 understood that Och-Ziff's funds would be used, in part, to pay substantial sums of money to DRC officials to secure access to these opportunities in the DRC mining sector. Although the parties did not enter into a written partnership agreement, as a result of agreeing to the corrupt arrangement, Och-Ziff Employee 3 and Och-Ziff Employee 5 secured long-term deal flows for Och-Ziff and AOC in the DRC mining sector.[32]

The DOJ's description of "DRC Official 1" and "DRC Official 2" leaves no doubt about the identities of Congolese officials involved in the corruption. According to the filing, "DRC Official 1" is an individual whose identity is known to the United States and the defendant OZ AFRICA was a senior official in the DRC who had the ability to take official action and exert official influence over mining matters in the DRC. DRC Official 1 was a "foreign official" within the meaning of the FCPA1 Title 15, United States Code, Sections 78dd-l (f)(l) and 78dd-2(h)(2). "DRC Official 2" is an individual whose identity is known to the United States and the defendant OZ AFRICA was a senior official in the DRC and close advisor to DRC Official 1. Since at least 2004, DRC Official 2 was an Ambassador-at-Large for the DRC government and also a national parliamentarian. DRC Official 2 had the ability to take official action and exert official influence over mining matters in the DRC and was a "foreign official" within the meaning of the FCPA, Title 15, United States Code, Sections 78dd-1 (f)(l) and 78dd 2(h)(2).[33]

The DOJ filing documented evidence of corruption and money that DRC Official 1 and DRC Official 2 received from Och-Ziff. Between 2010 and 2011, for example, $20 million in corrupt payments were made to Congolese officials. On December 1, 2010, $1 million was paid to DRC Official 1. Two days later, on December 3, 2010, $2 million was transferred to DRC Official 1. On December 7

and on December 9, 2010, DRC Official 1 received respectively $2 million. On February 9, 2011, transfers of $3 million and $1 million were made to DRC Official 1. DRC Official 2 received a payment of $350,000 on December 15, 2010, and another transfer of $250,000 on December 17, 2010. On January 13, 2011, he received another payment of $500,000. The DOJ filing leaves no doubt as to the identity of high-ranking and senior DRC officials who were paid tens of millions of dollars in bribes in exchange for investment opportunities that resulted in hundreds of millions of losses for the DRC. The DOJ filing also mentions that DRC Official 2 died on or about February 12, 2012. Joseph Kabila is DRC Official 1, and Augustin Katumba Mwanke, who died in a plane crash on February 12, 2012, is DRC Official 2.[34]

Katumba Mwanke was one of President Joseph Kabila's most trusted advisers. Called "Congolese Richelieu,"[35] or "kingmaker" and "a powerful deal-maker in Congo's politics and mining business,"[36] Katumba Mwanke was essential in Congolese political life and in the business world, particularly in mining, where no mining contract could be signed without his approval. The corruption schemes also involved Israeli businessman Dan Gertler, who is referenced in the DOJ filing as "DRC Partner." Using their close relationship with "DRC Official 1" (Joseph Kabila) and "DRC Official 2" (Augustin Katumba Mwanke), Dan Gertler and Och-Ziff Capital Management succeeded in illegally acquiring Kingamyambo Musonoi Tailings (KMT) mine in Kolwezi, DR Congo, for a sum of $60,000,000. The mine produced copper and cobalt, the latter being used in, among others things, lithium-ion batteries, including those in electric cars. A few years later, the mine was sold to the Kazakh multinational mining company Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation (ENRC) for approximately $685,000,000 – more than ten times its purchase price.[37] It should be noted that in this scheme, Gertler and Och-Ziff pocketed a substantial profit. However, the 700 Congolese miners who worked for KMT lost their jobs and were never compensated. Furthermore, this corruption scheme caused the Congo to lose several hundred million dollars, which could have financed the construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and many other projects that the country badly needed.

Joseph Kabila also distinguished himself by controlling the Congolese economy. As documented in the hundreds of thousands of pages of corporate documents examined by *Bloomberg News*, Joseph Kabila, his sister Jaynet, and brother Zoe "have built a network of businesses that reaches into every corner of Congo's economy and has brought hundreds of millions of dollars to the family."[38] Moreover, his wife, two children, and eight of his siblings control more than 120 permits to mine gold, diamonds, copper, cobalt, and other minerals. According to a *Bloomberg News* report:

> Two of the family's businesses alone own diamond permits that stretch more than 450 miles across Congo's southwestern border with Angola. Family members also have stakes in banks, farms, fuel distributors, airline operators, a road builder, hotels, a pharmaceutical supplier, travel agencies,

> boutiques and nightclubs. Another venture even tried to launch a rat into space on a rocket.[39]

In 2015, the biometric passport scandal provided an example of the conflict of interest between the pursuit of personal profit for Joseph Kabila and the interests of the Congolese state. This scandal shows that the personal interests of the Congolese president are incompatible with the requirements of the office of president of the republic. The new biometric passport was supposed to allow every Congolese citizen to be able to circulate freely in a world increasingly preoccupied by security requirements. But, priced at $185, this passport has proven to be prohibitively expensive for the average Congolese person. Reuters' research shows that of the $185 paid for each passport, DR Congo would only receive $65, or 35% of the price. The remaining $120 were donated to a consortium including Semlex Europe, based in Brussels, and Semlex Monde, based in the United Arab Emirates. Semlex was printing in Lithuania, and the entity was registered in the United Arab Emirates, LRPS. It is estimated that the $185 biometric passports could bring in hundreds of millions of dollars to the LRPS and Semlex companies, diverting these resources from the people of the Congo. Reuters' investigation also showed that a Ms. Makie Makolo Wangoi, who is said to be a member of or close to Joseph Kabila's family, was the owner of LRPS.[40]

The Congolese constitution does not prohibit Congolese officeholders from having business holdings. Nevertheless, it is extremely unusual how Joseph Kabila and his family acquired their businesses and how quickly they accumulated their fortune within a very short period of time. When they returned to the Congo during the First Congo War of 1996, Joseph Kabila, his father, and his siblings were not wealthy. Congolese people legitimately questioned the origins of the Kabila fortune.

Close examination reveals that the Congo exhibits the characteristics of a "gatekeeper state," as Frederick Cooper put it.[41] As the president of a failed state, Joseph Kabila knew how to control the gate through which his country interacted with the rest of the world. Control of the gate allowed him to oversee foreign aid and other revenue granted to the country. Moreover, controlling the gate gave Kabila the opportunity to control the Congolese economy for his own benefit and to acquire substantial amounts of money that would otherwise have gone into the Congolese state coffers. This mingling of politics and economics generated political tensions that led to constant political instability and civil unrest in the Congo.

Conclusion

When L.D. Kabila, and later his son Joseph, seized power by force in the Congo, the unarmed opposition was in the middle of complicated negotiations with the dictator Mobutu in order to establish a new social contract in the Congo (then called Zaire). The arrival of the Kabilas hijacked this process, which perhaps could

have led to the beginning of the democratization of the country. Instead, Joseph Kabila established a violent and repressive political regime. Moreover, he chose and reinforced the "gatekeeper state" model, which cost the country more than two decades of investment and productivity. By the end of his two terms, he had left the country exhausted and in ruins. He had squandered several hundred million dollars that could have been used to develop the Congo. It will take several years to deconstruct the gatekeeper state Kabila bequeathed to his successor.

Notes

1 The Democratic Republic of Congo, former Zaire, is also known as the DRC, DR Congo, Congo-Kinshasa, or the Congo. I will use these names interchangeably throughout this essay.
2 In the Arab world, the word "Raïs" refers to a political leader and means "chief," "leader," or "president" (A. Havemann, C.E. Bosworth and S. Soucek, "Ra'īs," in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 402–403).
3 Pierre Englebert, "Congo Blues: Scoring Kabila's Rule," *Atlantic Council: Africa Center* (May 2016): 1–10.
4 Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156–190.
5 In this paragraph, I am summarizing Erik Kennes and Jean Omasombo's accounts on this topic. Any error in interpretation is solely my responsibility. See Erik Kennes, *Essai biographique sur Laurent-Désiré Kabila* (Paris and Tervuren: L'Harmattan, Institut Africain-CEDAF, 2003), 298; Jean Omasombo, *Biographies des acteurs de la Troisième République* (Kinshasa, Tervuren and Lubumbashi: CEP, Africa Museum, CERDAC, 2009), 89–90.
6 Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Thomas Turner, Congo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011–2012); Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Faillite de la gouvernance et crise de la construction nationale au Congo-Kinshasa: Une analyse des luttes pour la démocratie et la souveraineté nationale* (Kinshasa, Montréal and Washington, DC: Éditions de l'ICREDES, 2015) publications, to name only a few, shed light on the "First Congo War" (1996–1997) and on the "Second Congo War" (1998–2003).
7 Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, 121.
8 Kennes, *Essai biographique sur Laurent-Désiré Kabila*, 319.
9 Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Histoire générale du Congo: De l'héritage ancien à la République Démocratique du Congo* (Paris and Bruxelles: Duculot, 1998), 795. Also, see my forthcoming article called "Multifaceted Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo" that will be published in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of African Studies*.
10 Prunier, *Africa's World War*; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*; Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*.
11 Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 17.
12 Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Faillite de la gouvernance et crise de la construction nationale au Congo-Kinshasa*, 302–305; Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa,* 17.
13 Prunier, *Africa's World War*, 212.
14 Cooper, *Africa Since 1940,* 156–190.

15 Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, 308.
16 Quoted in Jeanne M. Haskin, *The Tragic State of the Congo: From Decolonization to Dictatorship* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 133.
17 Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, 261.
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8

HUGO CHAVEZ

Was he an autocrat? (1954–2013)

Gabriel Hetland

This question has divided scholars of Venezuela since Hugo Chávez took office in 1999. To many scholars, Chávez was a quintessential autocrat: he rose to fame by leading a military coup against a democratically elected government, and then, after winning the presidency, he proceeded to dismantle all checks and balances, transforming Venezuela's representative democracy into a competitive authoritarian regime. The counterargument is that Chávez was a radical democrat who transformed a highly dysfunctional elitist (pseudo) democracy into a "protagonistic and participatory democracy."

This chapter begins by reviewing the Chávez-as-autocrat argument. The following section points to three major shortcomings of this argument: its fetishization of liberal democracy, selective de-contextualization, and disregard for disconfirming evidence. The next section seeks to synthesize competing views of Chávez by proffering a "messy analysis of Chavismo." I then discuss the consolidation of authoritarianism under Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro. The conclusion discusses how Chavismo points to unresolved tensions in the relationship between liberal and other forms of democracy.

The Chávez-as-autocrat thesis

Among many scholars, particularly US-based political scientists, it is axiomatic that Chávez was an autocrat, if not a dictator.[1] The first piece of evidence found to support this view is Chávez's leadership of the February 1992 coup against President Carlos Andrés Pérez, which is often taken as an indicator of Chávez's essentially autocratic nature. The second, and most significant, piece of evidence is the 1999 Constituent Assembly, which is seen as the critical turning point on Venezuela's path toward competitive authoritarianism.

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Scholars have criticized the assembly, and the resulting 1999 constitution, on multiple grounds. A first critique is the fact that Chávez convoked the assembly through a popular referendum, rather than having the convocation pass through Venezuela's legislature, as required by the 1961 constitution. Scholars also criticized the "originary" nature of the assembly, with constitutional delegates assuming the power to write a brand new constitution rather than to merely reform the existing constitution. The critique is that this also violated the 1961 constitution. The election for the Constituent Assembly, which took place in July 1999, has also been criticized over its rules, which facilitated a near-total dominance of the process by Bolivarian forces.[2]

A major critique of the assembly is the fact that it decreed the closure of Venezuela's legislature, with a "Congresillo" (little Congress) composed of select Constitutional Assembly delegates carrying out legislative functions until a new legislature was elected in mid-2000. An overriding concern is that these, and related actions (e.g., the replacement of electoral and judicial authorities by the Congresillo), severely eroded horizontal accountability. Scholars are also critical of the concentration of executive power within the 1999 constitution, which was approved in a December 1999 referendum. This is alleged to have further limited horizontal accountability by vesting the executive with authority over a wide and growing set of tasks. Chief among these were the power to exercise significant, if not overriding, influence over the process of "appointing and removing officials within the judicial, electoral, and citizen branches" established by the new constitution.[3]

The (purported) erosion of horizontal accountability effectuated by the Constituent Assembly and resultant constitution is alleged to have undermined the freedom and fairness of subsequent elections. This can be seen, scholars argue, in the campaign to recall Chávez from office. This campaign was initially launched in early 2003, after the midpoint of Chávez's new term as president, which started in 2000. Decisions by Venezuela's Supreme Court, however, allowed the government to delay the referendum by over a year, with the vote finally taking place in August 2004. Proponents of the Chávez-as-autocrat thesis view this delay as crucial to his victory in the referendum. This victory, they contend, was unlikely to have occurred had the election been held earlier, due to lower oil prices and the fact that from 2003 the government invested significantly in social spending, through numerous social or Bolivarian missions (a series of more than 30 state-run social programs) in an attempt to bolster its popular support.

The autocratic nature of the Chávez administration is also visible, according to critics, in the politicized nature of the government's social programs. Handlin and others argue that these programs were implemented not in the politically neutral fashion required by liberal-democratic norms but instead in a way that privileged government supporters, while punishing opponents. The missions are also criticized for their "parallel" nature: the fact that they were established with funds diverted from the national oil company PDVSA, rather than the normal budget process, and that the programs were created through executive decrees establishing new

institutions, rather than through programs run through the existing state bureaucracy. Communal councils, introduced nationally in 2006, are seen essentially as arms of the state, with Chávez and other government officials openly manipulating the councils for their electoral benefit. The missions are also criticized because they were funded through PDVSA and set up as "parallel" institutions outside the existing state bureaucracy.[4] This meant the missions were not subject to normal channels of horizontal accountability.

As is widely known, the 2001–2004 period was highly contentious within Venezuela, with the opposition seeking to remove Chávez from office through large protest marches beginning in late 2001, a military coup in April 2002, a management-led oil strike in 2002–2003, and the 2004 recall referendum. Scholars critical of Chávez acknowledge that these actions by the opposition did not always fit democratic norms; this became particularly obvious with respect to the 2002 coup against Chávez. A key argument of those critical of Chávez is that these "undemocratic" actions must be seen within the context of Chávez's initial assault on democracy. Corrales and Penfold do this by placing the 2002 military coup in the context of a "series of coups," the first being "Chávez's coup against institutions of checks and balances." Corrales and Penfold also criticize Chávez for eschewing "reconciliation" and instead "provoking the opposition to irrational acts." The clear takeaway is that while this period of confrontation "left few leaders in Venezuela guilt-free," Chávez bears ultimate responsibility, including for the anti- and undemocratic actions of the opposition.[5]

Handlin presents a similar argument that Chávez bears chief, or at least very significant, responsibility for the opposition's embrace of undemocratic tactics, which appear as a regrettable but understandable response to the "winner-take-all" character of politics in these years: "The 'winner-take-all' nature of polarized politics *incentivized the opposition* to resort to non-electoral and highly undemocratic strategies to oust Chávez" (emphasis added). The passive construction of this sentence, and Handlin's overall argument, makes clear that Chávez is the primary agent of all this.[6]

In addition to holding Chávez primarily responsible for the hyperpolarization of 2001–2004, scholars also criticize his response to opposition efforts to remove him from office. In response to the 2002–2003 oil strike, Chávez fired 18,000 employees of the national oil company PDVSA. This is viewed as an authoritarian abuse of power, with these employees seen as victims of political persecution by Chávez. Scholars are equally critical of the publication of the list of those who signed the petition in favor of recalling Chávez from office. This was done by Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) National Assemblyperson Luis Tascón. "Tascón's List" was then used for years to deny government opponents public employment and various benefits.[7]

Instead of seeing Chávez's and the ruling party's many electoral victories as evidence of a thriving democracy, critics view these victories as proof of the biased nature of electoral and political institutions within Venezuela. This view would

seem to hit a roadblock of sorts with the 2007 constitutional referendum and 2010 legislative elections, both of which the ruling party lost. Chávez's subsequent actions in response to these actions, however, appear as a vindication of the autocrat thesis. A key issue included in the 2007 referendum was the removal of presidential term limits. Chávez acknowledged his loss in the 2007 referendum but then sought a "do-over" of sorts in February 2009, when he convoked a new referendum on whether to remove term limits for all elected officials. This was seen as an illegitimate move, since the 1999 constitution forbids repeat referenda on the same issue; the government's argument that the 2009 referendum was distinct, in that it included all officials and not just the president, was seen as a flimsy argument disguising the government's continued autocratic ways.

The opposition also won a rare victory in the 2010 legislative elections, allowing opposition forces to hold a slim majority in the National Assembly. Chávez's way around this was to have the outgoing legislature, which was dominated by Chavistas because of the opposition's boycott of the 2005 National Assembly election, grant him emergency decree powers lasting 18 months, just weeks before the new National Assembly was seated. As with the 2007 referendum, this was viewed by Chávez's critics as yet another illegitimate act showing no regard for democratic checks and balances.

Another major criticism of Chávez is that he severely undermined the freedom of the press. The most glaring example of this, repeatedly cited by government critics, was the government's refusal to renew the broadcast license of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) in 2007. The government's argument was that RCTV had engaged in illegitimate and illegal action in support of the 2002 coup against Chávez. Critics, however, felt that Chávez was shutting down one of the few remaining outlets, on public television, that was openly and often vociferously critical of the government.

According to the autocrat thesis, by the time Chávez died in office in March 2013, he had thoroughly eroded institutions of horizontal accountability and democracy generally in Venezuela. Chávez had muzzled the press, illegitimately bypassed the opposition-controlled legislature, and purged the judiciary (most egregiously by packing the Supreme Court in 2004 and removing judges deemed too critical of the government). The Court also severely eroded civic autonomy by, for instance, funding "civic" associations and relentlessly pressuring these associations to support the government. This did not mean that Venezuela was a full-scale authoritarian regime. Rather, it had become a competitive authoritarian regime, in which elections were held, but these elections were not free or fair. Additionally, the stage was set for a transition to full-scale authoritarianism under Chávez's successor.

Shortcomings of the autocrat thesis

The concerns raised by proponents of the autocrat thesis cannot be lightly dismissed. Yet the thesis suffers from three major shortcomings, discussed in turn here.

Fetishization of liberal democracy

The first shortcoming is the fetishization of liberal democracy generally and of a narrowly proceduralist conceptualization of liberal democracy more specifically.[8] Put simply, the criticisms of Chávez that are central to the autocrat thesis are all based on the view that democracy is identical to the highly proceduralist notion of liberal democracy that has dominated US-based political science in recent decades. Mainwaring offers an exemplary illustration of this argument, which holds that Chavismo's claims to be democratic must be measured first and foremost against the procedural norms of liberal democracy. If Chavismo is found wanting on liberal-democratic grounds, it cannot be considered democratic in any meaningful way, irrespective of any substantive, or participatory, gains it has achieved for Venezuela's poor.

> Although substantive outcomes might be more important for poor people than the procedures embodied in liberal democracy, it creates a conceptual muddle to include substantive outcomes in a definition of democracy unless it further describes a political regime that is unequivocally democratic. A democracy that prioritizes more egalitarian substantive outcomes can be called a social democracy or an egalitarian democracy – but only if it is first democratic (according to liberal-democratic norms). Whether democracy produces greater equality and better outcomes for the poor is an empirical question of great normative importance, not a defining characteristic of democracy. Treating it as a defining characteristic of democracy runs the danger of diminishing the practical and normative importance of the civil liberties, associational freedoms, and polyarchal institutions that make it possible for diverse groups, including lower-class groups, to politically empower themselves and to press their claims for greater equality and social justice. In addition, it is doubtful that the radical left embodied by Chávez has achieved a way of promoting *equality and opportunity* that is as sustainable and effective as the moderate left.[9]

To many, if not most, contemporary US-based political scientists, this argument will appear as simple common sense. It is thus worth noting that this would not have been the case to those thinking about democracy for most of recorded history. As Wood notes, the substantive concerns Mainwaring explicitly refuses to include as definitional attributes of democracy were seen as core to the ancient Greek definition of democracy, which was accepted as the standard definition until the late nineteenth century.

> Consider . . . Aristotle's classical definition of democracy as a constitution in which "the free-born and poor control the government – being at the same time a majority" as distinct from oligarchy, in which "the rich and better-born control the government – being at the same time a minority." The

> social criteria – poverty in one case, wealth and high birth in the other – play a central role in these definitions.[10]

It is also worth noting that many contemporary scholars contest Mainwaring's (and many others') argument that proceduralist claims must take precedence over substantive and participatory ones in assessing the quality and indeed existence of democracy in Venezuela and elsewhere. These scholars often come from disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and geography, considered less prestigious than political science or are political scientists occupying more marginal positions within the US academy or outside the United States. Buxton provides a forceful counterpoint to the proceduralist argument that Venezuela under Chávez was authoritarian, arguing that there is a need to assess this period through tools that explicitly break with the liberal conceptualization of democracy. Buxton's argument appears as the forward to *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy*, one of many edited volumes that take up precisely this task.[11]

One of the goals of these and the many other works that examine Chávez-era Venezuela from a non-liberal-democratic lens is to rupture the logic that posits liberal democracy as *obviously superior* to non-liberal conceptions of democracy on both normative and analytical grounds for assessing contemporary political regimes, and particularly regimes that explicitly seek to construct novel forms of democracy that break with liberal democracy in key ways.[12] This counter-scholarship makes two replies to Mainwaring's claim that:

> Treating [substantive concerns] as . . . defining characteristic[s] of democracy runs the danger of diminishing the practical and normative importance of the civil liberties, associational freedoms, and polyarchal institutions that make it possible for diverse groups, including lower-class groups, to politically empower themselves and to press their claims for greater equality and social justice.

The first counterargument is to turn this claim on its head and ask whether treating proceduralist concerns as the defining characteristics of democracy does not run the danger of diminishing issues of socioeconomic inequality, popular participation, and social justice that have widely been seen as central to "Bolivarian democracy," including, importantly, by the millions of Venezuelans who have taken part in it. The second counterargument is to critically interrogate Mainwaring's claim that liberal democracy has allowed lower-class groups to politically empower themselves and press their claims for greater equality and social justice. Evidence indicates that this was not uniformly true during Venezuela's 40-year period of liberal democracy (1958–1998).

It is worth noting that Gilens and Page have forcefully challenged this argument with respect to the United States (often considered a paradigmatic liberal democracy) in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They find that while the United States meets key proceduralist benchmarks for liberal democracy,

non-elites have virtually no influence over US policymaking. In their view it is therefore more appropriate to consider the United States as an oligarchy rather than a democracy.[13] Like the counter-scholarship on Chávez-era Venezuela, Gilens and Page's research suggests that scholars should think twice before assuming that political regimes that perform well on liberal-democratic benchmarks but poorly on substantive and/or participatory ones are clearly more democratic than regimes where the reverse is (or appears to be) true.

In addition to challenging proponents of liberal democracy, the counter-scholarship on Venezuela draws attention to the non-liberal forms of democracy that were experimented with, and to a significant degree flourished, in Chávez-era Venezuela. These include "participatory and protagonistic democracy," a concept enshrined in the 1999 constitution that envisions ordinary people as active participants, and not just passive subjects, in making the decisions that affect their lives. The Chávez era has also been seen as an instance of radical social democracy and socialist democracy, in which popular participation and socioeconomic equality appear as central democratic principles.

Selective de-contextualization

A second major shortcoming of the autocrat thesis is selective de-contextualization, whereby proponents of the autocrat thesis largely ignore or significantly downplay the ways in which important features of Venezuela's changing historical context shaped Chávez's actions, while taking pains to carefully contextualize the actions of Chávez's opponents. This shortcoming is manifest in three main ways.

The first concerns the way in which proponents of the autocrat thesis discuss the relationship between the period leading up to Chávez's 1998 election and Chávez's actions as president. As is universally acknowledged by scholars, including those holding to the autocrat thesis, the 1980s and 1990s were a period of profound economic, social, and political crisis in Venezuela. The country's economic growth record in these years was dismal. This contributed to a steep rise in poverty and inequality, rising social unrest and state repression, and a full-scale collapse of Venezuela's party system.[14]

Scholars of all persuasions recognize that this "crisis of democracy" contributed to Chávez's rise. The key event precipitating the February 1992 coup that made Chávez a household name, and sent him to jail for two years, was the 1989 Caracazo, a weeklong social explosion in Caracas and cities nationwide that was put down by a brutal military crackdown leading to hundreds, if not thousands, of civilian deaths.[15] Chávez repeatedly pointed to his and other junior officers' disgust with this repression as the key factor behind their 1992 "rebellion."

Scholars also universally acknowledge that the disintegration of Venezuela's party system was a crucial factor behind Chávez's 1998 election.[16] This disintegration can be seen in the precipitous decline in the presidential vote share going to Acción Democrática (AD) and Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI, the Social Christian Party), the two parties that dominated

Venezuelan politics after the 1958 restoration of representative democracy, between 1988 and 1998. In 1988, the two parties received 93% of the presidential vote. This fell to 46% in 1993 (in part because of COPEI cofounder Rafael Caldera's defection from COPEI) and then to just 3% in 1998. In addition to corruption, a key reason behind the parties' decline was the "bait-and-switch" policies pursued by AD's Carlos Andrés Pérez and Caldera (whom voters continued to identify with COPEI). Both campaigned in 1988 and 1993 on anti-neoliberal platforms before embracing neoliberal policies while in office. The decline in support for AD and COPEI clearly contributed to voters' willingness to elect a "former coup leader with an antisystem populist message" president.[17]

Proponents of the autocrat thesis are thus attentive to how Venezuela's context facilitated Chávez's rise. Yet when it comes to explaining Chávez's actions as president, these scholars pay much less attention to context.[18] The focus instead is on Chávez's "will" and "whims." Weyland illustrates this in exemplary fashion. Like most proponents of the autocrat thesis, Weyland also views Chávez as a quintessential populist, in which "[p]olitical initiative emanates from the will – and whims – of the leader, not the mass base."[19] Weyland is among many "scholars [who] argue that from the outset, Chávez had strong authoritarian proclivities."[20] Within this framework, Chávez's actions as president – for example, convoking a Constituent Assembly, attacking political parties, renovating judicial and electoral institutions – appear as the mere unfolding of his will, whims, and authoritarian proclivities.

Attending to the context within which Chávez acted in the early years of his president suggests a far different story. As already discussed, the 1990s was a period of profound crisis within Venezuela, with ordinary citizens viewing political parties, the judicial system, and the Venezuelan state itself as increasingly illegitimate. As Brewer-Carías notes, there was a widespread public demand for a Constituent Assembly, which *Chávez was responding to*.[21] Since Chávez campaigned on a platform of reforming the state, and then did precisely this in office, one could argue that his actions were considerably more democratic than those of his predecessors, Pérez and Caldera, who, as noted, both engaged in bait-and-switch policies with respect to neoliberalism.

Chávez's attacks on parties also appear as something other than his mere "whim" when seen in the context of the decline in support for AD and COPEI, discussed earlier. So too do Chávez's moves to reform the existing judiciary, which Human Rights Watch characterized in these scathing terms: "When President Chávez became president in 1999, he inherited a judiciary that had been plagued for years by influence-peddling, political interference, and, above all, corruption."[22] In light of these facts it is difficult to sustain the idea that Chávez's actions stemmed primarily or solely from his will, whims, or authoritarian proclivities. Irrespective of whether these actions appear as autocratic, or deeply democratic, they must be seen as a response to mass demands for change.

The second and third manifestations of selective de-contextualization concern the disparate way proponents of the autocrat thesis treat the actions of Chávez and his opponents during the critical period of intense political confrontation

between 2001 and 2005. During this time, the opposition repeatedly sought to remove Chávez from office, including through a military coup in 2002 and an economically debilitating oil strike in 2002–2003. Proponents of the autocrat thesis acknowledge that some of the opposition's actions were "nondemocratic" but take pains to show how the broader context is key to explaining why the opposition took the path it did. Corrales and Penfold argue "a deep-rooted political polarization . . . at times has *induced the opposition to turn to nondemocratic means* to remove *chavismo* from power."[23] Handlin similarly argues, "The 'winner take all' nature of polarized politics incentivized the opposition to resort to non-electoral and highly undemocratic strategies to oust Chávez."[24]

From an analytical perspective there is a clear warrant for placing the opposition's actions between 2001 and 2005 in context. The issue, however, is that scholars who do this tend to resort to the same de-contextualized analysis detailed earlier in order to make sense of Chávez's actions during this same period. Handlin illustrates this tendency in his discussion of "infringements on procedural democracy [which] began largely in 2003–2004." One might expect attention to the relationship between Chávez's actions in these years (e.g., eroding judicial autonomy, exerting control over oil, establishing the missions) and the opposition's "highly undemocratic" actions, as Handlin describes them. Handlin instead "gloss[es] over them in order to draw the link tighter between the neutering of institutions of horizontal accountability [circa 1999–2000] and the subsequent erosion of democracy." Whatever justification there is for seeking to understand this specific link, it is worth pointing out that glossing over the opposition's "highly undemocratic" actions obscures the possibility that these actions "induced" Chávez to act as he did in response.[25]

As with Chávez's early actions as president, attention to the context in which he acted later on also suggests a more complex picture than the autocrat thesis allows for. Chávez's decision to remove thousands of employees of PDVSA, the national oil company, came directly following the damaging 2002–2003 oil strike, making it hard to see the action as stemming purely from Chávez's will or whims. This is also true of the creation and expansion of social missions from 2003 on, which can be explained on both electoral grounds (which is not the same as viewing it as capricious or just a product of Chávez's will) and as a response to the high levels of poverty within Venezuela following the oil strike. The manner in which Chávez created the missions – through the establishment of "parallel" institutions outside of the existing state bureaucracy – can also be seen in this light, as a logical way for Chávez to respond to a situation in which much of the state bureaucracy had repeatedly shown willingness to support "highly undemocratic" means to unseat Chávez. The point of doing this is not to justify Chávez's actions but to work toward a more plausible explanatory framework that situates these actions in the broader context.

Disregarding disconfirming evidence

A third major shortcoming of the autocrat thesis is the disregard for disconfirming evidence. This shortcoming is particularly notable, since it can be used to critique

the autocrat thesis on its own grounds – that is, within the liberal-democratic framework. Consider, for instance, a key charge of the autocrat thesis – that the 1999 Constituent Assembly eroded horizontal accountability because of the way it was convoked, because of its originary powers, and because it led to the suspension of the existing legislature. The weakness of these charges is the fact that Venezuela's Supreme Court approved each of these steps and, critically, did so at a time when it was *unequivocally autonomous from (and hostile toward) Chávez*, as these same scholars acknowledge.[26]

Proponents of the autocrat thesis also disregard Chávez's attempts to ground the Constituent Assembly in democratic legitimacy. Chávez did so by repeatedly seeking, and receiving, popular approval for his actions. Chávez ran for president in 1998 on a promise to rewrite the constitution. His convocation of a Constituent Assembly was approved in a popular referendum. Delegates for the assembly were then elected in a public vote. The constitution that the assembly produced was subject to a popular vote. And after this occurred, Chávez and all other elected officials were subject to another vote. These actions are swiftly dismissed by proponents of the autocrat thesis as evidence of the "plebiscitarian" character of Venezuela's politics. But for Chávez's supporters, the actions are all evidence of the thoroughly democratic character of the 1999 constitution.

Public opinion data constitute another thorn in the side of the autocrat thesis. Figures 8.1–8.3 use data available from the Latinobarómetro survey for every year between 1995 and 2018 to compare Venezuela to three other Latin American countries and to the Latin American country average on questions concerning citizens' satisfaction with democracy in their country and their ability to freely criticize their government.[27] The three countries are Uruguay, often seen as the region's highest-quality democracy, Chile, widely viewed as far more democratic in the period when Chávez was in office, and Colombia, which is viewed as being a much lower-quality democracy.

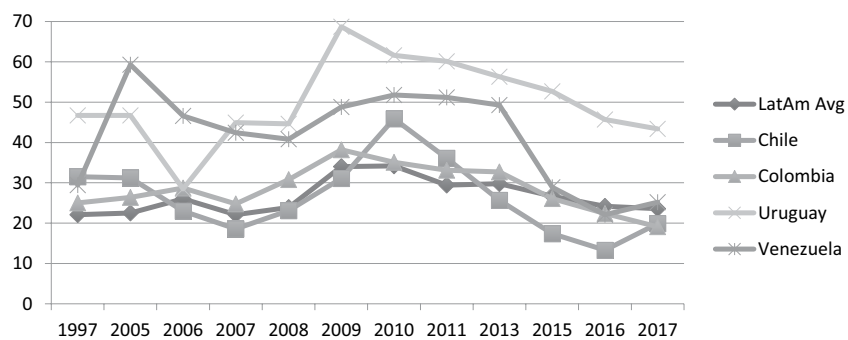

FIGURE 8.1 How democratic is [country]? 1997–2017 Latinobarómetro

Source: Latinobarómetro 1995–2018.

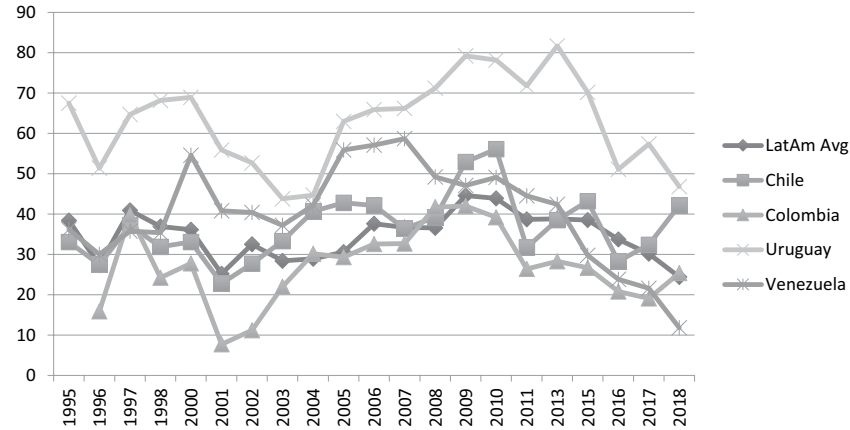

FIGURE 8.2 Satisfaction with how democracy works in [country], 1995–2018 Latinobarómetro

Source: Latinobarómetro 1995–2018.

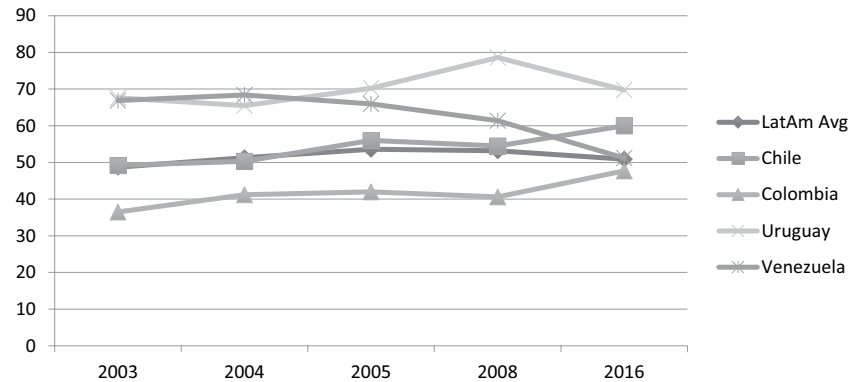

FIGURE 8.3 Can one criticize and speak out without restraint in [country]? 2003–2016 (select years), Latinobarómetro

Source: Latinobarómetro 1995–2018.

Figure 8.1 shows responses to the question, "How democratic is [country]?" Data shown are the aggregate of scores 8, 9, and 10, the three most positive responses to the question. The data show clearly that Venezuelans' sense that their country was democratic increased significantly after Chávez took office and remained high throughout his period as president. From 2005 to 2013, Venezuela had the highest or second-highest score on this question, second only to Uruguay (from 2007 to 2013) and far above the Latin American average. Venezuela's score on this question

declines significantly and sharply in 2015, and remains near or below the Latin American average through 2017.

Figure 8.2 shows responses to the question, "How satisfied are you with how democracy works in [country]?" Data shown are the aggregate of "very satisfied" and "rather satisfied" from all years between 1995 and 2018, except 1999, 2012, and 2014. This provides a more granular level of detail, compared to the data shown in Figure 8.1, in the view of Venezuelans and others on the quality of democracy in their countries. In the four years prior to Chávez's election, 1995–1998, Venezuela was near or below the Latin American average. Venezuela's score rose considerably in 2000 and remained higher than average through 2013, when Chávez died in office. Venezuela's score was second to Uruguay for the entire 2000–2013 period, except 2009 and 2010, when it was third, behind Chile. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 point to a conclusion directly opposed to the autocrat thesis: Venezuelans viewed their country as having become more, not less, democratic under Chávez.

Figure 8.3 also challenges the autocrat thesis, albeit in a more attenuated way. The figure shows data on the question, "Can one criticize and speak out without restraint in [country]?" for the years 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2016. From 2003 to 2004, there was a modest increase in positive responses to the question, with Venezuela having the highest positive response in the region. From 2004 to 2008, there was a clear if modest decline, with Venezuela falling to second place behind Uruguay. The next data point is not until 2016, when Venezuela fell quite significantly and approximated the Latin American average. Caution is needed to interpret these data, given the limited data points. The results suggest, however, that Venezuelans perceived a decrease in their ability to freely criticize the government under Chávez but still remained well above the regional average. As with Figures 8.1 and 8.2, there was a clear and significant decline by 2016, with all three figures indicating that Venezuelans felt their country became less democratic after Chávez died.

Proponents of the autocrat thesis also discount evidence that Venezuela under Chávez made progress on indicators associated with substantive democracy. From 1998 to 2011, the percentage of Venezuela's GDP devoted to social spending doubled from 11.3% to 22.8%, with the absolute amount increasing much more (due to the post-2003 oil boom). This facilitated major social gains: from 2003 to 2011, poverty declined from 62% to 32%; extreme poverty fell to 71%; unemployment was halved; child malnutrition declined almost 40%; school enrollment rose; university graduates doubled; and the number of pensioners quadrupled. Venezuela's GINI coefficient dropped from 0.5 to 0.4 during 2001–2011, which made it the region's most equitable country.[28]

Scholars viewing Chávez as an autocrat do not entirely ignore these indicators. Rather, the tendency is to view them as unrelated to Venezuela's status as a democracy.[29] If democracy is viewed solely in terms of liberal democracy, this is warranted. It should be noted, however, that under Chávez Venezuelans' understanding of democracy changed, with Chávez supporters, who formed a strong

majority of the electorate for most of the period 2004–2012, "understand[ing] democracy not only as the enjoyment of civil liberties and the exercise of political rights but also, in a very emphatic way, as social justice and social equality."[30]

Venezuelans also came to understand democracy more in participatory terms during the Chávez era. Under Chávez Venezuela made significant, albeit uneven, progress toward fulfilling the 1999 constitution's commitment to "participatory and protagonistic democracy." This is often acknowledged within the autocrat thesis, but its significance is diminished in three ways: participatory democracy is viewed as affecting only local decisions;[31] gains in participatory democracy are seen as unrelated to Venezuela's status as a genuine, that is liberal, democracy;[32] and such gains are viewed as highly tarnished due to the prevalence of clientelistic politics throughout Venezuela.[33] This latter charge is linked to the idea that Venezuela's purportedly participatory institutions suffered from a lack of pluralism, rendering them un- or even nondemocratic.[34]

This latter charge is limited by the fact that it is usually advanced with limited or no attention to ethnographic evidence. Such evidence is, however, arguably of particular importance for assessing the charge. This is because the existence, or lack, of pluralism within grassroots organizations can be difficult to assess without immersing oneself in a particular organization and/or community to study not only what people say but, more importantly, what they *do in practice*. Ethnographic research I conducted on the practice of participatory democracy in the cities of Caracas, Barquisimeto, Maracaibo, and Carora between 2009 and 2011 revealed that there was considerable variation in the degree of pluralism within grassroots organizations, specifically communal councils. In some cities I found there was little pluralism, but in others, there was significant pluralism.

I found a striking example of unexpected pluralism in Sucre municipality, in eastern Caracas, where members of a communal council told me that they have both Chavistas and opposition members, and that the leadership was mixed. On paper, however, the communal council's leadership was purely Chavista. The reason for this was that Fundacomunal would only recognize, and provide resources and funding to, councils with a Chavista-only leadership. The council in question thus submitted official paperwork that matched this clearly non-pluralistic requirement, but opposition members of the council told me that the council in fact included opposition leaders. This example shows that the charge of non-pluralism is partially accurate, in that Fundacomunal only recognized Chavista-led councils. But seeing all councils as non-pluralistic is inaccurate, as I found from ethnographic research with numerous councils in Sucre.[35]

Other ethnographic research also shows that the issue of pluralism is more complicated than the autocrat thesis allows for. García Guadilla found that councils were often highly critical of the government in non-electoral periods but still rendered support at election time. This support was not "automatic" but carefully considered, with organizers finding that their long-term interests were best served by having Chavistas in office.[36] At the same time, supporting the government in elections did not mean that the grassroots organization had surrendered all autonomy.

Synthesis: toward a messy analysis of Chavismo

The examples just cited point to the need for a "messy" analysis of Chavismo. This is an analysis that recognizes that under Chávez Venezuelan democracy was flawed and highly imperfect according to standards of liberal, participatory, and substantive democracy; that there was some democratic erosion per liberal-democratic standards; and that there were also major democratic gains, not only on participatory and substantive, but also on liberal-democratic grounds. This messy analysis is advanced in the following theses.

- Venezuelan democracy was highly flawed, per liberal-democratic and other standards, prior to Chávez's ascension to the presidency. Many of these flaws continued under Chávez: for example, widespread corruption within the state, clientelistic politics, politicization of the judiciary. The continuation of these flaws is notable but cannot be easily or automatically construed as evidence of democratic erosion.
- In the Chávez era, Venezuela made significant progress addressing some major liberal-democratic shortcomings: electoral turnout (particularly in presidential contests) increased significantly; Venezuela's electoral system became much more technologically secure; there was a significant increase in voter registration.
- Under Chávez there was a significant erosion of judicial independence, particularly from 2004 on, when Chávez packed Venezuela's Supreme Court and steps were taken to remove judges critical of the government. These moves constitute significant evidence of (liberal) democratic erosion.
- The main critiques of the 1999 Constituent Assembly advanced by the autocrat thesis – that it took place without horizontal accountability and then further eroded this accountability – are weak and lack validity, since the Supreme Court approved the process at a time when the Court was fully autonomous, if not hostile toward Chávez.
- Presidential powers significantly increased in the Chávez era, as a result of the 1999 constitution and Chávez's use of emergency decree. This does not in itself qualify as democratic erosion, since previous presidents also used decree powers. Yet three aspects of Chávez's use of decree powers warrant concern over the erosion of horizontal accountability: the frequency of the use; the fact that he often used these powers while his party controlled the legislature; and most concerning of all, the legislature's granting of 18-month decree powers in December 2010, just weeks before the opposition took control of the body, with this allowing Chávez to effectively ignore the results of the 2010 legislative vote.
- Concerns about state attempts to control civil society are valid but should be seen as ambiguous vis-à-vis democratic erosion. There are three reasons: there are significant limits on civic autonomy in many actually existing democracies; there were significant limits on civic autonomy, particularly regarding the

political parties, in pre-Chávez Venezuela; and ethnographic data show that the relationship between civic associations and the Chávez government was much more contradictory and dynamic than allowed for in the autocrat thesis. Specifically, associations often supported the government during elections but showed significant autonomy in other periods, to the point of vociferously contesting government policies.[37]

After Chávez: the authoritarian turn under Nicolás Maduro

The argument that Venezuela under Chávez was authoritarian does not hold. However, Venezuela was transformed into an authoritarian regime under Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro. Maduro was elected president in a special election held in April 2013, a month after Chávez's death in office. Less than nine months later, the ruling PSUV won a significant victory in the December 2013 municipal elections. The broad pattern found in Chávez-era Venezuela, of robust experimentation with participatory and social forms of democracy and some erosion of liberal norms, seemed set to continue until February 2014, when Venezuela was rocked by a new explosion of opposition protest seeking Maduro's ouster (*la salida*) by any means. This led to months of often-violent opposition protest against Maduro, and a harsh government crackdown, with 43 killed on both sides of the conflict. In addition to plunging Venezuela back into a situation of hyperpolarization, the protest wave also inflicted significant economic damage.

Over the course of 2014 it became increasingly clear that Venezuela was entering an economic crisis. The protests were a contributing factor, but the main reasons for this were Venezuela's currency policy (which led to an ever-widening gap between the official and real value of the currency, facilitating massive corruption inside and outside the state) and falling oil prices.[38] The government's inability and/or unwillingness to take necessary steps to address the economic crisis provided the opposition an opening, which was successfully exploited in parliamentary elections in December 2015 that gave the opposition a supermajority in the legislature. The incoming legislature acted in a highly provocative way toward Maduro, taking a hardline strategy in which Maduro's ouster was prioritized above measures directed toward resolving Venezuela's economic crisis.

Maduro responded to the opposition's increased political strength and provocative legislating by embarking on an ever-more authoritarian path. Throughout 2016, the Supreme Court, which Maduro effectively controlled, blocked the National Assembly from passing major legislation. In some cases, the legislature sought to act beyond its authority, for example, granting amnesty to prisoners like Leopoldo López. The Court's blockage of the National Assembly effectively erased the 2015 election results. In October 2016, the Court canceled a recall referendum against Maduro and indefinitely suspended gubernatorial elections slated for December (and finally held in October 2017), moving Venezuela further toward authoritarianism.

Then in March 2017 the Supreme Court issued a ruling dissolving the National Assembly, prompting a public rebuke from the attorney general, who condemned the action as "a rupture in the constitutional order." Maduro responded by urging the Court to review its decision. But the opposition seized the opportunity and launched a new protest wave. Many protests were peaceful, but there was significant violence, often by armed groups of youth, with over a hundred killed. As in 2014, both the opposition and the government were responsible for deaths, though the government likely was responsible for more. In April 2017, the government banned Henrique Capriles, who came a close second to Maduro in the 2013 presidential elections, from participating in politics for 15 years for alleged corruption. This charge was politically motivated, with Capriles' ban representing an unprecedented increase in restriction on political freedom within Venezuela.

In May 2017, Maduro called for a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the constitution. Many cried foul, arguing the only legitimate way for this to occur would be through a referendum. Despite these critiques, a vote was held for the new assembly on July 30, 2017. Smartmatic, a company overseeing Venezuelan elections for 15 years, announced it would not certify the results, claiming they were inflated by at least one million to give the government over eight million total votes. This figure was above the opposition claim of 7.5 million people participating in a nonbinding opposition referendum held on July 16, 2017. The government's apparent fraud was a major departure from technically clean elections in the Chávez years and meant the Venezuelan National Electoral Council was shrouded in illegitimacy. This illegitimacy increased in October 2017 when the government appeared to commit open fraud by stealing a gubernatorial election in Bolívar.[39]

Irregularities marred the May 2018 presidential election. The three leading opposition parties were prohibited, since they boycotted the December 2017 municipal elections. (The reason was in part the opposition's poor showing in October 2017.) The government was also accused of manipulating the media, disadvantaging the main opposition candidate Henri Falcon. Maduro won by a substantial margin, but many saw the election as illegitimate. The election can be seen as another indicator of Maduro's consolidation of an authoritarian regime in Venezuela.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the autocrat thesis, which sees Hugo Chávez as a ruthless tyrant who systematically eroded checks and balances, ran roughshod over civil society, and transformed Venezuela into a competitive authoritarian regime. The autocrat thesis points to important flaws in Venezuelan democracy during the Chávez era. Some of these flaws long predate Chávez, making it analytically unwarranted to assign primary or sole blame to Chávez. Other alleged flaws pointed to in the autocrat thesis are more apparent than real: this, I argue, is particularly true with respect to many concerns over the 1999 Constituent Assembly and resulting constitution. Some of the critiques of the autocrat thesis are, however, serious and

valid: this is particularly true of the critique of the erosion of judicial independence, which became a very significant problem within Venezuela from 2004 on. The expansion of presidential powers under Chávez was also a significant issue. Each of these issues can be seen as problematic not only from a liberal-democratic but also with respect to participatory and substantive notions of democracy.

The core argument of this chapter is that notwithstanding its partial validity the autocrat thesis falls short due to three major shortcomings. The first is the fetishization of liberal democracy, with proponents of the autocrat thesis excessively focused on narrow proceduralist aspects of liberal democracy. This obscures many important ways in which the quality of democracy improved (often significantly) under Chávez.

The second major shortcoming is selective de-contextualization, whereby scholars carefully note how Chávez's actions in his early years shaped ("induced" or "incentivized") the opposition to act in undemocratic ways in their efforts to remove him from office. Yet these same scholars fail to contextualize Chávez's own actions. This leads to an erroneous view that Chávez's actions were shaped solely or predominantly by his will and whims. In fact, there is clear evidence that Chávez's actions were decisively shaped by popular demands originating in Venezuela's multidimensional crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as by the opposition's actions, particularly their efforts to unseat him through sometimes-violent street protests, the 2002 military coup, the 2002–2003 oil strike, and the 2004 recall referendum. There is no analytical warrant for ignoring the significant ways these actions induced Chávez to act as he did, regardless of how one characterizes his actions.

Finally, the autocrat thesis disregards disconfirming evidence that shows that Venezuelans' expressed satisfaction with the quality of their democracy significantly improved under Chávez and was among the highest levels in Latin America throughout his presidency. The thesis also discounts evidence of major gains on substantive and participatory indicators in the Chávez years, and the fact that many, if not most, Venezuelans felt that these gains were directly related to the (improved) quality of their country's democracy.

Through its partial (and often overstated) insights and significant limitations, the autocrat thesis – along with the counter-scholarship challenging it – points to unresolved tensions in the relationship between liberal and other forms of democracy in Venezuela before, during, and after the Chávez era, more generally. A major tension is the fact that liberal-democratic forms can coincide with, and help to legitimize and perpetuate, oligarchic domination, in which economic and political elites ignore the wishes of the vast majority of ordinary citizens, while professing to support democratic rule. Venezuela in the 1980s and 1990s and the contemporary United States are just two of numerous examples of actually existing liberal democracies where this situation has prevailed.

Another significant tension relates to free speech, which is viewed as a crucial attribute of liberal democracy. Government attempts to regulate private media and/or promote state and community forms of media, as occurred in Chávez-era Venezuela, are often viewed as violations of freedom of speech. As Schiller notes,

"the common idea that shaped much of the international criticism of Venezuela's changing media world [in the Chávez era] held that state involvement was a danger to free expression."[40]

This critique is, however, largely silent about the potential dangers posed by private media monopolies, which tend to promote the interests of foreign and domestic elites. The critique also ignores how marginalized communities may benefit from access to state funds and the fact that receiving funding from the state does not necessarily result in the loss of autonomy as liberal theory predicts. Schiller and Fernandes have demonstrated that the Venezuelan state's funding of community media allowed marginalized groups to represent their communities in ways that challenged private and state representations. Schiller and Fernandes, who are both ethnographers, note that receiving funding from the state can create tensions for community media producers, but both reject the automatic dismissal of state-funded community media as simply a prop for the all-powerful state.

Like free speech, checks and balances are viewed as a sin qua non of liberal democracy. Yet it is worth noting that the concerns associated with checks and balances – relating to constitutionalism and limited government – originated in early modern Europe as part of a counterrevolutionary project, whereby feudal lords sought to protect their power and privileges from the state. As Wood notes:

> The original, aristocratic idea of constitutional checks on monarchical powers had no associations with the idea of democracy. Its identification with "democracy" was a much later development, which had more to do with an assertion of ruling class powers *against* the people.

Wood concedes that this and other aspects of liberalism "were later appropriated for more democratic purposes by more 'modern' or progressive forces."[41] But she insists on the need to view liberalism as a project aiming to *substitute* for democracy.

The tensions pointed to here are primarily negative in the sense of showing how key features of (what we now think of as) liberal democracy can and have been used to protect the interests of powerful groups over and against democratic claims from below. Liberal-democratic freedoms have, however, been seen as critical components of non-liberal forms of democracy, including democratic socialism. Rosa Luxemburg critiques the Soviet Union on precisely these grounds:

> With the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life and the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element.[42]

Luxemburg's critique appears very prescient in light of the marked changes that have occurred in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro, who has transformed the country into a full-scale authoritarian regime. Maduro has

postponed elections his party stood to lose, engaged in systematic and widespread repression, including of dissent on the left, committed electoral fraud, and prevented leading opposition parties and politicians from competing in electoral contests. It is easy (and not unimportant) to critique these moves on liberal-democratic grounds. Luxemburg reminds us that some so-called bourgeois freedoms are also central to non-liberal forms of democracy.

Notes

1 Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics: Hugo Chavez and the Political Economy of Revolution in Venezuela* (Washington, DC: The Brooking Institution, 2011); Scott Mainwaring, "From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism: Hugo Chávez and Venezuelan Politics," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 10/4 (2012): 955–967; Kurt Weyland, "The Threat from the Populist Left," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24/3 (2013): 18–32; Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes," *Democratization*, vol. 20/1 (2013): 107–136.
2 Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 139.
3 Ibid., 141.
4 Ibid., 153.
5 Corrales and Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics*, 22–23.
6 Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies*, 155.
7 Ibid., 150.
8 The term fetishization is used to refer to the process by which a given object – in this case liberal democracy – is viewed/worshipped as having inherent powers or values.
9 Mainwaring, "From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism," 960. Emphases added.
10 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 220.
11 Julia Buxton, "Forward," in David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger (eds.), *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), ix–xxii.
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17 Mainwaring, "From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism," 956.
18 Some proponents of the autocrat thesis do pay attention to context, but argue that Chávez is "taking advantage" rather than responding to, context. This allows the autocrat thesis to remain intact. See, e.g. (Corrales and Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics*, 17): "Chávez *took advantage* of the widespread antiparty sentiment across the electorate to call a National Constituent Assembly expressly aimed at putting an end to *partidocracia* ("partyarchy"), the local term for the stranglehold of traditional political parties in Venezuela." Emphasis added.
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9

LEE KUAN YEW

Autocracy, elections, and capitalism (1923–2015)

Michael D. Barr

The story of Lee Kuan Yew as an autocrat is not straightforward. He won his first election from opposition in 1959, retained clean (if not fair) elections, and continued the reality of Cabinet government rather than strict autocratic rule for about two decades, until a few years before he stepped down as prime minister in 1990. Even the period in which one can reasonably say that he had the authority of an autocrat is imprecise. Taking the meaning of autocracy literally (rule by one person), the period in which Lee had the capacity to exercise autocratic power whenever he chose began in the early 1980s, two decades after he won power. It lasted approximately three decades while he stayed in Cabinet variously as "Senior Minister" (1990–2004) and "Minister Mentor" (2004–2011). During this latter period, he did not routinely exercise his power except in Singapore's sovereign wealth funds, satisfying himself mostly with overseeing the continuation of his earlier initiatives and engaging in strategic interventions as and when he chose.

If we were to accept a less strict definition of autocracy, we might extend our view back into the period in which Cabinet still contained strong and independent-minded personalities, but Lee was easily the dominant force. With this perspective we would start the clock sometime in the 1970s – possibly after his 1976 election win, when he unambiguously established his authority. It was soon after this victory that he unilaterally launched social programs that were close to his heart but which many of his colleagues regarded with skepticism – notably eugenics, promoting and privileging Chinese culture and language, and creating a clutch of privileged, elite schools.[1]

This chapter does not focus on Lee Kuan Yew at the height of his autocratic powers nor on the tight system of rule he created. I present in passing an overview of the history and methods by which Lee and his colleagues exercised repression and emasculated the electoral process. My main analysis starts with the question

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of why Lee kept elections at all, and I employ this as the basis for developing an understanding of Lee's approach to power and politics.

The capitalist pivot

The formative years of the Republic of Singapore were punctuated by both regular rounds of extrajudicial detentions and hard-fought elections. These two elements do not usually coexist very comfortably, but in Singapore's early history they were inseparable both from each other and from the political career of Lee Kuan Yew. When Lee won power in 1959, the British Colony of Singapore was newly self-governing. Lee's electoral vehicle, the People's Action Party (PAP), convincingly won the first election in which all adult residents of Singapore could vote, and did so as an opposition party. A precondition of Lee's acceptance of the office of prime minister was the release of a group of left-wing members of his own party who had been detained by the British two years earlier.

Having won and accepted government, the PAP suffered a major split just two years later when the same left-wing members, plus hundreds of others, walked out of the party over fears that Lee intended to detain them himself. In 1963, Lee did indeed detain 133 people, most of whom had formerly been part of the left wing of the PAP – though the victims of this purge ranged much more broadly, from underground members of the Malayan Communist Party to populist right-wing opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly. With the leadership of the opposition under lock and key, the PAP won the next round of elections later that year and used its mandate to take Singapore into the new Federation of Malaysia as a member state. Two years later again, in 1965, Lee led Singapore out of Malaysia. In a rather ironic twist, Lee was running on this occasion from his own likely detention at the hands of the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur.

His natural response was to begin another round of detentions in 1966. Numerically, this was a very minor purge, targeting just the 13 opposition Members of Parliament, but it was sufficient to leave the PAP as the only party in the newly constituted Singapore Parliament (which in its first session was just the old Legislative Assembly with a new name). This action ran in partnership with more generic harassment of opponents.[2] It built on the government's existing antidemocratic achievements by which it smothered or swallowed alternative centers of political and social power and used state resources to build a network of state-sponsored Community Centers and Citizens' Consultative Committees that acted for and represented the PAP in everything but name.[3]

Thanks to a combination of these inputs, the political rewards that came with delivering housing and employment projects, and a short-sighted boycott of parliamentary politics by the main opposition party, when the time came for independent Singapore's first parliamentary elections – in 1968 – the PAP was able to make a clean sweep of all seats.[4] The government then deployed its housing program to redistribute opposition-leaning populations so they could not form a majority in any constituency and initiated major restructures and takeovers of both the

trade union movement and the media.[5] This left the PAP strong enough to retain its monopoly on parliamentary seats through several more elections – until 1981, when J.B Jeyaretnam won the seat of Anson for the Workers' Party in a by-election.

Lee Kuan Yew clearly had no respect for democratic norms, but neither did he ever abolish elections or reduce them to a meaningless rubber stamp. He resisted any temptation he may have felt to follow the example of South Korean President Park Chung-hee, who insulated himself from electoral accountability with a new constitution and then ruled for the rest of his life as an unfettered autocrat. Neither was he tempted by the Taiwanese solution of declaring martial law nor the Indonesian solution of setting himself up as the institutional author of all power and then organizing and licensing a tame political opposition. He craved power, but not for its own sake. He was a social progressivist and was convinced that the mission of government was to engineer society's pathway to "progress."[6]

He was also sure that for a tiny, resource-poor country such as Singapore, the path to advancement lay with a national program of capitalist development – notwithstanding the PAP's branding as a democratic socialist party. He was acutely conscious that Singapore had few natural economic advantages, but he was fully aware that its colonial history, along with its strategic position in the Straits of Malacca, did bestow a rich set of connections to both the capitalist West and a rising Japan.[7] Exploiting this slender comparative advantage was an important driver of Singapore's abortive entry into Malaysia in 1963, but when the Malaysian experiment failed and Lee found himself ruling a reluctantly independent Singapore in 1965, the capitalist vision moved from being merely important to becoming one of the primary drivers of his political agenda – the foundation of Singapore's survival.[8]

I argue that this capitalist ambition was pivotal in determining independent Singapore's political history. Building and sustaining a complex capitalist economy – as opposed to rentier capitalism based on the exploitation of a single valuable resource – was unlikely to be compatible with the more repressive versions of authoritarianism because the project required the active and enthusiastic cooperation of most of society, especially the educated elite. In the early twenty-first century, the notion of marrying capitalism with authoritarian rule is not so novel, nor is the idea of building an authoritarian political system that incorporates elections. Such forms of government are now sufficiently commonplace to be grouped and studied under collective labels such as "electoral authoritarianism," "competitive authoritarianism," and "modernist authoritarianism."[9] This was not the case in the 1960s or even in the 1980s.

Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore project was doubly unique in that it involved deepening and modernizing the country's capitalist economy *at the same time* as it was building an authoritarian state. Even in the historically cognate regimes that likewise combined authoritarianism with capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s (South Korea, Taiwan), the authoritarian system was already unassailably entrenched before the governments started building capitalist economies. This was not so in Singapore.

The superficial contradiction is straightforward: authoritarianism requires a citizenry that accepts being told what to do, but a complex capitalist economy requires

a population that is proactively and holistically engaged as units of production and consumption. Enthusiasm for the government could afford to be passive, or even grudging, but nothing short of whole-of-society engagement with the capitalist project would ever be sufficient to build economic success. Both social elites and ordinary people needed to invest in this enterprise without restraint – including preparing the next generation to participate in the local capitalist order.

Most others would have given up at this point and either given in to the temptation of outright repression (and Lee came close to this in the first decade of independence) or engaged in populist electioneering, but Lee's intellectual kit and personal qualities – along with the strong team of administratively robust colleagues with whom he was working – allowed him to draw back from both temptations and forge a new experimental path.

Elitism, capitalism, and politics

Lee Kuan Yew commanded respect from his opponents, loyalty from his colleagues, and something bordering on awe and fear from subordinates and those at the periphery of his orbit. His obvious personal strengths lay in his undoubted intellect, his capacity for both hard work and hard decisions, and his skills as an orator. Add to this, his capacity to pay attention simultaneously to minutia and strategy, and – perhaps most important of all – his extraordinary knack of extracting valuable insights, advice, information, and ideas from everyone he met, and we have the very picture of an unusual and effective leader and administrator.[10]

Fortunately, he did not need to learn the importance of teamwork on the job: he had long since been convinced that the key to a successful society is the wholehearted co-option of society's natural leaders, which in his mind was an elite consisting of the most dynamic and most intelligent echelon of society. Since his time as an undergraduate at Cambridge University after the war, he had taken very seriously the picture of society as organic, hierarchical, and dynamic – as painted by scholars such as Arnold Toynbee and validated in his mind by first-hand observation.[11] As prime minister, he articulated his vision with admirable clarity.

In one of his most significant set-piece speeches in 1966, soon after Singapore became independent, Lee explained to a meeting of school principals that society is a social "pyramid," consisting of "top leaders" at the apex, "good executives" in the middle, and a "highly civic-conscious broad mass" at the base. The role of each of these social strata was distinct, requiring "qualities of leadership at the top, and qualities of cohesion on the ground." Lee supplemented his imagery of the pyramid with that of a military organization and argued that after the generals come the "middle strata of good executives," because "the best general or the best prime minister in the world will be stymied if he does not have high-quality executives to help him carry out his ideas, thinking and planning." Finally comes "the broad base" or the "privates," who must be "imbued not only with self but also social discipline, so that they can respect the community and do not spit all over the place."[12] Hence, all strata of society – but particularly the elites and "high-quality

executives" – were required as Lee's partners in his new project. A few years earlier, in 1962, a similar theme emerged when Lee addressed civil servants on the key to good government, which he identified as "determined leadership," "an administration which is efficient," and "social discipline."[13]

The co-optation of the elite and the rest of society did not require elections, but engaging in an overt constitutional coup like Indonesia's Sukarno and Soeharto or South Korea's Park Chung-hee would have sent the wrong message to both, creating new problems in exchange for minimal benefits, since he was confident of winning the next elections anyway. Yet not being one to leave anything to chance, he set about constraining the operation of democracy even as he allowed election campaigns and secret ballots to function cleanly and produce a result every few years.[14] Outright acts of repression and arbitrary detention were part of his kit, and he exercised them whenever he thought it necessary, but if he was to engender enthusiasm for his national project, he could not afford to turn to repression as his leading tool. Mass detentions (and even targeted detentions) were akin to wielding a sledge hammer or a chain saw in a Japanese garden, doing more harm than good. Lee's preferred instrument was something like a whittling knife or a scalpel.[15]

And so he retained elections, but with no very clear role for them to play. Much more important to Lee was the organization of society so that each social fraction was playing its part in his scheme. This was a relatively straightforward task to plan but not so easy to implement. It required his colleagues' full attention to manage most of the mechanics of governance and much of the generation of new ideas, while Lee drove the project overall and managed the politics. Hence the operation of state and business was left to a team of highly competent administrators, such as Dr. Goh Keng Swee – variously Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for Finance, Defense and Education. A more complete list of Lee's collaborators would include fellow members of Cabinet such as Dr. Toh Chin Chye, S. Rajaratnam, Lim Kim San, K.M. Byrne, Ong Pang Boon, Hon Sui Sen, and E.W. Barker, along with civil servants such as S. Dhanabalan, Goh Chok Tong, and J.Y. Pillay.

It is an indication of the trajectory of Singapore's capitalist development under Lee that the career of each of the civil servants mentioned above was dominated by pivotal roles running government-owned commercial companies. Lee's capitalist ideal was always disconnected from notions of independent and proactive entrepreneurs. The private sector was the mainstay of capitalist development in the Anglo-American world, but he preferred enterprises and capital that were either created by the government or beholden to it. He wanted capitalist partners who would just get on with their allotted tasks within the pathways his government laid down; partners who would augment the level of his control and patronage, thus helping to utilize economic and social power in the service of his political power. The two types of partners that fitted this bill emerged as Government-Linked Companies (GLCs; mostly corporatized Statutory Boards) and foreign Multi-National Companies (MNCs).[16]

Managing the politics on the ground – including the strong-willed Chinese business sector – was one of Lee's main tasks. Conventional wisdom has it that

the key to the PAP's political longevity is the depoliticization of Singapore. In this reading, politics was all-but expelled from the public arena, and completely expelled from the exercise of governance; sacrificed on the altar of technocratic professionalism-in-government. The thesis was first proposed in an academic setting by Chan Heng Chee, when she labeled Singapore an "Administrative state" and asked "Where has the politics gone?"[17] Yet Chan was not so much contributing original analysis as amplifying Lee Kuan Yew's well-established messaging. Years early he declared that his policies work because they are gestated without politics. Instead, he intoned, "there is a group of men sitting in little rooms, planning, thinking, analysing, watching figures, watching trends."[18] Lee's rationale has not only been widely accepted, but it has stood the test of time. His eldest son, Lee Hsien Loong, recounted a slightly different version of the same mantra in 2005, a year after becoming prime minister, when he said that civil servants operate under almost "laboratory conditions," working out "rational, effective solutions for our problems."[19] Significantly, the government's espousal of this narrative strengthened over the 1980s and 1990s, just as the seriousness of opposition electoral challenges escalated, suggesting that the narrative of "professionalism without politics" should be itself regarded as a political project designed to delegitimize political dissent.

Scholars no longer take seriously Lee's early claims about having achieved apolitical governance in the 1960s – and to the contrary, the government is immensely proud of its highly politicized narrative of those years[20] – but there has developed a prevalent mythology that suggests that professionalism did begin driving politics out of government in the 1980s,[21] and that the 1990s saw the arrival of mature technocratic government.[22] Since the surge of electoral support for the opposition in 2011, the narrative that Singapore's governance is "still" apolitical is rarely posited as an explicit claim, but the narrative lasted intact until the end of the 2000s.

I contend that the "expulsion of politics" thesis was never valid in independent Singapore, and argue instead that the prevalence and dominance of this mythology points to the real key to Lee Kuan Yew's rise, which took him from being merely a successful strong-man politician in the 1970s to having the power of an autocrat in the 1980s and beyond.

Far from purging Singapore of politics, Lee created a hyper-politicized environment in which government permeated every aspect of society through a myriad of overt public campaigns and – more significantly – through the covert creation of a networked elite that monopolized power and patronage and pushed the significance of elections and political opposition to the margins. As Mauzy and Milne noted in 2002 when writing about the importance of PAP's network of kindergartens: "The PAP has always sought to fill all available social and political space, and it certainly did not want to leave pre-school education to chance."[23] One could substitute almost any social institution for "pre-school education" and this sentence would still be true.

For Lee, politics was real and important, but it was not about choosing the government. Its role was to provide avenues for soliciting compliance and support

for the government. In taking this approach, he had in mind two very different constituencies as his targets: the elite, whose support was critical, and the ordinary people. This bifurcation can be seen in many of Lee's early speeches, including his 1966 speech to school principals and his earlier speech to civil servants, both quoted above. Yet he was even more explicit in a 1962 address to the Royal Society of International Affairs in London, where he told his distinguished audience,

> If I were in authority in Singapore indefinitely, without having to ask those who are governed whether they like what is being done, then I have not the slightest doubt that I could govern much more effectively in their own interests. *That is a fact that the educated understand*[24] [emphasis added].

The first sentence of this quotation is cited routinely by scholars of Singapore politics but it is the second, less commonly cited sentence tells us who he regards as the important constituency. Another section of the same speech goes beyond hinting: "You can govern as long as the intelligentsia is with you."

On elections and more important matters. . .

Elections were peripheral to Lee's view of government, but that did not mean they had no role. Provided they were not allowed to harm the operation of his government, they were acceptable as one tool of governance among many others in providing legitimacy and soliciting support from both the elite and ordinary citizens. It is perhaps an indicator of Lee's indifference to elections as a tool of representation that as early as the late 1960s, the main role of elected parliamentarians was not their contributions to parliament (which were always minimal), but their weekly meetings with constituents, which were focused almost entirely on service delivery – helping those needing a job, facing a fine or who were otherwise having a problem dealing with a government agency.[25] Under Lee's watch, by the beginning of the 1970s elections had moved from being primarily a mechanism of democracy (choosing a government and representative legislators) to being primarily a mechanism by which the government in power demonstrated its legitimacy.

Then, in the 1984 General Elections, something went wrong: the PAP lost two seats (in a house of 79 MPs) to the opposition, having already lost a single seat in a 1981 by-election. Lee could have responded to this minor challenge by simply increasing the levels of repression and control, and creating obstacles that would make it more difficult for the opposition to operate and win seats. In fact, he did take both of these steps,[26] but more critically, he reduced the importance of elections even further, but still without fully subverting them.

There were two inseparable elements in this package: increasing the importance of non-electoral channels of communication with the government, and reducing the significance of any opposition electoral victories. The first step in this project involved parliament nominating an *erzatz* opposition from among each General

Election's "best losers," who would sit with elected MPs in parliament as Non-Constituency MPs. A year later the government formed a "Feedback Unit" in the Ministry of Community Development, which started holding regular discussion sessions about issues.[27] Most significantly, feedback sessions were not constituency based and – despite "discussions" occasionally being loud and acrimonious rather than genteel and respectful[28] – they ultimately did nothing more than make suggestions that the government might wish to consider. They were designed to expose the government to sentiment on the ground and potentially new ideas and perspectives without involving (opposition) politicians. Lee's successors finessed the concepts and techniques of feedback-without-politicians by appointing yet more nonelected people as Nominated MPs. These NMPs were highly educated non-party professionals whose presence was intended to introduce new ideas and fresh perspectives – though it should be noted that there has only ever been one occasion (the passing of NMP Walter Woon's Maintenance of Parents Bill in 1994) when a Nominated MP achieved a tangible outcome.[29] There also emerged recurring high-profile national "consultations" with grand titles such as "Our Singapore Conversation," which provided not only feedback, but a palliative spectacle of consultation.[30]

Among these new feedback structures, elections were retained but were of marginal importance – and deliberately so. One of the primary purposes of the feedback mechanisms was to diminish the importance of voting and – particularly for the educated elite – reduce the incentive to stand for election. Engagement in opposition politics was reduced to one of the less effective ways by which an educated person with independent perspectives could contribute to the operation of government.

The main purpose of elections remained basically unchanged from the 1970s: to establish the legitimacy of the government. It is significant that when Lee's successor, Goh Chok Tong, wanted to demonstrate his authority in 1992, he did so by calling an unnecessary by-election in his own constituency. Lee helped him along by declaring that a swing against Goh would diminish his "moral authority . . . in the government and with the public": "Do not cast doubts on his authority by a lower percentage of votes. We are in a critical juncture in Singapore's history [with its first change of PM]."[31]

Hence, by the 1990s we have the situation where the government had at its disposal a wide range of tools by which it could engage, or at least be seen to engage in "consultation," and separately it had elections to confirm its legitimacy. And let us not underestimate the importance of elections in this regard. The leaders of the People's Republic of China have no intention of introducing elections at home, but it has now been well established that the capacity of Singapore's rulers to successfully combine economic development, tight social discipline, and free elections was a major attraction of Singapore as a development model in the PRC.[32]

So, if elections are really so peripheral to government, and feedback mechanisms are designed more with an eye to (mis)directing political discontent than seeking

fresh ideas and feedback from the ground, how did Lee's theory of co-opting elites and the rest of society work? After all, I have suggested, following the logic of Lee's own words, that capturing the allegiance of the elite was critical to his enterprise.

I suggest that over and above the simple suppression, discouragement and misdirection of dissent, the key to Lee's power was the hyper-politicization of Singapore, combined with his personal capacity to dominate this stage and manage the resultant enterprise. Everything was political. He deployed government-linked enterprises as his preferred form of capitalism, meaning that the most important class of local capitalists was dependent upon the patronage of government. International capital was even easier to manage. He co-opted most of civil society – notably ethnic, community, religious and language associations – into his orbit, generally without insisting that each organization or individual actor formally declare political loyalty, but nevertheless being confident of their willing cooperation. Trade unions became two-way conduits for communication between the shop floor and the government, with the peak union leader based in the Prime Minister's Office since the 1980s. He integrated housing and neighborhoods into his personal networks through centrally constructed community centers, residents' committees, and Town Councils. And the list goes on, usually involving the government – or Lee personally – deploying the personnel to run and dominate. Hence in the 1980s Lee supercharged his program of "professionalizing" Singapore's civil society, which essentially involved deploying tertiary educated professionals to take charge of the less-educated sections of society, whether through their management of trade unions, Residents' Committees, or language associations.[33]

As with the formal feedback mechanisms, this plethora of devices served to tame political energies, but they had a more direct role as conduits for both the dissemination of the government's messages and the implementation of its policies. Unlike the formal feedback mechanisms, these social entities had lives and purposes of their own, independent of the government. They were part of people's ordinary lives, without requiring deliberate consent or enthusiasm for the government's social projects. The importance of these institutions to the government is demonstrated with just one standout example: since 1968 Islam in Singapore has been run by a government Statutory Board (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, MUIS), which is chaired by a seconded civil servant. This organization runs the mosques, the associated schools, appoints and governs the education of imams, and manages the Muslim community's response to government initiatives, such as the kidney transplant program.[34]

Such social institutions constituted the sinews of Lee's systems of social control, but they were never sufficient. Without a strong sense of what we might call "the political," such instruments were at risk of giving control only, without acquiescence or active participation. To reach their full participation-building potential, these mechanisms needed constant attention – the sort of micro-management at which Lee excelled. In short, Lee created a system that relied on his personal control and drive – the very picture of the successful autocrat.

Conclusion

As someone who has studied Lee Kuan Yew for a quarter of a century, I have been constantly taken aback by the minutia with which he routinely concerned himself when he was at his peak. The full text of his 1966 speech to school principals mentioned earlier in this chapter is a case in point, reflecting an extraordinary level of attention to detail, completely unexpected in a prime minister; even the prime minister of a micro-state.[35] Combine this with his levels of energy and the volume of hard-earned political experience that nearly overwhelmed him in the 1950s and 1960s, and we see a political animal to be treated with respect, if not trepidation. True, once he reached the pinnacle of his power in the 1980s, he discarded some of the caution that had previously reined in his more idiosyncratic ideas and prejudices[36] – and as he got older still, his political judgment eventually slipped to the point where Cabinet Ministers started dismissing his more outlandish statements with a strong dose of condescension.[37] Yet in his prime – and long after his prime – he treated politics as a serious blood sport, relishing the fight as much as the victory. For him, politics was not just about winning, but about using the public space to deliver public education. Indeed, at that same 1966 address to school principals to which I have alluded more than once already, Lee drew a direct comparison between his role as a political leader and that of a school teacher:

> For effective teaching – such as explaining to an ignorant audience the simple A.B.C. of currency or reserves backing, and why our currency could be sound if we do this or that – one really has to give of oneself. The process demands effort and nervous energy.[38]

This energy and experience, and Lee's personal skills as an orator, marked him out as an unusual autocrat.

Yes, he monopolized the media, dominated and intimidated both his constituents and his opponents, and used the law and the full force of state institutions to have his way, but if he was going to win over the elites, such crude tools were only ever going to be steps on the way. And winning such allegiance is easier said than done, as his successors have discovered. The current crop of Singapore leaders is increasingly coming to rely on the institutional tools of coercion and repression, but finding that these tools are not as effective as they used to be. This diminished effectiveness is partly because the ground has changed – the constituency is better educated and better connected and better informed than in the past – but also because there is no longer a Lee Kuan Yew to engage in the "effective teaching." It is possible that some current or future member of the political elite might have the "nervous energy" for politics of which Lee spoke (though the complacency of living in a social bubble is more readily apparent), but even if that does exist somewhere in Cabinet, the rest of Lee's political skill set is absent. Lim Siong Guan, who was head of the Civil Service from 1999 to

2005, indirectly alluded to this phenomenon in 2017, two years after Lee passed away:

> I think the challenge for the future is to move to a politics of conviction; politics in Singapore has to move to one where the government needs to recognize that it has to convince Singaporeans on the need for policy change. They now have to say, "I cannot assume that you will trust me so that all I need to do is explain to you what I propose to do." Now, then government has to go a step further, to say, "I need to communicate well; need to demonstrate the necessity for change; I need to be able to convince you."[39]

Were Lee Kuan Yew still alive to hear that speech he might have responded, "When did you stop doing these things? That is how I always approached politics." And that was the essential ingredient of his autocracy. He built a hyper-politicized society, wherein his personal power and that of his closest collaborators was institutionalized throughout all aspects of society. But the only way to run a hyper-politicized system is to have a hyper-politician at the helm. Perhaps this methodology makes Lee Kuan Yew the most democratic of autocrats – and it was certainly the key to his success and that of Singapore's unusual marriage of capitalism and authoritarianism.

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PART III

Twenty-first-century autocrats

The major powers

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10

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Russia's neo-patrimonial façade democracy (born 1952)

Allen C. Lynch

Vladimir Putin's improbable rise to supreme power in Russia is inseparable from the consequences of Soviet collapse. A mid-ranking intelligence officer in the Committee on State Security (KGB in Russian) in Dresden in the late 1980s, in less than a decade Putin would rise from utter obscurity to unquestioned domination of the post-Soviet Russian political landscape. Arguably, only the comprehensive institutional breakdown triggered by the disintegration of the Soviet Union could have allowed an unknown quantity like Putin to rise so rapidly: at the time of his appointment as prime minister in August 1999, just 2% of Russians had even heard of him.

No major public issue in Russia can be decided against Putin's preferences. Putin's power is based on his personal networks and demonstrable charismatic legitimacy much more than on the institutions that he has established or co-opted. At the same time, under Putin, as before under President Boris Yeltsin, every major election in Russia has been held on schedule and under nominally competitive terms. Independent polling in Russia has confirmed strong majority support for Putin across two decades at levels that would be the envy of any Western politician.[1]

If the conditions and consequences of Soviet collapse explain Putin's political rise, it is Putin's creation and refinement of a distinct post-Communist Russian political "machine" that has been central to his maintenance of authoritarian power. This network is drawn disproportionately from intelligence colleagues, military and paramilitary officials, and friends from his youth and time spent running the St. Petersburg mayoralty from 1990 to 1996. Putin's carefully nourished network has captured the administrative apparatus of government and fused "party" and state in ways reminiscent not of the totalitarian Soviet party-state as much as the kinds of urban, regional, and national one-party political machines that pepper the history of political development. These include the northeastern cities in the United States after the Civil War, the one-party South between 1877 and 1965,

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the de facto one-party government by the Christian Democrats in Italy between 1948 and 1992, the Revolutionary-Institutional Party in Mexico between 1910 and 1994, and the Liberal Democrats in Japan for the entire Cold War period.

In turn, state capture by Putin's network has tended to reinforce the network's grip on power by allowing the subsequent appropriation of huge economic resources, national television stations, the parliament and judiciary, and, not least, the national electoral commission, all of which have been converted into extensions of Putin's entourage. The result has been to reinforce the message of the inevitability of Putin's rule and the fruitlessness of direct challenges to it, so that resistance tends to fade even among the minority opposed to it. This in turn lowers the costs to Putin of maintaining what I have termed Russia's "neo-patrimonial façade democracy."

The concept of the political machine and its applicability to Putin's Russia

Political "machines" are generally understood to signify the capture of the "machinery" of public administration by a certain party or network so as to render particular benefits to that party, including the reinforcement of the party's grip on power. At a certain point, in successful machines, the distinction between state and party hardly matters. Indeed, such capture, the longer it lasts, tends to render more improbable the ouster of the party in power by ordinary electoral means, as the machine controls public appointments, disburses money and other material resources to allies and withholds them from foes, acquires virtually unaccountable control over the police and courts, and infiltrates the ostensibly neutral electoral system.[2] Such a "party-state," whether local, regional, or national, also tends to impose a significant political charge on the movement of capital, so that nominally private capital often operates in an environment where fealty to the machine is a precondition for doing business; the consequent rents in turn help to fuel the machine. In the Russian case, the imposition of corrupt rents on private transactions frequently extends to the outright corrupt acquisition of major private capital assets. Sanctions against political opponents may even extend to selective violence, so as to reinforce the idea of the fruitlessness of resistance. In these respects, the clear distinction that Diego Gambetta has made between a mafia and a state – the former being an industry providing security on a private basis, while the latter provides it on a public basis – tends to fade into ambiguity.[3]

Still, the machine needs to perform at a minimum level of competence. Urban machines need to ensure that basic utilities and public services are performed. A national machine that failed to ensure the regular delivery of existing social security payments, or failed to maintain sufficient financial reserves or conduct a macroeconomic policy to avoid a sustained depression, would have a short life under almost any imaginable circumstances.

Such de facto authoritarian machines have thrived within broader functioning liberal democracies; they have also endured for lengthy periods at the national

level, coexisting with written and relatively liberal constitutions, regular competitive elections, and opposition parties governing major cities and regions: an important instance includes Communist governance of Bologna and other large northern Italian cities with Christian Democrat-centered coalition governments in Rome in the 1970s and 1980s.

In most cases, distinctive historical circumstances have tended to offer one party or network unusual advantages in building a machine. In the case of the northern urban machines in the United States like Tammany Hall in New York, sudden massive inflows of new constituents – Irish immigrants after 1845 and Italian and Jewish after 1890 – allowed Democrats to co-opt large populations that tended to vote *en bloc* once assured of rudimentary social and political services, such as emergency and/or holiday food deliveries and jobs in the public sector.[4] In the American South following Reconstruction, which ended in 1877, Democrats enjoyed a massive advantage in a White population that resented the party of Lincoln and the "Radical" Republicans and proved able to convert that into unchallenged rule for the next 90 years. In Cold War Italy, the obvious impossibility of the Communists being allowed into government, which was understood by the Communists themselves over time, meant that the country's second-largest party was never a factor in decisions about the formation of coalition governments. The Italian Communists typically garnered between a fourth and a third of the vote on the national level. As a result, Italy's Christian Democrats never needed to achieve a majority, either directly or in coalition, of the entire electorate but instead just a majority of the electorate remaining after subtracting the Communist vote: that is, they needed a majority of 65–75% of the electorate instead of 100% to remain in power. That is why there could be more than 40 governments in Italy between 1948 and 1991 with the Christian Democrats at the center of every one of them. Repeated free elections could not dislodge the Christian Democrats under these circumstances.[5]

In the Russian case, the Soviet collapse saw the now Russian Communist Party emerge as the only true functional political party on a nationwide basis but as it was essentially a nostalgic party, without a plausible program or vision for building a post-Communist Russia, it suffered the fate of the Italian Communists: Russia's Communists had a ceiling of a third of the electorate, mainly among the older population, in the early post-Soviet years that tended to decline over time. And as in Cold War Italy, most everyone in Russia, including the Communists, understood that they really could not govern at the national level. Once Yeltsin, with the connivance of the Clinton administration, had defeated the Communists in the 1996 presidential election, they were a spent force in Russian politics.

At the same time, the fate of Russia's liberal democrats in trying to manage Russia's transition from Communism to liberal democracy in the 1990s also discredited them by the end of the decade as a plausible contender for national power. A decade-long economic depression, culminating in default in August 1998 and geopolitical retreat in the face of NATO expansion, undermined the electoral viability of Russia's Western-oriented liberal and social democrats.[6] In consequence, both the Russian Communists and liberals could be safely subtracted from the

ranks of those competing for national power. This greatly simplified Putin's task in forging the majorities that have kept him in power for over two decades.

Another consequence of the Soviet collapse was the evisceration of most Soviet public institutions, most obviously the Communist Party of the Soviet Union but extending to vast sectors of the previously nationalized Soviet economy. These were "privatized," or "piratized," as ordinary Russians term it, in ways that reflected the domination of private over public interests in Russia.[7] Swedish economist Anders Aslund has calculated that in the first post-Soviet year of 1992, private profits from the stripping of assets from state companies and related transactions constituted well over half of the country's GDP for that year.[8] The government itself was so poor that in 1995 Yeltsin transferred title, as collateral, to over half of Russia's mineral and industrial base to a dozen financial barons in exchange for just $5–6 billion in a scheme known as "loans for shares." When the government predictably defaulted, ownership was transferred for the equivalent of title fees.[9]

The one major exception to this narrative of institutional collapse involves the military and intelligence agencies. Due no doubt to institutional inertia and also fewer opportunities to exploit the post-Soviet bonanza of "privatization," the Russian military and paramilitary forces retained a degree of organizational coherence, reinforced by personal loyalties typical of such institutions, that stood out in the generally flat post-Soviet Russian bureaucratic landscape.[10] The security services were appalled at the Soviet collapse, the liberal policies of Gorbachev that they believed had led to them, and they were moreover excluded from the profits of the "greatest fire sale in history." It was an accident that Putin himself was a professional intelligence officer. It was not an accident that the forces of order were among the most coherent public structures in early post-Soviet Russia and that Putin should find in them, and they in Putin, natural allies.

How Putin rose to power

The historical circumstances attending the Soviet collapse thus gave a non-Communist and non-liberal nationalist political alternative an unusual advantage at the turn of the twenty-first century. How did Putin's backers and Putin himself exploit that advantage?

Consider first that the Russia of the late 1990s was practically a failed state. The government had defaulted on its domestic and foreign obligations in August 1998 following the decline in world oil prices to $11 per barrel. With 80% of the country's exports made up of raw materials and the bulk of that in the oil and natural gas sectors, Russia remained vulnerable to swings in world energy prices absent meaningful structural economic reforms. By 1999, full one-fourth of the country's dollarized GDP was absorbed in debt servicing. The central government had lost what would be the first phase in the War of Chechen Secession between 1994 and 1996; Islamic *sharia* law prevailed in the province and signs pointed to an escalation of war to other regions of the Caucasus. In spring 1999, NATO had waged war against Russia's historical ally Serbia over heated Russian protests. With

NATO expanding eastward, Russian national security elites wondered whether NATO's zone of operations might be expanding toward the fragile southern Russia borderlands.[11]

Concurrently, Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his handlers were alarmed at their prospects once Yeltsin could no longer constitutionally be president after mid-2000. Given the magnitude of corruption that they had sanctioned during Yeltsin's tenure, they reasonably feared imprisonment, or worse, once deprived of Yeltsin's umbrella of immunity. It was these twin contexts – the progressive collapse of the Russian state's capacity to govern and the bleak future facing Yeltsin and his entourage – that framed the rise of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency.[12]

Putin spent six years learning the ropes of post-Soviet politics and making crucial connections as deputy mayor of his hometown Leningrad/St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city with five million people, between 1990 and 1996. He developed a real expertise in the political economy of the Russian raw materials sector and impressed his superiors, associates, and even adversaries with his work discipline, loyalty, and ability to escape the endemic stench of corruption. He also developed a sincere aversion to elections, as he witnessed in 1996 how ruthless political tactics could undermine a decent man like his boss and mentor in Law School, Anatoly Sobchak. Putin turned down the offer to work for the team that defeated Sobchak for governor in early summer 1996 and found himself unemployed and without immediate prospects some 400 miles from Moscow.

Putin's post-Soviet contacts in St. Petersburg politics paid off when Aleksei Kudrin, at the time deputy head of the Presidential Administration in the Kremlin (and later Finance Minister under Putin), brought him to Moscow to help supervise property matters in the infamously corrupt General Department of the Presidential Administration. Putin survived squeaky clean and reinforced his reputation for efficient administration. Meanwhile, a vicious "war of the clans" was dominating Moscow politics, defined by the clash between economic liberals like Kudrin, who counted Putin as one of theirs, and a handful of incredibly wealthy financial barons led by Boris Berezovsky, who made his initial fortune trafficking in used cars. The latter were principally concerned with protecting their life, liberty, and property after Yeltsin and believed that they saw in Putin the agency of their future salvation. They also believed that Putin could be safely channeled toward *their* purposes; in this they proved wrong.[13]

Putin's rise was stunningly swift as one Kremlin principal after another wanted him as their *factotum al largo*. The chronology takes one's breath away:

August 1996: appointed Chief of the Department of General Affairs in the Presidential Administration.

1997–1998: appointed Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration's Chief Directorate and Chief of the Main Inspectorate of the Presidential Administration, then as today the real *locus* of governmental authority in Russia.

May 1998: appointed First Deputy Director of the Presidential Administration.

July 1998: appointed Director of the Federal Security Service, the chief successor agency to the KGB.
March 1999: appointed Head of the National Security Council.
August 1999: at the age of 46 appointed Prime Minister of Russia.
January 2000: succeeds Boris Yeltsin, who resigns as Russian President.
March 2000: elected president with a majority in a five-candidate race.[14]

Yeltsin's authoritarian legacy

At the time when Putin became Russian president in January 2000, Russia was on paper, as it is today, a constitutional federal democracy combining division of powers and checks and balances on the American model with elements of presidentialism based on the French Fifth Republic. And while, as we shall see, Putin did much to consolidate authoritarian presidential rule, the groundwork had already been laid in the Yeltsin years from 1992 to 1999. Faced with a parliament that refused to accept his "shock therapy" economic program and claims of presidential prerogative, in early fall 1993 Yeltsin suspended parliament in a move that he acknowledged was unconstitutional and called on the military to end the confrontation between a partially armed opposition and Yeltsin's government. At least 150 parliamentarians and their supporters were killed in the ensuing battle, as government tanks reduced the Russian parliament building to a smoking hulk.

Yeltsin then called snap parliamentary elections to prove his commitment to democracy, but the only pro-Yeltsin party received just a quarter of the votes; anti-Yeltsin parties obtained a majority. Curiously, on the same day as these elections, a national referendum was held that would enshrine a new constitution with a heavy thumb in favor of presidential rule. (Note that voters were being asked to choose a new parliament that could only be legal if the new constitution were also passed.) Suspiciously, a small majority of votes cast were counted in favor of this constitution. Many observers believed that government control over the Central Election Commission tipped the scales in favor of Yeltsin and what would become presidential rule for the rest of the decade.[15]

Faced with a parliament that consistently rejected his programs, Yeltsin bypassed it by ruling mainly by presidential decree, akin to an executive order in the United States. Personal access to an increasingly sick Yeltsin, and thus Yeltsin's Presidential Administration as distinct from the executive branch of government, was the key to Russian national politics. In the December 1995 parliamentary elections, the only pro-government party, "Our Home is Russia," led by Yeltsin's Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, received just 10% of votes cast, with no change in the composition either of the government or of government policy. In the mid-1996 presidential election, Yeltsin's administration exploited all of the levers of control of the machinery of government to defeat Communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov, even while it prepared plans to annul the elections in the event of unfavorable

results. In a foreshadowing of the electoral tactics of the Putin machine, Yeltsin's entourage:

(a) transferred, as noted, the bulk of Russia's natural resource industry to a handful of financial barons in exchange for just $5–6 billion, which was used almost exclusively to finance Yeltsin's reelection campaign;
(b) used the government-controlled natural gas monopoly *Gazprom* to purchase control of NTV, the largest independent television station in Russia;
(c) financed the establishment of a "third party" candidate, nationalist hero General Aleksandr Lebed, who predictably siphoned off just enough votes at 14% that would otherwise have gone mainly Communist; Yeltsin squeaked through round one by 34% to 31%;
(d) exploited control of the Central Election Commission to return improbable vote totals for Yeltsin wherever possible.[16]

In sum, already by the mid-1990s, the Presidential Administration's control of the machinery of government allowed it to frame the electoral process in ways that minimized, but did not eliminate, the chance that the government could be overturned at the polls. The substance of authoritarian, if mainly ineffective, government could thus be maintained with the benefit of democratic legitimacy that elections conferred. Putin thus inherited a governmental system that his academic and political mentor Anatoly Sobchak described in mid-1999 as a political "halfway house": that is, the prevalence of semi-democratic, semi-market, and semi-legal approaches to governance, with the single exception of the full-blown rule of the bureaucracy, which was under the control of the Presidential Administration that Putin would inherit.[17]

Building the Putin machine: the "militocracy"

Putin's very first act as Russian president was to issue a preemptive amnesty for Boris Yeltsin and his immediate family. This was the *conditio sine qua non* for Putin's accession to supreme power, and he was true to his word. Thereafter, Putin quickly began to build the foundations of his own machine. In early summer 2000, he convened a meeting of Russia's wealthiest businessmen, all of whom profited enormously from the administrative chaos and corruption of the Yeltsin period. Putin assured them that they could keep their property under his administration *so long as* they stayed out of politics and cooperated with the government's strategic economic plans. He was determined to assert the prerogatives of the state over the private sector, even while avoiding the wholesale renationalization of formerly state property. Second, Putin established seven new macro-administrative districts spanning all of Russia and corresponding exactly to Russia's military districts: five of the seven "prefects" that he appointed, who would report directly to Putin, bypassing existing regional structures, were senior military or intelligence officials.

In the early years of Putin's rule, about a third of the top 1,000 officials in the Presidential Administration, tax agencies, the parliament, the courts, in addition to the Ministry of Defense, had a military or paramilitary professional background. By late 2006, this had risen to 77%, though the composition of the mid-level elites is more variegated.[18] Thus was established a pattern whereby Putin tended to rely on a "militocracy" in order to solve two core problems that all leaders, authoritarian or otherwise, face: that is, how to get the governmental bureaucracy to take the leader's priorities seriously and how to forge and retain unity of command. This militocracy has remained unswerving in its support for the Russian leader.[19] Insofar as this remains the case, it is unlikely that inter-elite divisions could serve as a basis for an effective challenge to Putin's authority.

Undermining the machines of others: disciplining Russian "federalism"

Having established, as noted, seven super prefects at the very beginning of his tenure, Putin continued to reduce the autonomy of Russia's then 89 regions as he consolidated his own power base in Moscow. In 2001, Putin had regional governors, who were elected locally, removed from the equivalent of the Russian Senate, and transferred to an advisory council: regional leaders no longer had a national base for potentially opposing Putin. By 2004, a safely reelected Putin was able to use pro-government majorities in the lower house of parliament to pass a law that eliminated the direct election of regional governors; regional legislators would now appoint governors from lists approved by Putin. Moreover, existing governors could be removed by Putin if they were found to be in violation of two federal laws, a standard that no successful politician in Russia could hope to meet, rendering them permanently vulnerable to removal at Putin's pleasure. By the end of 2002, most of the treaties that Yeltsin had signed with regional leaders providing for substantial local sovereignty had been revoked. The progressive reduction of the remaining autonomies of Russian regions culminated in the elimination of Tatarstan's residual sovereignty in summer 2017. The "Russian Federation" in name and form, Putin's Russia much more closely resembles a unitary state, with the chief restrictions on central authority deriving from the awesome logistical constraints on managing a territory spanning nine time zones rather than inviolable regional sovereignties.[20] And in this union, Putin rather than the State per se is the boss.

At the same time, Putin has taken care to give regional elites strong incentives to collaborate with him. The currently dominant United Russia party was created in 2001 by merging the Unity party, created by Yeltsin's Presidential Administration in September 1999 as a pro-Putin vehicle, with Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov's Fatherland party. The revenues flowing into state coffers from higher oil prices combined with Putin's undeniable popularity provided uncommitted regional bosses with powerful incentives to get on the right side of the government.[21] The

success of this effort at co-optation over time can be seen in the fact that between 2012 and 2015, 81% of governors appointed by Putin were members of United Russia.[22] A few years later, in the September 2020 regional elections, United Russia even won 20 out of 20 governorships at stake and maintained its majority in 17 out of 20 regional legislatures.[23]

Still, while United Russia and affiliated NGOs like All Russia People's Front have unquestionably helped to maintain elite cohesion and to reduce the costs to Putin of doing so, these have never constituted an independent weight in Russian politics. United Russia's popularity tends to rise and fall with that of Putin, even if it has always been significantly behind that of the Russian ruler. When Putin announced that he would switch places with then Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev to avoid running afoul of constitutional term limits in 2008, he then assumed leadership of United Russia in the parliament. When Putin returned to the Presidency in 2012, he relinquished party leadership to Medvedev, his protégé. Considering that one of the major benefits of being a Russian MP is immunity from prosecution, in addition to a Moscow apartment, free travel, and access to off-budget payoffs from the Presidential Administration, Thomas Remington's judgment that United Russia is "the parliamentary appendage of a very strong president" remains valid.[24]

Managing elections

Putin's rise to power in the fall of 1999 coincided with a systematic campaign by Yeltsin's government to discredit plausible challengers to Putin as the former's anointed successor. Once again, state television represented a massive and effective thumb on the media scale. In one influential episode, government television broadcast video of a purported heart operation that former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, now the chief threat to Yeltsin's legacy, had undergone in Switzerland. The film was a fake but its impact was enormous, reinforcing suspicions that Primakov was physically unfit to govern. Combined with the surge in Putin's popularity as he successfully prosecuted stage two of the War of Chechen Secession, the decline in support for Primakov proved enough to make Putin the leading candidate to succeed Yeltsin.

Moreover, by resigning on New Year's Eve, 1999, Yeltsin triggered a clause in the Russian Constitution that required new elections within three months in the event of the death or resignation of the President. The election to succeed Yeltsin would thus take place in March instead of June, as had been scheduled. This caught the opposition parties by surprise and underprepared to wage a campaign so soon, giving Putin another major structural advantage over his opponents.

As President, Putin and his Presidential Administration refined these and other techniques to structure elections so as to minimize the chance that they might be the vehicle for their removal from power. Between 2002 and 2012, for instance, Putin's government made more than 60 changes to the electoral laws, each carefully

calibrated to maximize prospects for the government and minimize those for the plausible opposition. These included:

(a) In 2005, foreign NGOs were prohibited to monitor Russian elections.
(b) In 2006, the minimum size for a party to be officially recognized was raised from 10,000 to 50,000 members.
(c) In 2007, the threshold of votes needed for parties to be represented in parliament was raised from 5% to 7%. In the same year, at-large seats were eliminated in favor of 100% proportional representation.
(d) In 2011, Putin pushed through a constitutional amendment extending the presidential term from four to six years.
(e) In 2012, the government prohibited alliances among political parties for purposes of contesting elections. In the same year, in response to protests about obvious fraud in the December 2011 parliamentary elections, the government restored the direct election of regional governors but also required that all such candidates first be approved by a commission under the jurisdiction of the Presidential Administration.[25]

With the Central Election Commission and all national television stations controlled by Putin appointees, the government has retained unrestrained leeway in complicating the establishment of plausible alternatives to Putin and his machine.[26] Registration requirements for political parties are frequently changed, while candidates with the potential to challenge Putin, like chess champion Gary Kasparov, have faced countless obstacles to building constituencies, such as finding auditoria closed by the fire department at the last minute, meeting halls suddenly flooded, local airstrips blocked by cows and boulders, airport roads blocked until scheduled meeting times are over, his television interviews voiced over as if he were talking only about chess, etc.[27]

In addition, the list of approved candidates who do face Putin at election time tends to reinforce the point that there is no real alternative to the Russian strongman. In the 2012 Presidential elections, for instance, one of the five candidates was Sergei Mironov, who was the founder of the Fair Russia party, which Mironov had described as a pro-Putin opposition party. Another, Sergei Prokhorov, then owner of the New Jersey Nets NBA basketball team, was posting pro-Putin sentiments on his website before being moved to present himself as a candidate for President. A third, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, had been running for President of Russia since 1991 and was widely considered to be the clown prince of Russian politics. He had, for instance, once called for Alaska to be returned to Russia on the grounds that Russia had never sold it to the United States but only leased it for 99 years. The remaining candidate was the old Communist stalwart Gennady Zyuganov, running for president since 1996 and this time largely for show: he would receive a predictable 17% of the vote. Under these circumstances, there were in practice no real alternatives to Putin, who would garner nearly 64% of the vote in this five-candidate "race." A multicandidate election could thus be

held with the confidence of a Soviet election official and the legitimacy of an ostensibly free and fair election. The 2018 Presidential election proceeded along similar lines.[28]

The most famous instance of exploiting the rules to retain power was the "castling" maneuver that Putin and his then Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev performed in 2008. Putin was constitutionally prohibited from seeking a third consecutive term as President. He and Medvedev thus agreed to exchange positions: Medvedev would run for president and he would then appoint Putin Prime Minister. In practice, Putin remained the power broker of Russian politics, the *capo di tutti capi*. It is Putin's person, and not the particular office that he holds, that determines the center of gravity of the Russian political system.[29]

Fueling the Putin machine: renationalization

Putin's construction of his own political machine allowed for, and in turn accelerated, the acquisition by the government of direct or indirect control of at least half of the Russian economy, including most of the lucrative natural resource sectors. The economic Rubicon was crossed in 2003, when Putin had oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky arrested on corruption charges. The crux of the matter was that Khodorkovsky was attempting to use revenues from his well-managed oil company Yukos to challenge Putin politically by funding opposition candidates as well as seeking an alliance with ExxonMobil independently of the government. In evidence of the functioning of the Machine, at Khodorkovsky's sentencing the judge used the same language as contained in the prosecutor's indictment; the sentencing document even contained the same typos as in the government's brief. The message had been sent: large-scale private capital could not be deployed against the government's wishes. Yukos was dismantled and its assets distributed to Putin's allies.[30]

The subsequent renationalization of large parts of the Russian economy reflected and generated massive incentives for corruption. For instance, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics were financed mainly by no-bid contracts to Putin cronies, including boyhood judo partner Arkady Rotenberg. While the Olympics proved to be an athletic and political success, it cost four times as much to put on a single athletic event in Russia as it did for the 2008 Summer games in Beijing.[31]

Machines must work

No matter how solidly political bosses may build, they also need to provide critical services to their constituents, mass as well as elite. From the point of view of the large majority of Russians, who tend to compare Putin to his immediate predecessors Yeltsin and Gorbachev rather than to an idealized Western alternative, Putin has delivered the goods, thereby earning their support and the undeniable charismatic bond that he has established with the Russian people. Below we examine four crises, domestic and foreign, that have tested Putin's capacity to govern.

The War of Chechen Secession, stage II

The immediate cause of Yeltsin's appointment of Putin as Prime Minister was the escalation of the War of Chechen Secession. In early August 1999 some 2,000 Chechen guerillas had invaded neighboring Russian Dagestan with the evident intent of spreading their Islamic Revolution and kicking Russia out of the North Caucasus. This time, the Chechens overplayed their hand and Putin proved able to mobilize a coalition between Moscow and the local Dagestani authorities and defeat the Chechens decisively. Within a month, the explosion of four apartment buildings in Russia, including two in Moscow, with the loss of some 300 lives, had transformed the Chechen issue in Russia: whereas in 1994–1996 most Russians saw the Russo-Chechen War as a vendetta between two criminalized political clans, by Fall 1999 most Russians saw stage two of that war as a matter of vital Russian national interest. Putin convened a council of all post-Soviet prime ministers and rejected their unanimous advice for a limited war of attrition. Instead, Putin improbably decided to wage total war, thereby galvanizing Russian opinion and garnering the loyalty of the Russian military command. By late winter 2000, the Russian Army brutally but effectively eliminated the capacity of the Chechens to wage large-scale regular warfare against Russia. Terrorist incidents would recur from time to time but there was no longer any doubt that Russia would remain sovereign in Chechnya.[32]

More than any other issue, Putin's performance as wartime leader in 1999–2000 cemented his charismatic bond with the Russian people and assured his victory in the March 2000 presidential election. Putin emerged from the war as the savior of Russian unity, a theme that he would assiduously cultivate over the next two decades. On several other occasions, Putin proved able to surmount crises that to most Russians signified his unmatched leadership abilities and thus reinforced what to most Westerners seems a bizarre popular legitimacy.

War in Georgia

In August 2008, four months after NATO had publicly stated that Ukraine and Georgia would one day join the alliance, Putin ordered the invasion of Georgia after the reckless violation of a ceasefire line within the country by Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili. In five days, the Russian Army destroyed the Georgian Army, partially outfitted with US equipment, and avoided contact with the several hundred US Marine officers who had been training units of the Georgian military. While a postwar investigation revealed many inefficiencies in Russian tactics and logistics, the objective was achieved at very low cost in Russian lives and materiel. After arguing with the United States fruitlessly over NATO expansion for more than a decade, Putin had drawn a red line against further such expansion. In 2021, 13 years after NATO's declaration, Georgia still remains outside the alliance.

Relatedly, and demonstrating the personalist nature of Putin's political order: when the war began, Putin, now Prime Minister, was in Beijing for the opening

of the Summer Olympic Games. He immediately flew to the Caucasus and took command of military operations, in spite of the fact that the Russian Constitution expressly locates that power in the Presidency, then occupied by Putin's protégé Dmitri Medvedev. Few in Russia objected.[33]

The 2008–2009 global financial crisis

Almost immediately afterward, the Russian economy was rocked by the onset of the global economic crisis triggered by the collapse of the housing bubble in the United States. The impact on Russia was massive, as declining global demand saw oil prices drop from $145 per barrel in July 2008 to just $33 by the end of the year. Given that Russia's economy and state budget were significantly dependent on the fuels sector – fuels revenues accounted for 20% or more of Russia's GDP and in some years half of the national budget – this represented an existential crisis for Putin's political economy of the kind that both Gorbachev and Yeltsin had failed to manage. While Russia's GDP suffered the largest decline of any major economy, falling 14 percentage points in a twelve-month period in 2008–2009, the Russian economy, social structure, and Putin's machine survived intact. How so? During the previous eight consecutive years of 7–8% average growth per annum, Putin had established several state reserve funds under the management of competent financial appointees. By the early 2000s, the government was receiving 90% of oil revenues sold above $28 per barrel. By 2006, Putin had managed to pay off Russia's foreign sovereign debt in full. When the shock came in late summer 2008, Putin's Russia had accumulated $600 billion in dollar and Euro currencies, the third largest such stock in the world after China and Japan.[34] As the Russian economy began to recover, Putin replenished these critical state reserve funds. In consequence, Russia proved able to survive two further such crises triggered by the implosion of world oil prices: in 2014 and again in 2020.

Over two decades, Putin, deeply influenced by the bankruptcy of Gorbachev's USSR and Yeltsin's Russia, has shown himself to be a prudent manager of Russia's finances. Indeed, in late 2019, Russia's public debt was less than 12.5% of the country's GDP, compared to 100% in the United States, more than 80% in Germany, more than 140% in Italy and Greece, and 240% in Japan.[35] By international standards, and more to the point for our purposes by recent Russian standards, this is a remarkable performance, one that helps explain Putin's two-decades long majority support in Russian public opinion. Most Russians thus trust Putin to manage the country effectively, in both domestic and foreign affairs. In particular, they trust him incomparably more than any plausible alternatives, a perception that Putin's propaganda machine has taken great pains to drive home.

Crimea

While Putin is reviled in the United States for having annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, he is almost universally acclaimed in Russia for it. Even his arch

opponent Aleksei Navalny supported the move. It is enough to note, without delving into the details, that nearly all Russians have regarded Crimea, with a population that is two-thirds ethnically Russian, as historically Russian, not Ukrainian, and the annexation is seen as reversing a historical injustice stemming from the Khrushchev period. In 1954, during a 15-minute meeting, the volatile Soviet leader signed over Crimea from Russia to Ukraine within the USSR, never imagining that the deed could ever acquire political significance. Most Russians knew nothing about this. In addition, Putin's media network has repeatedly stressed the putatively preventive nature of the move, i.e., to prevent Ukraine from ever joining NATO. By joining Crimea to Russia, and with minimal loss of life on all sides, Putin further reinforced his charismatic appeal to the Russian people.[36] The Victory Day parade through Red Square on May 9, 2014, presided over by Putin and broadcast throughout the country, integrated the *Anschluss* of Crimea to the Russian motherland with the triumphalist narrative of Soviet victory in World War II and, implicitly, Russia's rejection of the contemporary West as a model of development. It is thus not surprising that in summer 2020 Putin overwhelmingly won a national referendum allowing him to extend his tenure as Russian president to 2036.

Conclusion

There are many things that Putin has not accomplished: he has been unable to move the Russian economy much beyond the grip of the natural resource, and above all, fuels sector, leading after 2010 to secular declining growth rates even when oil prices are high; he has not only failed to contain the scale of official corruption that he inherited from Yeltsin but with a much larger economy has overseen a massive expansion of corrupt transactions over the past two decades; and he has been unwilling to institutionalize the succession process. Indeed, Russia remains the only post-Communist country in Europe that has yet to see executive authority change hands by means of elections that are truly free and fair. Even in Belarus it happened once, in 1994.

Yet, as we have just reviewed, what Putin *has* accomplished has been sufficiently impressive to enough Russians to warrant approval ratings averaging well over 60% for most of his tenure as Russia's boss. Moreover, he has shown himself willing to deploy this accumulated political capital by taking calculated risks to deal with resistant structural issues of political economy. For instance, in summer 2018, Putin pushed through a controversial pension reform and survived with his charismatic authority intact.[37] A combination of a defensible record of performance in the economy, foreign policy and national security affairs; the absence of plausible alternatives; the establishment of a charismatic, traditionalist bond with the bulk of the Russian people; the sheer passage of time and the resultant acquiescence in the inevitability of the machine; as well as the unity of Putin's network of senior officials: all of these have worked to create and sustain an authoritarian political regime embedded within the framework of formal constitutionalism, regular elections, and

considerable pluralism in the press, so long as journalists do not get too close to the nexus of power and money.

Putin is, and is generally recognized as, the indispensable power broker among the various "clans" of the machine. So long, therefore, as Putin remains healthy and willing to rule, he can. The long trajectory of Russian history, as well as that of many other authoritarian societies, indicates that the motor for major change tends to come from intra-elite splits from above rather than from spontaneous movements from below. Such open cleavages are unlikely so long as Putin appears to be in charge. But this is also the weakness of his machine. Remove Putin from the picture, and the likelihood of intra-elite conflict leading to conflicting appeals to the public increases substantially. Under such circumstances, the spoils of power in Russia are simply too high for any one clan to acquiesce in the unqualified victory of another.[38] Ironically, it seems that it remains to Putin himself to figure out how to solve this Rubik's cube of Russian politics. The Russian Constitution now gives him until 2036, when he would be 84, to do so.

Notes

1 The independent Levada Institute offers invaluable data on Russian opinion throughout the post-Soviet period, most of it in English as well as Russian. See: www.levada.ru.
2 V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), 15–35, 385–485.
3 Diego Gambetta, *La mafia siciliana* [*The Sicilian Mafia*] (Turin: Einaudi, 1993).
4 In 1920, fully three-fourths of the non-Black population of New York City was either first- or second-generation American. David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918–1932* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 77.
5 Robert Leonardi and Douglas A. Wertman, *Italian Christian Democracy: The Politics of Dominance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).
6 Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections Without Order: Russia's Challenge to Vladimir Putin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82–100.
7 In Russian, the distinction is between *privatizatsiya and prikhvatizatsiya.*
8 Anders Aslund, "Social Problems and Policy in Postcommunist Russia," in Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mandelbaum (eds.), *Sustaining the Transition: The Social Safety Net in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), 124–146.
9 Rose and Munro, *Elections Without Order*, 36–40. See also Marshall Goldman, *The Piratization of Russia: Russian Reform Goes Awry* (London: Routledge, 2003).
10 Amy Knight, *Spies without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38–110.
11 Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), 7–68.
12 Rose and Munro, *Elections Without Order.*
13 Berezovsky did not return to Russia from Britain in late 2000 and obtained political asylum there after having been indicted for corruption by Putin's government. He died in the UK under mysterious circumstances in 2013.
14 Allen C. Lynch, *Vladimir Putin and Russian Statecraft* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2011), 28–52.
15 Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 7th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2012), 57–73.
16 An Italian election observer reported to me in July 1996 that in the region of Tatarstan, late morning tallies of one-third support for Yeltsin became two-thirds in favor of Yeltsin by late afternoon in round one.

17 Anatoly Sobchak, *Dyuzhina nozhei v spinu* [*A Dozen Knives in the Back*] (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), 129.
18 Bettina Renz, "Security, the Military and Politics," in Richard Sakwa, Henry Hale and Stephen White (eds.), *Developments in Russian Politics, 9* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 180–191; see also David W. Rivera and Sharon Rivera, "Is Russia a Militocracy?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 30/1 (2014): 27–50; Olga Kryshtanovskaya, *Anatomiya rossiiskoy eliti* [*Anatomy of Russian Elites*] (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005).
19 Viktor Zolotov, the commander of *Rosgvardia*, in effect a Praetorian Guard of several hundred thousand troops formed in 2016 and reporting directly to Putin, was formerly Putin's personal bodyguard and sparring partner in judo and boxing.
20 Gordon Hahn, "Reforming the Federation," in Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman and Richard Sakwa (eds.), *Developments in Russian Politics 6* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 148–167; Darrell Slider, "Politics in the Regions," in Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman and Richard Sakwa (eds.), *Developments in Russian Politics 6* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 168–185.
21 Ora John Reuter, *The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 26.
22 Ibid., 268.
23 "Everybody's a Winner! Russia's New Three-Day Voting Scheme Delivers Huge Victory Margins for Incumbent Governors, while Navalny's Coalition Succeeds in Two Municipal Races" (September 14, 2020): www.meduza.io.
24 Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 177.
25 Richard Rose, William Mishler and Neil Munro, *Popular Support for an Authoritarian Regime: The Changing Views of Russians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124–141; Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 96, 116.
26 Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True but Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014). Pomerantsev worked in Putin's media complex in the early 2000's.
27 Boris Reitschuster, *Putin's Demokratur: Wie der Kreml den Westen das Fuerchten lernt* [*Putin's "Democracy": How the Kremlin Teaches the West Fear*] (Berlin: Ullstein, 2006), 55–64. Reitschuster, a German journalist, was an eyewitness to many of these episodes.
28 Jim Nichol, *Russia's March 2012 Presidential Election: Outcome and Highlights* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 14, 2012): www.crs.gov.
29 Sakwa, *Putin Redux*, 111–133.
30 Ibid., 39, 53, 66–67.
31 This calculation is based on then Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev stating publicly that the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, with one fourth the number of games as in a Summer Olympiad, had cost $50 billion; the 2008 Summer games in Beijing cost $44 billion. "Dmitri Medvedev's Interview with CNN" (January 22, 2014): www.government.ru.
32 Roy Medvedev, *Vladimir Putin: Chetyre goda v kremle* [*Vladimir Putin: Four Years in the Kremlin*] (Moscow: Vremya, 2004), 100–137; Christoph Zuercher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 70–114.
33 Ronald Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 165–188, esp. p. 179.
34 Lynch, *Vladimir Putin and Russian Statecraft*, 119–125.
35 "Russia Government Debt: % of GDP, 2011–2020": www.ceicdata.com.
36 Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 53–144.
37 "Putin Signs Unpopular Bill Raising Retirement Ages by 5 Years," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (October 3, 2018): www.rferl.org.
38 In this author's judgment, the evident poisoning of Putin critic Aleksei Navalny in August 2020 can be seen in this light: Navalny, a social media savvy populist and nationalist who has made official corruption his wedge issue, poses no direct threat to Putin

but it is easy to imagine him mobilizing a powerful constituency in the struggle to succeed the Russian ruler. It thus seems likely that he was poisoned not by Putin but by others looking to a post-Putin Russia. For tacit acknowledgement, see Daria Litvinova, "Navalny Releases Recording of Call to His Alleged Poisoner," *Associated Press* (December 21, 2020): www.apnews.com.

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11

XI JINPING

The rise of an authoritarian leader (born 1953)

Johnny Erling

The privacy of Chinese leaders is well guarded. Revelation about their income, their family, their health situation is considered a violation of state secrets. Foreign correspondents who reported on financial and real estate assets owned by top leaders or their families, especially the relatives of paramount leader Xi Jinping, had their work permits canceled. Beijing punished newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal* and especially the *New York Times*, after it published a "wealth-report" related to the family of Xi in 2014.[1] Even worse, Chinese financier Xiao Jianhua, who was believed to have been involved, was abducted from his Hong Kong apartment in January 2017. He was brought to mainland China in hitherto unexplained ways and has not been heard of since.[2]

In another case, as early as 2015 agents of China's State Security secretly crossed into Hong Kong to chase and kidnap five local booksellers. They had published and distributed sensational gossip about the lifestyle of Xi and his rise to power.[3] Reportedly, he was not amused. Gui Minhai was one of the five booksellers. In 2015, he disappeared in Thailand, where he was spending his holidays. Sometime later he reappeared in police custody in mainland China. The Hong Kong citizen, who was born and raised in Ningbo, has held a Swedish passport since 1996. On February 24, 2020, a court in Ningbo sentenced him to ten years in prison for a traffic accident which had happened decades before.

Censorship of such cases has been strictly enforced since Xi Jinping's rise to power. At the end of 2007 Xi became part of the top leadership elite. The 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) promoted him from the position of party secretary of Shanghai to membership of the collective leadership. He was chosen to be one of the seven men in the Standing Committee of the politburo in Beijing, the upper echelon of the Chinese government, which makes all the major decisions. It took Xi only another five

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years to rise further and become the foremost leader of China. In November 2012, during the 18th National Congress, Xi was elected general secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. In March 2013 the National People's Congress also elected him Chinese president. At that time, however, Xi was essentially still *primus inter pares* on the Standing Committee.

Another five years later, in October 2017, the 19th National Congress confirmed him as the "core" person of the Standing Committee. With this achievement Xi had abandoned the collective leadership principle de facto. He also prompted the National Congress to change the Party Statutes and enshrine his name and philosophy as the guiding ideology for the "new era of socialism in China." In essence, the Xi Jinping era had been institutionalized.

Xi Jinping achieved yet another monumental breakthrough in March 2018. The National People's Congress revised the State Constitution and brought it in line with the changes in the Party Statutes. Most importantly, these alterations rescinded the term limits for the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC). China has had this legal protection since 1982, when former leader and reform architect Deng Xiaoping had introduced the term limit to prevent the emergence of another lifetime ruler like Mao Zedong. Instead of being limited to two five-year terms as president, Xi Jinping was now free to rule for as long as he desired. Thus, Xi can be president for a third term beyond 2023 and could even rule for the remainder of his life. Consequentially, a new emperor was born. US journalist and China expert Evan Osnos put it well: "Xi Jinping, an unremarkable provincial administrator, became China's most authoritarian leader since Mao."[4]

The unstoppable ascent of Xi Jinping since 2012 has surprised everyone. He had patiently hidden all of his ambitions for 25 years as he climbed the greasy pole. Starting from the bottom in 1982 as a grassroots party administrator at the county level in Hebei province in northern China, he eventually made his way through four provinces. For 17 years he worked in Hebei and the coastal province Fujian (and was its governor from 1999 to 2002) before becoming the top leader – governor and party secretary – of the neighboring rich Zhejiang province. In 2007, he took briefly over as party secretary of metropolitan Shanghai, solving a leadership crisis in the process.

Kerry Brown, a China expert at the University of Sydney, describes Xi as a "highly networked person, thanks to his family background, his institutional, military and provincial links and his service as an official at all levels of government."[5] But only a handful of foreigners recognized his potential. Former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who had visited China more than 70 times when he was president of Goldman Sachs, got to know Xi well. As early as the fall of 2006, Paulson met Xi as the then leader of Zhejiang province. He called him a "rising star" on the political horizon in China, predicting that Xi would be "one from the fifth generation of successors who knows how to pass the finishing line."[6]

Born red

As a provincial leader Xi talked with ease to Chinese journalists. Yang Xiaohui, the chief editor of the magazine *Sons and Daughters of China* (Zhonghua Ernue), met Xi in 2000 as an outspoken, self-confident official. He was someone who revealed his emotions and even joked about his childhood. Xi talked to TV journalists from Yanan CCTV about his experience during his seven years working in the countryside. Some of his interviews have been reprinted, even after his ascent to national power in late 2012.[7]

Xi told Yang about his childhood and his experiences growing up under strict supervision from his father, who taught his children good, revolutionary behavior. Xi's father Xi Zhongxun, a veteran party member who fought for Mao's revolution before 1949, rose to become a high official after the founding of the PRC in 1949. In 1959, he was made vice-minister of the State Council, effectively the country's government and chief administrative authority.

Every weekend, when the children of the Xi family (four sisters and two brothers) came home from college, they had to stand up in front of their father in a row from the tallest to the smallest child. He lectured them about Communist ideals. Xi Jinping laughed when he told Yang, "Our ears got calluses."[8] As the youngest son, Xi had to wear patched clothes, hand-me downs from his older siblings. The clothes from his sisters "had floral patterns, although I resisted with hands and feet to wear them." He overheard whispers when the parents took them to a reception on National Day. "Who does this child with the old clothes belong to? Oh, they are from the Xi family." Hearing these and similar remarks was not at all uncommon for Xi. He was embarrassed and felt ashamed.[9]

The children grew up in a politically privileged household and school, which was provided to the victors of the revolution. *New Yorker* journalist Osnos characterized Xi Jinping as being "born red." Young Xi Jinping was only nine years old when in 1962 his comfortable life was turned upside down. His father Xi Zhongxun (1913–2002) had been slandered and lost favor with Mao. Mao suspected him to be disloyal due to his support of the publication of a novel called *Liuzhidan*, which glorified a former guerilla fighter. Mao assumed that father Xi used the book for a covert attack on him, with the aim to rehabilitate some of his opponents. Xi Zhongxun was dismissed and outlawed for 16 years, suffering serious physical, personal, and political consequences in the process. He was eventually rehabilitated in 1978, two years after Mao's death. Xi Jinping later referred to his childhood when talking to Chinese journalists, saying "Half my time I lived under sunshine; the other half was the opposite."[10]

During the 1967 Cultural Revolution, Xi's father had been seized again by radicalized Red Guards who denounced him as "head of an anti-party clique" and an enemy of Mao. Xi Zhongxun's family had to witness him being fiercely criticized in mass meetings and even beaten up. Tragically, the children were attacked too. An official profile of Xi Jinping reveals, "During the Cultural Revolution Xi suffered public humiliation and hunger, experienced homelessness and was even held in custody on

one occasion."[11] His elder sister Xi Heping committed suicide. "She was persecuted to death in the Cultural Revolution. It broke the heart of Xi Zhongxun."[12]

In 2001, Xi Jinping wrote a letter to his father to congratulate him on his 88th birthday. Even on this occasion he referred to the Cultural Revolution. "At that time, when society shouted at us children that we were the 'breed of a dog', I continued to believe that my father was a hero, and we all were proud of him."[13]

Deng Xiaoping, who also fell victim to Mao, was back in power in 1978. This development was instrumental for the return of Xi Zhongxun. Deng made him leader of the southern province of Guangdong to assist his economic reforms. Shenzhen at that time was an impoverished district of Guangdong with a mere 1,000 peasant households. Deng envisaged Shenzhen to become China's first special economic zone and an experimental ground for all sorts of reforms.

By 2020, Shenzhen had developed into an international hub for high-end industries and communications. Overall, it has become a showcase of China's modernization. Xi Jinping visited Shenzhen at the end of 2012 on his first inspection trip as the new party chief of China. He laid a wreath in front of a statue of Deng Xiaoping. This move was understood as indicating Xi's strong commitment to continue genuine reforms. Insiders believe, however, that it was primarily meant as a homage to his father.

Neither the son, Xi Jinping, nor the father, Xi Zhongxun, has ever condemned Mao in public or has held him responsible for the traumatic events that destroyed their family. Both have deliberately played down their sufferings as regrettable accidents, which happened to them due to bad luck but not because of systemic failure and totalitarian rule. Xi Zhongxun remained devoted to Mao until the end of his life. "It's hard to think of someone who'd more fanatically put party interests above his own interest," explained Joseph Torigian, a professor of history and politics at American University, who is currently working on a biography on Xi Zhongxun.[14]

Soon after his rehabilitation Xi Zhongxun published in the Communist Party newspaper *People's Daily* on December 20, 1978, a full-page laudation on Mao Zedong's upcoming 85th birthday, calling him a "shining red sun." He recounted how Mao fought in northern China in the 1940s and how he supported him. His praise was reprinted in the *Selected Works of Xi Zhongxun, 1940 to 1992*. The volume did not even mention that Xi had fallen out of favor with Mao between 1962 and 1978. Instead, the foreword praises Xi Zhongxun for having always followed "the overall truth of Marxism and Mao Zedong's ideas."[15]

Demaoization will never be on Xi's agenda

The apple did not fall far from the tree. In December 2017, Xi Jinping wrote his own laudation on Mao to commemorate his 120th birthday. In many of his speeches Xi defended Mao's ideals and revolutionary legacy. But he also used him as a role model to uphold his own authoritarian rule and emphasize his patriotic and nationalist sentiments, which he sees as a pillar for the political stability of his regime.

Soon after he was chosen as new general secretary of the Party in late 2012, Xi declared in his first major speech on January 5, 2013, that Demaoization would never be on his agenda. Xi told his newly appointed Central Committee, "Let us imagine for a moment that we had completely negated Comrade Mao Zedong. Could our party and our socialist system have survived? They would have collapsed. That would have created a great mess."[16]

In the same speech Xi urged the party elite to believe wholeheartedly in Communism highlighting that "this is our soul." But to fully implement Communism, he outlined, the work of dozens of generations was required. Xi Jinping asked: "How long is that? From Confucius to the present day, more than 70 generations have passed." Chinese Communists need to have a long-time perspective and prove that "we are dealing with this question in a politically sober way." In Xi's view, Mao had made some mistakes but only because he had rushed to bring about the execution of his Communist policies. Conditions had not been ripe for mass-campaigns like the "Great Leap Forward" or the "Peoples Communes."[17]

However, Xi did not take history as a guide to learn from Mao Zedong's disastrous policies. On the contrary, Xi was also highly impatient. He quickly began to mobilize all of his forces to implement his vision. Unlike Mao, who looked inward to remodel China, Xi focused on expanding China's external role and influence. His signature projects are gigantic geostrategic and geopolitical undertakings, which need massive capital investments. In 2013, Xi initiated the "Belt and Road-Initiative" (BRI). Under the original name "The New Silk Road," it was meant to connect China with Europe by land and sea routes through Central Asia or along the coasts of Southeast Asia and Africa.

Perhaps overambitiously, Xi expanded the scope and radius of BRI to reach the Arctic region (Silk Road on Ice) and Latin America. He developed other offshoots like the "Digital Silk Road," the "Silk Road into Space," and the "Health Silk Road." Xi has also initiated and founded more than a dozen policy instruments and institutions to push forward the BRI, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS club (Brasilia, Russia, India, China, South Africa). The "16 + 1" group was established to gain an upper hand in East- and Southeast Europe. Xi wants Beijing to lead a multipolar world and build a China that encompasses a "global community with a common future." It is a new globally focused version of Mao's "Great Leap Forward."

In 2013, Xi ordered the construction of seven artificial islands deep in the South China Sea to cement China's territorial claims on the whole South China Sea region, which were fiercely disputed by several neighboring countries. Beijing soon militarized these islands, despite Xi having promised US president Obama during his visit to Washington in September 2015 not to do so.[18] Xi also pushed Chinese demands regarding a number of islands in the East China Sea, which were also claimed by Japan, not least the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The new Chinese leader reversed the policy of China's chief reform architect Deng Xiaoping, who famously had told his colleagues to "hide China's strength and bide its time."

These offensive moves were part of Xi's overall strategy, which he named the "China-Dream." After Xi was chosen General Secretary of the Party, on November 29, 2012, he made all members of his Standing Committee visit the Chinese Museum of Revolution. In front of exhibits to memorialize the humiliation of China during the Opium Wars and through the invasion by foreign powers, he proclaimed:

> Now we are nearer to reach the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation than we have been in any period of our history. And we have more confidence and strength compared to any period of history to realize this goal.[19]

The Chinese dream of national rejuvenation

Xi's speech was published under the title "Realizing the great rejuvenation of China is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation since modern times." According to Xi's "China Dream," the country should be developed in an all-round manner by 2050 and become a dominant global power. Unlike the "American Dream," which is understood as an international vision of hope and reflects the global "soft power" of the United States, Xi's dream was always only tailored for the rise of China and the Chinese. Xi believes that the economic and overall strength of China will lead to its global supremacy by 2050 to claim "it's rightful status inside the center of the world." Beijing began a personality cult around Xi and boosted his image. This was also indicated by the slogan "Mao Zedong made China stand up, Deng Xiaoping made it become rich. Xi Jinping will make it strong."[20]

Soon Beijing provoked headlines with the assertive and offensive moves of its leader in foreign policy and its authoritarian and repressive rule domestically. "China is a puzzle," commented Richard McGregor, one of the most knowledgeable Western experts on the Communist Party.[21] Xi has led China to

> become the world's largest economy and a technology and military superpower. It's technocrats, developers and the development of the country are highly sophisticated. Under Xi however, China's politics have taken a different path. They have gone back in time, with echoes of the Maoist era, a period of ruthless purges, ideological education, loyalty tests and personality cults.[22]

At the end of 2012 "the expectations in favor of Xi were huge," wrote Cai Xia, a senior lecturer at the Central Party School (CCP) and granddaughter of an early revolutionary leader.[23] Cai continued:

> After a decade of stagnation, the CCP needed reform more than ever, and Xi, who had hinted at his proclivity for change, seemed like the man to lead it. . . . Given the reputation of Xi's father, a former CCP leader with liberal

> inclinations, and the flexible style that Xi himself had displayed in previous posts, I and other advocates of reform hoped that our new leader would have the courage to enact bold changes to China's political system. Yet, her hope had turned into desperation. Over the course of his tenure, the regime . . . has grown even more repressive and dictatorial. A personality cult now surrounds Xi, who has tightened the party's grip on ideology and eliminated what little space there was for political speech and civil society. People who have not lived in mainland China for the past eight years can hardly understand how brutal the regime has become.[24]

Cai sought exile in the United States and in 2019 was expelled from the party. She had worked at the Central Party School for four decades. This elite training ground, where senior officials learn how to apply Marxist theory and Communist ideology to their daily work, is subordinated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC). In 2007, soon after Xi was admitted to the Standing Committee, he was also appointed as new principal of the Party School. He managed it like a modern administrator. German chancellor Angela Merkel was impressed when she met with Xi and gave a speech at the school in 2010. Xi explained to her that socialism in China is still in an embryonic phase. Merkel believed that this theory enabled Beijing to pursue a pragmatic reform policy.[25]

While Xi quoted Deng Xiaoping, he did not reveal his personal thoughts. This only happened in 2012. As the Number One in the Party, he could demand the Party School to advocate the "Xi Jinping thoughts." In 2015, he warned the School not to explore political reforms or to think outside the box declaring, "The word party is part of your name. You have to teach the ideology of the party."[26] In 2017, Xi's thoughts were enshrined in the Party Statutes as the new leading ideology.

Already at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, Xi introduced his two-phased plan to facilitate the global rise of China. During the first phase, Xi expected China to emerge as a moderately prosperous society in all aspects by 2021. The second phase foresaw that China should be the dominant world power and a model in ecological development by 2050. Both stages corresponded to important dates in recent Chinese history. In 2021, Beijing celebrated 100 years of the founding of the Communist Party, and the hundredth anniversary of the PRC in 1949 will be commemorated in 2049/50.

In 2017, an impatient Xi accelerated his plan for China's rise. He introduced a 2035 goal as an in-between benchmark to shorten the road to rejuvenation. By the year 2035, he expects China to overtake the US economy, both regarding high-tech innovation and with respect to the country becoming the world's leader in standardization and digitalization. By then China is also meant to possess a modernized army at the world-level standard. In 2021, Beijing put into effect a new Five-Year Plan and also introduced the 15-Year Plan, which specified long-term goals in nine areas, in particular regarding industrial and technological innovation.[27]

Looking back over the previous ten years, Xi managed to speed up his rise to power. He was scheduled to become the next Secretary General in November 2012 but wanted to be installed simultaneously as chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Party (CMC). That was unprecedented. Former leader Hu Jintao, who was chosen Secretary General in 2002, had to wait two years before he could take over the military.

Xi got both jobs but had to fight for it. In September 2012, he suddenly vanished for two weeks. His meetings with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the President of Singapore were canceled. Both were told that Xi had hurt himself during a swimming exercise. Beijing never disclosed to the public what had happened. A party official revealed later to the author under condition of anonymity that Xi had given the Standing Committee an ultimatum: he would not accept the position of Secretary General if he could not lead the army at the same time.[28]

The core leader

Xi's ultimatum was his first step to free himself from the shackles of collective leadership and reverse the clock to establish his authoritarian, one-man rule. In another calculated move he put his own organizational layer, consisting of half a dozen newly founded leading groups, on top of the administration. These groups were all under his direct command. Their members are chosen by Xi and the politburo. Their meetings are not announced and only reported by Chinese press agency Xinhua after the sessions have taken place. The ministries and the whole administration have to implement their guidelines. These leading groups were put in charge of national security, infrastructure development, the economy, and financial and military reforms. They also oversaw China's cyber policies. Now Xi could execute major decisions by direct order. In 2020, Xi fine-tuned his control with the "Xi Jinping Thought research centers," which were established in all ministries. Foreign Minister Wang Yi praised the new research center in his ministry "as the latest achievement of Marxism in the field of diplomacy" and "a historic leap in the Sinicization of Marxism."[29]

With big anti-corruption campaigns Xi gained fear, respect, and control over the bureaucracy, eliminated his political opponents, and became popular with the men and women in the street. He empowered the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in Beijing, which is the top anti-corruption agency and works for the party leadership. An army of commissioners swarmed out to hunt down millions of small officials (known as "the flies") and thousands of high-ranking functionaries (known as "the tigers"). The Inspectors were given unchecked powers to arbitrarily arrest anyone they suspected of corruption. The Anti-Corruption Commission was led by Xi's most trusted companion from his youth, Wang Qishan Xi promoted him in 2018 to become the vice president of China. Wang is nicknamed as the "eighth member of the Standing Committee," as he takes part in all major gatherings of this highest leadership group.[30]

Deng Xiaoping had promoted political reforms to increase the efficiency of the bureaucracy. To sideline Deng's policies Xi undid the separation of powers between the party and the government as well as between the party and individual businesses. The decision-making powers of the government State Council were transferred to the Standing Committee of the Politburo. Premier Li Keqiang and his Cabinet became agencies for implementing Xi's decisions.

On New Year's Day 2020 Beijing put a revised National Defense Law into force, which transferred the military decision-making powers from the State Council to the Central Military Commission (CMC). The latter is run by Xi. He can now mobilize military and civilian resources in case of emergencies and in the defense of the national interest, which also includes China's "development interests" abroad.

In February 2021, a new Coast Guard Law went into effect. The new statute allows the largest coast guard force in the world to fire at foreign ships in its waters. The coast guard vessels are allowed to use force and remove buildings constructed by foreign countries on islands that China claims as its territory. In addition to the People's Liberation Army, Xi also commands the People's Armed Police and the Coast Guard. Ultimately, this gives Xi extended powers to push forward his pet projects. Among these projects are the continued expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and his endeavors to secure China's territorial claims in the South and East China Seas. In 2019, Xi reminded the public that the "sacred mission" to reunify with Taiwan "cannot be left for generations."[31]

The doctorate from Fujian

After his father was purged by Mao in 1962, the family lived with their mother in Beijing. Xi Jinping, who was born in 1953, continued to attend the Bayi-Primary school No. 8 in Beijing for children of high-ranking officials. He eventually switched to the Bayi-Middle School No.8, which he attended from September 1965 to December 1968. The school subsequently closed due to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and Xi could not finish the regular middle school term.

As a child of a "reactionary father," he was harassed in the Cultural Revolution by Red Guards and was even locked up for some months in a detention camp for adolescents. Xi finally ran away from Beijing. He could do so because of a proclamation by Chairman Mao Zedong in December 1968 stating that students should "go to the countryside to receive re-education from poor and lower middle class peasants." In 1969, Xi arrived in a remote village in northern China and met the peasant leaders. "I said to them, this is in response to Chairman Mao's call," he told them. He was allowed to settle.[32]

Xi stayed for seven years in the village and learned how to work on a farm and survive in the countryside. Surprisingly, the boy from Beijing – whose father was being persecuted but still had influential friends – got along with the country folks. In his seventh year living there he became leader of the party cell in the village production brigade. Finally, due to a special admission quota for the

countryside, Xi was even sent back to Beijing to study at Tsinghua University, one of China's leading universities. Xi graduated in 1979, and in 2002 he received his PhD from Tsinghua. A rare book, published in 2003, contained a special collection of biographies of 381 recipients of a doctorate from the university, who were directly connected with Fujian province. It included a chapter on Xi. He wrote in his short biography what he had experienced in the years since 1969. I bought the book, printed in only 2,000 copies, secondhand in Beijing. I have translated some parts which may help the reader to better understand Xi through his own narrative.[33]

Xi was rejected ten times to join the party

> In 1969, I arrived from Beijing at the Liangjiahe Production Brigade administered by the Wenanyi People's Commune to "plant my roots" in the countryside. The brigade belonged to Yanchuan County and is located north of Shaanxi Province. I stayed there for seven years. . . . I was very far from home and with no relatives around, I had to team up with others. I worked with the farmers of Liangjiahe and got used to participate in their life. . . . There were 20 to 30 other young city people from Beijing with school education who were sent to stay in the village. They all came from families of army officials. After half a year most of them were gone. After a year all but me had left the brigade. I felt very lonely.

In his résumé Xi also revealed for the first time that during his stay in the peasant village he tried in vain to join the Communist Party.

> I wrote ten applications to be admitted into the party. All were rejected because of my (bad) family background. Later peasant party officials from the village and at commune-level wanted me to stay in the village. They pledged to help me with my wish to join the party. They forwarded it to the next higher level of party organization . . . to the Party Secretary of our brigade. . . . He finally supported my admission. He assured me that now I could become the secretary of the production brigade's party cell.

Xi joined the Party in 1974. Soon he was made a party leader at grassroot level. And he now qualified to apply for a university scholarship as a "student from the workers, peasants and soldiers." In 1975, his village selected him to attend Tsinghua University to study chemical engineering.

> I wished to continue to study. Tsinghua University had been awarded a quota and granted scholarships for university entry to two students from the Yanan region. . . . I applied for it. My district leaders asked the higher administration to decide. They did not dare to accept me. The responsible admissions' person at Tsinghua University for students coming from the countryside did

> not dare to accept me either. He referred it directly to university leaders and asked them to take the decision. That was my chance. Tsinghua was in the middle of a political campaign, which targeted the so called "rightist restauration wind." The two [radical leftist] leaders of Tsinghua University, Chi Qun and Xie Chengyi, were too busy to care about the concrete admission work. Comrade Liu Bing [an old friend of Xi's father] made the decisions. My father Xi Zhongxun had just been released from prison and was sent to work to the Luoyang Refractory Factory. The leadership of this factory provided me with an "unofficial" letter of recommendation. It says: "Comrade Xi Zhongxun's problems have to be understood as a contradiction among the people. They should not prevent his children from studying or working." This letter helped me to be admitted to Tsinghua University.[34]

After graduating in 1979 from Tsinghua University, Xi could have stayed in Beijing. His father Xi Zhongxun had already been rehabilitated in 1978 and was again very influential. Xi became Secretary to China's defense minister Geng Biao, who was an old friend of his father. But after two years in Beijing, Xi asked to be transferred to become Deputy Party Secretary and then Party Secretary of the city of Zhengding in Hebei, Beijing's neighboring province. He knew that he had to make his way "on a long march through the provinces," if he wanted to rise.

> In 1982 I made the decision to leave Beijing and go again back to work at the grassroots. I left the Army Central Committee Office and went first to Zhengding County in Hebei Province. Many people did not understand why I left Beijing. Previously I had worked as the Secretary for Defense Minister and Politburo member Geng Biao. But there were other youths, who also wanted to work on the lowest level of administration. One was Liu Yuan [the son of former purged Chinese President Liu Shaoqi]. We both shared the same ideals and wanted to join the workers and peasants.[35]

It should be noted that Xi wrote this biographical entry when he already worked as the leader of Fujian province from 1999 to November 2002. He was asked to head an advisory committee for a new publication project. Fujian wanted to prove that it cared for academic talent and published the biographies of those who had received doctorates.

Xi, whose Ph.D. was accepted in March 2002 by Tsinghua, was included in the book, and he contributed his photo and a curriculum vitae to the publication. His contribution stated: "I was enrolled as a PhD-doctorate from March 1998 to January 2002 into the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Tsinghua University. My major was Marxism and Ideological Political Education. I got my doctorate degree."[36]

However, Xi was 1,200 miles away from Tsinghua University and worked full time as a high official of the Communist Party and governor of Fujian province. So how did he manage to write his PhD thesis entitled "Research in the

Construction of China's Countryside Marketization"? Professor Liu Meixun was named as his doctoral supervisor. But neither she nor the university itself ever talked about their famous doctoral student. The *Beijing News* reported on July 30, 2014, that Journalist Guan Qingfeng had discovered one copy of the 169-page PhD thesis in the reading room of Tsinghua Library.[37]

In his résumé Xi also listed other books and academic papers that he claimed to have written. The titles include "On poverty reduction"; "The landscape specifics of Fujian as a coastal province"; "Modern theory and praxis of agriculture"; "Economic modernization in agriculture"; "On developing and optimizing the socialist market economy in Marxist economics." There also was a paper entitled "The effect of China's admission into the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the construction of rural marketization." Xi claimed that some of his papers earned him highest academic rewards.[38]

In the library of Tsinghua University, which is accessible online, I could only find a 20-page digital version of yet another paper which Xi claimed to have written, "The effect of China' admission into the WTO on the construction of rural marketization."[39] The paper had the following abstract:

> This paper studies the importance of the rural marketing process in China, analyzes its achievements, difficulties and reasons causing these problems, researches both the positive and negative factors of accession to the WTO for the rural marketing process in China and puts forward the measurements of rural marketing.[40]

Xi writes in his paper:

> Joining the WTO is conducive to promote rural marketization, but it cannot be a free lunch. . . . It does not only require other member states to open their markets to China, but also requires China to open its domestic market to other member states. . . . After joining the WTO, my country's agriculture product market and factory market will get in line with international markets, which will help to learn and adept at competition, mechanism and the rules of the international market.[41]

Twenty years later, however, Beijing has fallen short on a lot of the promises it made in 2001 to gain admission to the WTO. Xi's expressed desire in 2000 to open China's agricultural markets to the world has not been achieved either. Is there a gap between Xi's remarkable conclusion two decades ago and his thoughts today?

Conclusion

There are many reasons why Xi has become China's most authoritarian ruler since Mao. One reason is his intense belief in his country's promising future and his desire for China to avoid a similar downfall to that of the Soviet Union.

In December 2012, just days after he became Secretary General of the Party, Xi asked the members of his new Central Committee to reflect on two questions: "Why did the Soviet Union disintegrate?" and "Why did the Soviet Communist Party dissolve itself?" He answered these questions himself.

> The soviet leadership tolerated liberalism, allowed to completely negate the history of the Soviet Union, their party and their leaders Lenin and Stalin. Historical nihilism and mental confusion spread everywhere. The party organizations could decide almost nothing. The army was no longer under the command of the party.[42]

Xi views as naïve the belief that China's Communist Party is too big to fall. Xi said when explaining his point of view:

> The Soviet party seized power when it had 200,000 members, defeated Hitler when it had two million members, but it lost power when it had nearly 20 million members. I told you repeatedly that in the turmoil of events in Moscow, no one there was man enough to stand up, fight and defend the party. Why? Because the members had lost their ideals and belief.[43]

Those nightmares are still haunting him. On October 1, 2019, Xi inspected a huge military parade in Beijing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. He exclaimed from Tiananmen gate, "No power on earth can shake the foundations of China or stop its rise."[44]

But on the same day the authoritative Party Magazine *Qiushi* (meaning "seeking the truth") published a speech for the first time, which Xi had given 20 months earlier. It encompassed a completely different tone, one that asserts that the enemies are within the party. "Our party has more than 89 million party members and more than 4.5 million grassroots party organizations. I think it is only ourselves who can defeat us; there is no second person,"[45] Xi said in this unearthed speech.

This speech to his Standing Committee dated back to January 5, 2018. At the time he had just been confirmed for his second term as Secretary General. Instead of being jubilant, he warned the Communist elite that the history of China is full of instances of powerful dynasties and rulers who were overthrown because of their inner weaknesses. That also happened to the mighty Soviet Union and its Communist Party. "Throughout the ages, one of the common reasons for the collapse or decline of major powers in the world is the loss of central authority and their inability to centralize and unify all forces," Xi stated.[46]

Therefore, Xi demanded the party to remold itself ideologically and constantly enforce its control over society. Since 2017 Xi has had one often-repeated request: "Inside the government, the army, the people, academic fields and in the east, west, south, north and in the center – the Party must lead everything and in every part of the PRC."[47] Xi is nicknamed the "Chairman of Everything."

The Communist leader seems insecure and consumed by the fear that unexpected events could endanger his rule. Beijing has enlarged and strengthened the country's security forces and intensified ideological education campaigns. It has clamped down on political, religious, and minority protests and on critical lawyers, journalists, liberal scholars, and dissidents. Beijing made use of "the war against the COVID-19 pandemic" since early 2020 to develop even more sophisticated artificial intelligence techniques for surveillance and enforced censorship and digital monitoring of the whole society.

Since 2019 Xi has warned his party to pay utmost attention to the danger of "black swans" (unforeseeable, unexpected dangerous events like the outbreak of COVID-19) or "gray rhinos" (the underestimated, long-term problems of China that have not been solved). Either development could suddenly lead to a systemic crisis. In September 2020, Beijing published a 250-page book regarding all the potential dangers about which Xi has warned since 2012. The book is entitled *How to Respond to Dangerous Challenges, Crisis and Sudden Events*.[48] China has also isolated itself from the outside. Its foreign policy under Xi follows a "wolf warrior" mentality. Beijing retaliates with "hard power" whenever it feels criticized by other countries, foreign entities, or persons. But the rivalry with the United States matters most for Xi.

New US president Joe Biden knows Xi "pretty well" since the time when both men were vice presidents. "I probably spent more time with Xi Jinping than any world leader has, because I had 24, 25 hours of private meetings with him when I was vice president. I traveled 17,000 miles with him," Biden said of his prior interactions with Xi. During an interview, Biden also commented on Xi's authoritarian character: "He's very bright. He's very tough. He doesn't have – and I don't mean it as a criticism, just the reality – he doesn't have a democratic, small D, bone in his body."[49]

The biggest, unexpected event, which could plunge Xi's regime into a crisis is never mentioned by him. It is his "one man rule" that leads easily to poor decisions and avoidable mistakes. In August 2020 a *New York Times* journalist spoke with Deng Yuwen, the former editor of the Party School newspaper *Study Times*, who lives in exile in the United States. In China many disgruntled liberals were "despairing" and "for the most part they put the blame on Xi Jinping." "They are waiting," Yuwen explained, "for some kind of error made by Xi to reinvigorate reformist forces within the party."[50]

Notes

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2 Richard McGregor, *Xi Jinping: The Backlash* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 43.
3 A book with the title *Xi Jinping and his lovers* (in Chinese) was announced in Hong Kong in 2015 but it was never published. The manuscript was later brought to the USA, and printed in 2019 by "United Editors" for Westpoint Press. It is distributed via Amazon.
4 Evan Osnos, "Born Red," *The New Yorker* (March 30, 2015): www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red.

5 Kerry Brown, *"CEO, China" – the Rise of Xi Jinping* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).
6 Christopher Bodeen, "U.S. Treasury Chief Paulson Makes 'Important' Trip to China Amid Trade, Currency Friction," *Associated Press* (September 19, 2006): www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/215462; Henry M. Paulson, *Dealing with China* (New York: Headline Books, 2015).
7 Xi Jinping, "How Did I Enter Politics?" Interview with Yang Xiaohui, in "Sons and Daughters of China," in Chinese *Zhonghua Ernue*, vol. 7 (2000): http://nias.asia/news/Xi_Jinping_interview_Chinese Xi Jinping; "Xi Jinping Accepted an Interview in 2004: I am from Yanan," *Yanan TV Station* (June 13, 2014): http://sx.sina.com.cn/news/b/2014-06-13/0723108859.html; "I am a Yanan-Man," *Interview with Yanan CCTV* (August 14, 2004): http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0214/c1001-26566406.html.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China, Vol. 1: Man of the people* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2018), 479.
12 Xi Zhongxun, *Official Biography* [in Chinese, *Xi Zhongxun chuan xia*] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxuan Chubanshe, 2013), 640. The biography reveals also that Xi's elder brother Xi Zhengning, who worked as a court president in Hainan, died in 1997 of a heart attack.
13 "Xi Jinping: Letter to His Father," in *Xi Zhongxun chuan xia* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxuan Chubanshe, 2013), 642.
14 He is quoted in Alice Su, "Dreams of a Red Emperor: The Relentless Rise of Xi Jinping," *Los Angeles Times* (October, 22, 2020): www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-22/china-xi-jinping-mao-zedong-communist-party.
15 Xi Zhongxun, "The Red Sun is Shining," in *Selected Works* (Chinese) (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxuan Chubanshe, 2013), 286–300.
16 The speech was only published 19 months later. See Xi Jinping, "On Some Questions How to Hold to and Develop Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (January 5, 2013)," in *Selection of Important Documents Since the 18th Party Congress* (Chinese), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxuan Yanjiushe, 2014), 113.
17 Ibid., 115.
18 Ankit Panda, "It's Official: Xi Jinping Breaks His Non-Militarization Pledge in the Spratlys," *The Diplomat* (December 16, 2016): https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/its-official-xi-jinping-breaks-his-non-militarization-pledge-in-the-spratlys/.
19 For a summary of the speech and a photo taken in the museum, see Wu Gang and Yan Shuang, "Xi Jinping Pledges 'Great Renewal of Chinese Nation'," *Global Times* (November 30, 2012): www.globaltimes.cn/content/747443.shtml; Xi Jinping speech on November 29, 2012, in Xi Jinping, "Selected Speeches on the History of the Communist Party (Lun Zhongguo Gongchandang Lishi)," *Zhongguo Wenxuan Chubanshi* (February 2021), 2.
20 This slogan was officially used after the 19th Party Congress in 2017 as part of the personality cult around Xi Jinping. Since it has been been repeated constantly.
21 McGregor, *Xi Jinping*.
22 Ibid.
23 Cai Xia, "The Party That Failed: An Insider Breaks with Beijing," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100/1 (January–February 2021): 78–96: www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-12-04/chinese-communist-party-failed.
24 Ibid.
25 Chancellor Merkel mentioned this to journalist Thomas Schmid, who covered the event, after she had visited the Party School.
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12

NARENDRA MODI

Elected authoritarian (born 1950)

Ian Hall

In May 2014, Narendra Modi led his Bharatiya Janata Party ("Indian People's Party" or BJP) to one of the most remarkable election victories in Indian political history. A "Modi wave" swept 282 BJP candidates into the lower house of the parliament – the Lok Sabha – giving the new government a comfortable majority.[1] The Congress Party, which had ruled India for a decade, was left with just 44 seats, too few for it even to be designated the official opposition. In the years that followed, Modi tightened his grip still further, despite his government's inability to deliver the economic growth and jobs it had promised. His political opponents struggled to rebuild their support, as the prime minister's popularity remained high. Within government, both ministers and officials were subjected to a higher degree of control than was common in earlier administrations, as Modi drove its agenda and burnished his personal brand. Outside it, critics in civil society, the media, and universities – some accused of being "anti-national" – found it harder to get their voices heard and to hold Modi or his ministers to account, as press conferences and interviews became increasingly rare.[2]

Modi's second, equally crushing election win in May 2019 confirmed him as the dominant force in contemporary Indian politics.[3] Yet his extraordinary success was far from preordained. Modi is an unusual politician with an unorthodox background. Unlike many Indian leaders, he is not the scion of a landowning, political, or administrative dynasty. Nor was he educated at a private school or elite university. He was born into modest circumstances: his father made a living selling tea at the railway station in the town of Vadnagar, in the western Indian state of Gujarat. At school, he performed unremarkably. He may have attended university, but whether he was awarded two degrees in political science, as some claim, is unclear.

Modi's success cannot be attributed to privilege or to polish. A different set of factors explain it. His capacity for work, his sheer ambition, his flexibility and capacity for personal and political reinvention, the obsessive control he exerts over

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his image and his underlings, and his self-confidence have all played a part, as this chapter argues. The backing of the powerful Hindu nationalist organization the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("National Volunteer Association" or RSS), which Modi joined as a boy, and the opportunities that it provided him as a young man were also crucial. And so was his skill at identifying and manipulating popular aspirations and grievances which, when coupled with an efficient, well-funded, professional, and ruthless party machine, allowed Modi to establish himself as the most successful Indian leader of his generation.[4]

The organizer

Modi is the first person born after India became independent to become prime minister and is one of the only two leaders that have held that office to have risen to it from what is normally regarded as a lower caste.[5] His biographers suggest he became interested in politics at a young age, thanks largely to the RSS. Physically active and religiously devout, he joined the organization, which describes itself as dedicated to social service and the upholding of Hindu values, at the age of eight. His local RSS branch – the *shakha* – would have organized sporting contests and taught a kind of paramilitary drill, instructing boys on how to use the *lathi*, the bamboo pole used by India's police. There, too, Modi would also have been exposed to the RSS's ideology, understanding of India's history and destiny. These ideas are imparted to all recruits as part of what the RSS calls a "character building" (*chaaritya nirman*) program. Convinced that Hindus had become soft in mind and body, this was developed by the organization's founders to instill self-discipline and social responsibility, as the RSS conceives it.[6] It is intended to teach practical skills, including leading and managing others. And it is designed to allow RSS leaders to identify recruits willing and able to dedicate their lives to the cause, forgoing marriage, children, careers, material wealth, and – supposedly – ambition.[7]

All of this had a lasting effect on Modi. In about 1972, while in his early twenties, the future prime minister became an RSS *pracharak* – literally "preacher" but often translated as "organizer" – and full-time volunteer. He split from his family and refused to marry a woman with whom his parents had arranged a match.[8] Instead, he dedicated himself completely to the RSS, spending the next 30 years in various roles within the organization or seconded to the BJP, which the RSS supports. In so doing, he built a network of connections in the national capital, New Delhi, and across the country, and honed skills that he would use to great effect when he eventually emerged from backroom politics to high office.[9]

His first opportunity to shine came during the Emergency, in 1975–1977, when then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended parliament and ruled by decree. Temporarily banned, the Gujarat RSS used the young *pracharak* as a courier, encouraging him to enroll in a university to give him an excuse for traveling to New Delhi to pass messages to politicians and supporters in the capital.[10] Modi was also deputized to the powerful student union affiliated with the RSS, the Akhil Bharat Vidyarti Parishad ("All India Students Council" or ABVP), providing him

with another useful set of contacts within the broader Hindu nationalist movement in the capital and in Gujarat.[11] Modi performed well, and when the Emergency ended, the State RSS put him in charge of mobilizing voters during the 1977 general election campaign. Soon afterward, it promoted him, allowing him to run its operations in a large part of Gujarat.[12] In that job, Modi bolstered his reputation within the RSS for competence, energy, and commitment, attracting the attention of one of the most important Hindu nationalist leaders of post-independence India, L. K. Advani.[13]

In 1987, Advani picked Modi – then 37 years old – to spearhead the BJP's efforts to win control of the State government in Gujarat and seats in the upcoming national election. Modi again impressed, displaying a flair for political theatre. He orchestrated a series of popular protests and staged several so-called *yatras* – literally ceremonial processions, but in effect long marches between towns and cities – to highlight various social issues. In 1990, Modi was then asked to organize the Gujarat leg of a major national procession: Advani's *Ram Rath Yatra* intended to begin at the significant Hindu site of Somnath and to end at a controversial mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid.[14] Hindu activists had long claimed that the mosque, which dated back to the sixteenth century, sat on the site of an earlier Hindu temple marking the birthplace of Lord Rama. Advani's *yatra* was designed to highlight that claim, consolidate Hindu support for the BJP, and call for the mosque to be replaced by a temple. It worked.[15] Traveling in pickups decked out as ancient chariots, playing music from recently televised adaptations of Hindu epics, the BJP's procession boosted their fortunes.[16] And shortly afterward, in December 1992, a large number of Hindu nationalist activists went to the Babri Masjid and demolished it, sparking riots that left at least 2,000 people dead across India.[17]

Modi played no role in the destruction of the mosque, and although his career faltered in the early 1990s due to infighting in the Gujarat BJP, he continued to bolster his network and polish his skills. In 1993 and 1994, he traveled to the United States for the first time, exploring the country and – importantly – meeting members of the Indian diaspora sympathetic to the RSS and the BJP. He returned to assist the Gujarat BJP win power in the 1995 State election but then lost another factional battle, leading to another stint in effective exile. By this point, however, Modi had backers willing and able to cushion his fall. The BJP's national president, Advani, pulled him out of Gujarat and commissioned him to help the party build support across northern India, from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Himachal Pradesh in the east. When the BJP won the 1998 national election, Modi was rewarded with a more prominent position: he was made one of the BJP's national secretaries and a party spokesperson. These jobs gave him new opportunities, which he grasped with alacrity: the chance to establish a public profile, forge links with journalists, and appear on television.[18]

In October 2001, Modi's diligence finally paid off. Concerned by accusations of incompetence and corruption leveled at the Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel and his mismanagement of the response to an earthquake that had killed more

than 20,000 people earlier that year, the BJP's national leadership forced him to stand down.[19] And despite never having held public office, Modi was appointed in his place.

The king of Hindu hearts

Modi served as chief minister for twelve and a half years, until he was selected to spearhead the BJP's 2014 general election campaign. In Gujarat, he established the distinctive approach to governance that made him plausible for higher office. It evolved and changed over time, but throughout it had three elements. The first was the careful cultivation of an image of Modi as a different kind of politician to the Indian stereotype: one that was energetic where normal *netas* are indolent; clean rather than corrupt; technologically savvy rather than unapologetically Luddite; and responsive to the people, not bound to special interests.[20] The second was an open and unabashed friendliness to business, including the big, family-owned industrial conglomerates that dominate the Indian economy. And the third – and by far the most controversial – was the manipulation of identity politics both within Gujarat and between Gujarat and the rest of India, which among his most fervent supporters won Modi the sobriquet *Hindu Hriday Samrat* ("King of Hindu Hearts").

These elements did not fall into place at once. Identity politics dominated Modi's early years in office, which were scarred by the Godhra incident and its bloody aftermath. On February 24, 2002, just three days after the new chief minister had taken his seat in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, Hindu activists aboard a train, which stopped at the station in the town of Godhra, got into an altercation with local Muslims. In circumstances that remain unclear, part of the train caught fire, and 59 passengers were killed. Communal violence between Hindus and Muslims flared across Gujarat. Official figures put the dead from the rioting at about 1,000; unofficial tallies run to twice that number. Thousands more were burnt out of their homes, maimed, raped, and humiliated.[21]

These events shook Modi's government. Some accused the new chief minister of incompetence and indifference to the suffering of the victims, especially Muslims. Others went further, suggesting the government had deliberately stood by as Hindu nationalist groups incited or orchestrated violence. A few accused ministers and officials of complicity in its planning and execution. Modi was hauled before the national leadership of the BJP to explain his actions, display contrition, and offer to resign. After an apology and public admonishments from both Advani, his mentor and patron, and the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, however, he was permitted to keep his post. But ongoing police investigations cast a shadow over Modi's government for more than a decade.[22] The chief minister and his government were heavily criticized within and outside India for years to come. Modi was banned from entering the United States; unofficial bans on diplomatic contact with him were imposed by other governments.

During the riots, Modi's reported comments were unequivocally divisive, and soon afterward, he set about extracting what advantage he could from the

wreckage. Immediately after Godhra, he suggested that the burning of the train had been planned by local Muslims prior to the event and that it might have been an act of terrorism.[23] Once the violence had subsided, he continued to refer to Muslims, as a group, as a threat to Gujarat and to India – a fifth column for Pakistan and terrorist groups. He gambled that a significant proportion of Gujarati Hindus shared that view and believed that what had occurred at Godhra had validated it. And keen to capitalize on heightened communal tensions, Modi attempted to bring the upcoming State election, scheduled later in the year, forward by several months. That move was stymied, however, by the Election Commission on the grounds that law and order had not yet been restored.[24] When Gujarat did go to the polls, in December 2002, Modi campaigned hard on the argument that he and the BJP were all that stood between Hindus and Muslim terrorists.[25] It proved a winning strategy, securing a landslide victory.[26]

After 2002, Modi continued to use identity politics to consolidate his support base, but he also added a new, more parochial dimension. When outsiders criticized him or his government or lamented the polarization of religious groups in his State, he claimed they were prejudiced against Gujarat or jealous of Gujaratis' fabled business acumen and comparative wealth. He cast himself as engaged in a struggle to defend the States's *asmita* (or "pride") against what he called – with deliberate reference to the national capital's past as the seat of successive Muslim empires – the "Delhi Sultanate." He promised not only to protect Gujarat against slurs and innuendo but also to tell the world about what he portrayed as its long history of inclusiveness and communal harmony, as well as its economic success. To that end, Modi publicly appealed to the memory of great Gujaratis like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, despite his association with the opposition Congress Party, even building a giant statue of him named the "Statue of Unity." And in parallel, he held annual summits – dubbed "Vibrant Gujarat" – showcasing the State and the economic opportunities it offered, to which he invited prominent Indian industrialists and foreign investors.[27]

Those events and others like it allowed Modi to develop and display the other elements of his political appeal: his energy, perceived dedication to the job, and grasp of the power and possibilities of technology. Vibrant Gujarat gave Modi a platform to market his evolving approach to governance, one that coupled deregulation with energizing the State bureaucracy to better serve both citizens and business. It gave him opportunities to form close relationships with business leaders, including powerful and wealthy figures like the billionaire industrialists Gautam Adani, Mukesh Ambani, and Ratan Tata.[28] He leveraged these ties to assist the State's development agenda and to help finance the local BJP, giving it ample resources with which to fight elections. And those resources were deployed cleverly, in ways not often seen in Indian campaigns, as Modi and his team made use of established but underexploited technologies like television, as well as emerging platforms, like mobile telephones and social media.[29]

Despite this closeness to big business interests, Modi also managed to contrive an image as an unusually clean politician. His personal circumstances helped.

Estranged from his parents and siblings and without a partner or children, he was able to present himself as both selfless and incorruptible. Without heirs or close relatives, he could credibly claim he was not interested in founding a dynasty or using his office to further family interests – in stark contrast to others in his position.[30]

To the devout or chauvinistic, then, Modi cast himself as a defender of Hindu values and Hindu communities. To the business community, he presented himself as the technocrat reformer. To the emerging and aspiring middle class, tired of the corruption and inefficiency that normally characterizes the Indian state, he posed as clean and effective. And in his final avatar, Modi appealed to what is generally known in India as the *aam aadmi* (or "common man"), as a champion of the ordinary Indian who, because of his own modest beginnings, grasped their troubles and desires in ways that the upper echelons of society do not. To do that, he peppered his speeches, especially when campaigning, with earthy language combined with catchy slogans and acronyms. While centralizing power in the hands of the State bureaucracy and cultivating big business, Modi told ordinary voters that he was just a simple, clean, and practical *vikas purush* ("development man").

The outsider

Modi's legacy in Gujarat remains contested. The economy certainly grew – and reasonably quickly – but so did the whole of India during the 2000s.[31] Roads were built and villages electrified, but there is evidence that the gap between rich and poor widened, that social development lagged behind wealth creation, and that Muslims did not prosper as some of their Hindu counterparts did.[32] Complaints also surfaced within the Hindu nationalist movement – both inside and outside the State – about Modi's "autocratic style," which some thought is increasingly at odds with the consensus-based, collegial approach the RSS claims it favors and his egocentric tendency to "self-promotion."[33]

None of this, however, prevented Modi from being nominated as the BJP's pick to lead its campaign in 2014. Whatever the results of his term in Gujarat, it was clear that his dynamic brand of business-friendly, technologically enabled Hindu nationalism was a potent one. After years of scandals, in which a number of ministers were accused of profiting from government ventures, it was clear that someone like Modi, who lacked a family and appeared clean, would inspire sections of the electorate tired of negotiating both everyday corruption and high-level cronyism. And the idea of a leader from outside New Delhi, from a lower caste and humble background, also appealed. This was a stark contrast, after all, to the mostly upper-caste, predominantly Brahmin, senior leadership of the Congress Party and the BJP. So, for all these reasons, Modi was drafted from Gujarat into national politics, and a formidable election-winning organization was built around him.[34]

The BJP then opted for a simple strategy. It ran a highly "Modi-centric" campaign, saturating India with still and moving images of "NaMo," using not just posters but also 3D holographic representations of their leader.[35] It emphasized Modi's supposed success in delivering growth and good governance in Gujarat, as

well as his modest beginnings and apparent incorruptibility, but downplayed his reputation as a defender of the Hindu nation, so as not to alienate middle-class voters more interested in development than identity politics. Instead, the BJP argued that Modi was the leader best able to restore integrity to government and dynamism to the flagging Indian economy, promising that "*achhe din aane waale hai*": "good days are coming."[36]

These messages were powerful in themselves, but the BJP was able to amplify them because it enjoyed several advantages over its principal opponent, the Congress Party. First, Modi's strong connections into the business community and into India's far-flung diaspora, built up over two decades, helped the BJP build up a war-chest that allowed it to buy up advertising space in newspapers and on television, radio, billboards, and social media. Reputable estimates put the amount spent on the 2014 election at US$5 billion – US$3 billion more than on the 2009 campaign – and most was spent by the BJP.[37] Second, the BJP was able to draft talent to design and run a campaign of targeted messaging to mobile telephone users, whose numbers boomed in the late 2000s and early 2010s, especially among the young. This talent was drawn partly from India and partly from Silicon Valley's large reserve of well-educated Indian-origin information technology experts.[38] Third, the BJP had a formidable on-the-ground presence across large parts of India, bolstered by both new activists enthused by Modi and the RSS, which turned out in force to help him win the election.[39] This allowed it not just to encourage voters to turn out but also to convey carefully crafted messages aimed at winning over particular groups of voters, including specific castes or subcastes.[40]

Modi's illiberal India?

All of this – combined with a groundswell of anti-incumbency – propelled Modi and the BJP into power in 2014. But these factors do not account for why he came to dominate Indian politics after that victory. To be sure, the BJP continued to command the support of big business and the diaspora, as well as the extensive financial resources that went with them. It also continued to be highly adept at using social media and new technology to reach voters, especially young ones. And it continued to run a highly disciplined party organization, expanding it after 2014 into areas in eastern India in particular, where historically the BJP had been weak or even absent.[41]

However, these factors do not explain the high levels of personal popularity Modi built up and managed to sustain after 2014, nor – to be blunt – does the record of his government, especially on the economy. During Modi's first national election campaign, the BJP promised higher rates of growth, lower inflation, and more jobs. In the Modi government's first term, it succeeded in bringing prices under control, but on growth and especially on jobs it failed to deliver. Prices fell, but in large part due to lower global prices for oil. Gross domestic product grew by just over 8% in 2015–2016, but after that it slowed, reaching about 6.5% in 2017–2018.[42] There is little evidence to suggest the Modi government managed to

keep its campaign promise to create ten million new jobs per year.[43] And it made serious mistakes, the biggest being the demonetization of 80% of India's paper money in late 2016, ostensibly to tackle corruption and terrorist financing. That sudden announcement dealt a significant blow to both the cash economy and the informal economic sector in which many Indians work. It knocked at least 1% off GDP growth in 2017.[44]

This disappointing performance in economic management came despite a major effort by Modi himself to consolidate power at the center of government, which should have given him the capacity to implement serious reforms. He achieved this in two ways: first, by creating a Cabinet he could control and, second, by shaking up the civil service, as he had done in Gujarat, ostensibly to energize it. In May 2014, despite the large number of newly elected parliamentarians from which he could draw, Modi appointed the smallest Cabinet in 20 years and left out BJP grandees – including Advani, his former mentor – who might have curbed his authority. At the same time, he transferred about 30 senior officials from Gujarat to New Delhi, installing them in the Prime Minister's Office and other key positions, and moved to tame the civil service. He commissioned reforms to its promotion system, arguing it should reward talent rather than timeserving.[45] And he dispensed with officials perceived as unwilling or unable to implement his agenda, most notably India's most senior diplomat, Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh. He replaced her eight months before she was due to retire.[46]

As soon as Modi came into office, he also set about to transform his political image. Early on, he used foreign policy to help shed the perception that he lacked polish and to reinvent himself as an international statesman of whom India could and should be proud. Unexpectedly, he used his swearing-in ceremony as prime minister to try to reset relations with India's neighbors, inviting their leaders, including Pakistan's, to attend the festivities. He traveled abroad – making state visits, attending summits, and wooing potential investors – more times in his first five years in office than his predecessor had managed in a decade. And in his first 12 months in government, he played host to both Chinese President Xi Jinping and US president Barack H. Obama, who became the first American leader to be the guest of honor at India's Republic Day celebrations.[47]

As Modi's first term continued another change to his image also became clear. His friendliness with business leaders helped bring him to power but was always politically risky, given the high level of public concern about official corruption. This danger was illustrated early in Modi's tenure, when he was pictured wearing a bespoke suit with his name embroidered into the pinstripe – a suit that cost far more than a prime minister could afford. Modi was accused of running a *Suit-Boot ki Sarkar* (literally a "government for suit-boots," or government for the wealthy), and questions were asked about his links to rich industrialists.[48] As a result, the prime minister limited his public appearances with business leaders and began to place greater emphasis on welfare policies, such as the distribution of gas cylinders to women, the rural employment scheme inherited from the previous regime, and farm loan waivers.[49] By the end of his first term, as Milan Vaishnav and Jamie

Hintson note, Modi had shifted from being a "development man" to a budding architect of an Indian welfare state, promising – among other things – universal health care through the Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme.[50]

These image makeovers were enabled by a carefully controlled media strategy. Since May 2014, Modi has not held any press conferences at which journalists might ask questions. In the run-up to the 2019 election, he did permit a couple of interviews with sympathetic outlets, but for the most part, he communicates with the public directly. He uses the set-piece speeches all prime ministers deliver, such as the one given from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi every year on Independence Day. He addresses the nation once a month in his folksy *Mann ki Baat* program for All India Radio – a medium that reaches into rural areas as well as cities. On occasion, such as when he announced the test of an anti-satellite missile just before voters went to the polls in 2019, he records short explanations for television. And he and his extensive public relations team make great use of social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as platforms like WhatsApp.[51]

This strategy allows Modi to avoid questions from critical journalists and to amplify his preferred political narratives. So too does the intimidation, allegedly by pro-government forces, of media outlets – and others, including academics and activists – viewed as opposed to its agenda. In June 2017, for example, the editor of the respected journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, was forced to resign after publishing an article about the Adani Group, whose boss, Gautam Adani, is reputedly close to Modi.[52] Such actions, including threats, harassment, and an increase in the number of journalists killed in India since 2014, has raised serious concerns for the future and freedom of its media.[53] In parallel, a similar effort to intimidate or silence critics in universities and civil society groups has also generated anxiety within and outside India. Sedition charges have been filed against student activists, professors have been ousted from or denied posts, and nongovernment organizations stymied, leading in some cases to the suspension of operations within India.[54]

These moves are not simply about denying critics airtime. They are part and parcel of a broader concerted push to replace the post-independence India, with its commitments to the equal treatment of all, with an India that explicitly favors the Hindu majority.[55] This effort has many parts. One is the strengthening of the BJP itself, especially outside its traditional heartland in central and northern India, with the aim of winning crucial State elections and building up its vote in national elections. Another is a kind of culture war, waged in the civil service, universities, media organizations, and civil society, which aims to displace critical voices and supplant them with voices sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist project. This involves the regular deployment of identity politics to brand opponents not simply as wrong but as "anti-national" – opposed to India itself. A case in point is Modi's description of New Delhi's socially elevated, English-speaking elite as the "Khan Market gang" in a rare interview given just before the May 2019 election. That derogatory moniker alludes not just to a fashionable location in Delhi few ordinary

Indians can afford to patronize, but also to what some Hindu nationalists would see as the unsavory alliance of that elite with Muslims.[56]

Conclusion

Modi's rise to power was a function of ambition and dedication on his part, not just to the RSS and its cause, but also to learning new skills and forging new networks that allowed him to climb ever further. His capacity for reinventing his image is striking – for playing different roles for different audiences, often in parallel – and so is his extraordinary flexibility. In Gujarat, he began by seizing the mantle of the "King of Hindu Hearts" and then morphed into a technocrat, downplaying though not relinquishing identity politics. In New Delhi, he started as a "development man" dedicated simply to boosting India's economy, but soon after coming to office he unexpectedly transformed himself into globe-trotting statesman and salesman. Then, as growth faltered and terrorist activity increased, he turned into a champion of social welfare and ever-vigilant "watchman" defending India from its enemies.[57] Of course, obsessive control over ministers and officials, as well as savvy media management, has facilitated these reinventions, but their number is surely exceptional.

Together, they have also allowed Modi to make two national elections and many State-level contests about him and his leadership – he "presidentialized" Indian politics.[58] This is not unprecedented, but the agenda that he has pursued will likely change the country in significant ways. Indira Gandhi did something similar, from the mid-1960s until her assassination in 1984, when focusing election campaigns on her person and her vision kept her in power for most of that period. But she was unable to bring about lasting economic reform and higher levels of growth and in response fell back on identity politics, welfarism, and authoritarianism to consolidate her base. The result was what one analyst famously called a "crisis of governability," as a weakened state struggled to meet the demands of a growing population and manage a surge in political violence.[59]

Modi's India is richer and stronger, but his attempt to create a "New India" by challenging the institutions of the old could once more drive the country into a similarly authoritarian direction. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is the direction India is heading. Serious concerns have been voiced about the independence of the judiciary.[60] The media's freedom to hold the government accountable has been curtailed by the refusal to hold press conferences and regular interviews, by the use of sedition laws, and – some allege – by threats of violence.[61] The public's access to information is regularly limited, especially in restive areas like Kashmir, not least with frequent and lengthy shutdowns of the Internet and the 4G network.[62] And academic freedom has also been limited during Modi's time in office, with political allies appointed to senior positions in universities and tighter regulations imposed on individual teachers and researchers.[63] These actions have been met with growing concern inside and outside India and indicate a definite shift under Modi toward a less liberal and more authoritarian state.

Notes

1 In total, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) took 336 seats of the 543 contested.
2 There are many critical studies of Modi's India, but among the best is K.S. Komireddi, *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India* (London: Hurst and Company, 2019).
3 In 2019, the BJP won 303 seats in the Lok Sabha and its NDA coalition partners another 50. Congress regained only 6 seats, taking 52 in total. For analysis, see Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "The BJP's 2019 Election Campaign: Not Business as Usual," *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 28/2 (2020): 155–177.
4 For a sympathetic study of Modi's rise, see especially Andy Marino, *Narendra Modi: A Political Biography* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014). For a critical analysis, see Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times* (New Delhi: Tranquebar, 2013).
5 Modi's birthday was November 17, 1950. The other non-higher caste leader is H. D. Deve Gowda, who ruled for almost eleven months in 1996–97. Modi's family belongs to the Ghanchi caste, traditionally oilpressers, now designated as an "Other Backward Class" (OBC). The category of OBC applies to castes and groups deemed to be disadvantaged and therefore eligible for government support, including the provision of so-called reserved places in universities and the public sector.
6 On this program, see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The RSS: A View to Inside* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2018), xii.
7 Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 52. On RSS ideology, see Dinesh Narayanan, *The RSS and the Making of the Deep Nation* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2020).
8 Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 66–70.
9 On the RSS's approach to "Human Relations and Management Training," see Ratan Sharda, *RSS 360: Demystifying Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2018), 126–140.
10 See Marino, *Narendra Modi*, 41.
11 Kingshuk Nag, *The Namo Story: A Political Life* (New Delhi: Lotus Roli, 2013), 42.
12 M.V. Kamath and Kalindi Randeri, *The Man of the Moment: Narendra Modi* (Noida: Times Group Books, 2013), 24.
13 Lal Krishna (conventionally L. K.) Advani was born in 1927 in Karachi, in what is now Pakistan. He joined the RSS at 14 and later the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and then helped found the BJP. He was Home Minister and later Deputy Prime Minister under Atal Bihari Vajpayee between 1998 and 2004.
14 See Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, the Politics of Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27–54.
15 On the results of the *Yatra*, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 416–419.
16 In the 1991 election, the BJP secured 20% of the vote and 119 seats in the Lok Sabha, more than it had ever won before.
17 On this episode, see Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 455–464.
18 Sudesh Verma, *Narendra Modi: The GameChanger* (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2014), 77–79.
19 On this episode, see Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 248–249.
20 *Neta* is a common derisory term for a politician.
21 See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 17–20.
22 See L.K. Advani, *My Country, My Life* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2010), 842–844. The courts finally – though controversially – exonerated Modi in 2014. On the investigation, see Manoj Mitta, *The Fiction of Fact-Finding: Modi and Godhra* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014).
23 Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 266–267.

24 Ibid., 295–297.
25 Ibid., 300–303.
26 The BJP won 127 seats out of 182, while the Congress Party won only 51. Human Rights Watch concluded that the victory "testified to the effective manipulation of communal violence as a political strategy" ("Compounding Injustice: The Government's Failure to Redress Massacres in Gujarat" (2003): www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/index.htm#TopOfPage_).
27 Christophe Jaffrelot, "Narendra Modi Between Hindutva and Subnationalism: The Gujarati *Asmita* of a *Hindu Hriday Samrat*," *India Review*, vol. 15/2 (2016): 196–217.
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29 Christophe Jaffrelot, "Gujarat Elections: The Sub-Text of Modi's 'Hattrick' – High-Tech Populism and the 'Neo-Middle Class'," *Studies in Indian Politics*, vol. 1/1 (2013): 79–95.
30 Modi regularly uses this charge to attack his opponents – especially the Nehru-Gandhi family that have ruled India for long periods since 1947.
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32 Christophe Jaffrelot, "What 'Gujarat Model'? Growth Without Development – and with Socio-Political Polarisation," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 38/4 (2015): 820–838.
33 Vivian Fernandes, *Modi: Making of a Prime Minister – Leadership, Governance and Performance* (New Delhi: Orient Publishing, 2014), 22; Narayanan, *The RSS and the Making of the Deep Nation*, 147–148.
34 See Prashant Jha, *How the BJP Wins: Inside India's Greatest Election Machine* (New Delhi: Juggernaut, 2017), 4–5.
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38 See R. Sardesai, *2014: The Election that Changed India* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2014), as well as Lance Price, *The Modi Effect: Inside Narendra Modi's Campaign to Transform India* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2015).
39 On the RSS's involvement, see Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 131–155.
40 Ibid., 93–130.
41 Milan Vaishnav and Jamie Hintson, *The Dawn of India's Fourth Party System* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 5, 2019), 29–30: https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/05/dawn-of-india-s-fourth-party-system-pub-79759.
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43 Ibid., 201–205.
44 Ibid., 190–197.
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47 Ibid., 5–8.
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58 Vaishnav and Hintson, *Dawn of India's Fourth Party System*, 19. See also Pradeep K. Chhibber and Rahul Verma, *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 44–49, 133–150.
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13

DONALD J. TRUMP

The authoritarian style in American politics (born 1946)

Klaus Larres

It happened suddenly, quite unexpectedly and comparatively late. The fast erosion of democracy in the United States and the "substantial autocratization" of the country's governmental system emerged after the presidential election of November 2016, when Donald Trump narrowly and much to his own surprise won the White House for the Republican Party. Trump gained the presidency with a majority of 77 Electoral College votes over his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton. A razor-thin majority of under 1% and a mere 107,000 votes in three states decided the 2016 election and opened Trump the door to the Oval Office. But this still meant that almost 63 million Americans cast their vote for the ferocious, misogynistic, and loudmouthed Trump. They found his populist-nationalist campaign slogan "America First" appealing.[1]

Four years later, in November 2020, even more people voted for him, though Trump lost the election to Joe Biden, President Barack Obama's former vice president. Biden won both the popular vote and a majority of 74 Electoral College votes. While more than 81 million votes were cast for Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris, just over 74 million citizens – 11 million more than four years before – voted for Trump despite his tumultuous, highly contentious, and undemocratic presidency.[2] Clearly, Trump's authoritarianism had made deep inroads into the American body politic.[3]

In their important book *How Democracies Die*, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt identify four key indicators of authoritarian behavior: first, the weak commitment to or rejection of the democratic rules of the game; second, the denial of the legitimacy of political opponents; third, encouragement or toleration of violence; and, finally, the readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents and the media.[4] Trump met all four criteria during his two presidential election campaigns in 2016 and 2020 and when serving as president from 2017 to 2021. Throughout his one-term presidency Trump broke many long-standing democratic norms and

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traditions and, on multiple occasions, skirted legality and moved into unlawful and authoritarian territory.

In particular, there were three factors that turned him into the first autocrat in the White House. They explain why Trump became the only president who was impeached twice by the US House of Representatives. There was, first, Trump's frequent obstruction of justice; it was the basis upon which many of Trump's illegal and autocratic activities as president rested, including some of his foreign policy decisions. Second, Trump actively courted autocrats abroad and White supremacists at home. Third, there was Trump's adamant refusal to accept Joe Biden's electoral victory in November 2020 and his insistence that he had in fact won the election.

Trump's untruthful claims that the election had been stolen from him incited his followers and directly led to the insurrection and storming of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021, by a White supremacist mob. Even Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blamed Trump for causing the insurrection in his speech in Congress on February 13, 2021, after the Senate did not convict Trump in his second impeachment trial. McConnell spelled it out unambiguously:

> Former President Trump's actions preceding the riot were a disgraceful dereliction of duty. . . . There is no question that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day. . . . The people who stormed this building believed they were acting on the wishes and instructions of their President. . . . Later, even when the President did halfheartedly begin calling for peace, he did not call right away for the riot to end. He did not tell the mob to depart until even later.[5]

The above three factors provide the clearest evidence for Trump's undemocratic leanings and authoritarian presidency. This chapter explores them.

Trump's autocracy

Already during Trump's contentious first presidential election campaign in the summer and fall of 2016, evidence of Trump's autocratic leanings and disinterest in observing the norms and rules of American democracy was available to anyone who listened to Trump's speeches and interviews or read his numerous Tweets, frequently fired off on the spur of the moment. Once he was installed in office in January 2017, it became abundantly clear that Trump was the first modern US president who did not care about the country's liberal-democratic traditions and values. Democracy in America during the Trump years was quickly becoming an endangered species.[6]

Trump did not have much appreciation of the rule of law and the principle that no one, including the president, is above the law and can break or ignore the law with impunity and then try to explain it away. But exactly this happened at an increasing pace after Trump's 2016 election victory. "Shudder for the rule of law

in our nation," *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne Jr. summarized the situation in June 2020.[7] Obstruction of justice became a way of life in the Trump White House, regarding both domestic and foreign policy issues. And there were plenty of enablers who helped Trump to first question and then erode US democracy. They could be found in the White House and in the vice president's residence on the grounds of the Naval Observatory, in many if not most departments of state, no more so than in the Department of Justice and the State Department, and also in both houses of Congress. In particular, in the Republican-controlled Senate the dour but skillful and highly intelligent majority leader Mitch McConnell became one of Trump's most loyal disciples for four long years until Trump caused the insurrection on January 6, 2021, after which even McConnell had second thoughts – at least for a while.

Lacking any comprehension and understanding of the values and rules of US democracy, Trump essentially saw his presidency as a continuation of his role as the omnipotent and autocratic CEO of his business empire. For decades he had been able to boss people around and diminish and discriminate against his underlings without having to face any consequences. Trump certainly was not used to tolerating criticism. Instead, he focused entirely on what was advantageous to him and his family personally, be it financially or otherwise. Without giving it much thought, he assumed as a matter of course that his dictatorial, almost absolute, rule over *The Trump Organization*, consisting of approximately 500 business entities, could also be applied to his new executive role as US president.[8] The pushback he received over time from the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, the courts, the media, and his political opponents (and sometimes, though rarely, even from his political friends) explained his growing frustration with the limitations of the powers of the presidency and the checks and balances of the US political system. With the COVID-19 epidemic ravaging the country and the economic and geopolitical rivalry with China becoming fiercer by the day, throughout his last year in office Trump displayed an increasingly irrational, unpredictable, and authoritarian pattern of behavior.[9]

There have been a number of novels that have attempted to explain the possible consequences of a dictator in the White House. Most famous are Sinclair Lewis's 1935 book *It Can't Happen Here* and Philip Roth's narrative of 2004 *The Plot against America*. The political novel *Night of Camp David*, written by Fletcher Knebel in 1965 (reissued 2018), however, comes perhaps closest to the reality of the Trump years in 2020, his final full year in office. The thriller, in the words of a *New York Times* reviewer, "features an unhinged American president who falls prey to his own paranoia and conspiratorial fantasies, as people around him struggle to rein in his worst impulses."[10]

Flawed democracy

The weakening of democracy in America did not happen overnight. It arrived gradually and slowly. At first, however, democracy was on a high with the end of

the Cold War and the collapse of the dictatorial one-party system of the Soviet Union in 1991. Out of the remnants of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe, many new democratic states developed. Even Russia began on a careful though ultimately unsuccessful process of democratization.[11] The 1990s also witnessed the collapse of dictatorships and the emergence of a large number of newly democratic states in South America as well as in Asia and Africa.[12] Of the 30 new democratic nations formed after 1987, the Pew Research Center concluded, more than half were still considered to be democratic in 2017.[13] Still, already by 2006 the post-1990 democratization trend had begun to reverse. The number of democracies in the world began to decline, while the number of autocratic countries grew rapidly.[14] The United States did not remain unaffected by these authoritarian tendencies. Growing autocratic tendencies predate the arrival of Trump in the White House.

The Intelligence Unit of the respected British business magazine *The Economist* came to the assessment that already in the course of 2016 the United States had become a "flawed democracy."[15] A subsequent *Freedom House* report arrived at a similar assessment.[16] When evaluating the democratic standards of 167 nations on the basis of 60 criteria, Norway and Iceland came out on top, according to *The Economist*, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and North Korea were at the bottom of the pile. The United States, once seen as the world's model democracy, was ranked 19th. There did not seem to be much left of the idea that America was – in the exaggerated words of Ronald Reagan – a "shining city upon a hill whose beacon light guides freedom-loving people everywhere."[17] A year later, in 2017, the United States dropped to 21st rank, and it even came 25th in both 2019 and 2020.[18] Clearly, democracy was weakening, and authoritarian tendencies were increasing.

Among the major reasons for the development of America as a "flawed democracy," *The Economist* concluded, was "a sharp fall in popular confidence in the functioning of public institutions."[19] The increasing polarization of the US political landscape was also a major contributory factor. The redrawing of congressional districts, "a stronger emphasis on ideological purity" within the country's two major political parties, "and less appetite for compromise" helped this trend along. The magazine concluded at the outset of Trump's time in office in early 2017 that if the new president proved "unable to reverse the trend towards increasing social polarization," it was likely that US democracy would "be at greater risk of further deterioration especially given the interplay of this trend with other, long-standing drivers of democratic decline," such as the poor functioning of the US government.[20]

This proved to be a prescient prediction. During Donald Trump's presidency, the erosion of democracy in America was greatly accelerated. The United States embarked upon the slippery road toward authoritarianism. By March 2020, *Freedom House* observed "troubling signs" regarding the health of American democracy.[21] *Freedom House*, the eminent US-government-funded nongovernmental organization set up with the help of Eleanor Roosevelt in 1941, was convinced that "rule changes that weakened the rights of asylum seekers, new evidence of electoral

interference" by the Trump administration, and "escalating clashes between the executive branch and Congress over their respective powers" were bad for democracy. In the context of Trump's first impeachment trial, the organization concluded, that in particular the "defiance of congressional authority" and the president ordering "current and former officials to defy all of Congress's subpoenas for documents and testimony about his attempt to extract a political favor from the president of Ukraine" were undermining democracy.[22]

Autocracy in American history

Since the development of the modern American presidency under Theodore Roosevelt in the early twentieth century, the United States has had its fair share of would-be dictators, though in each case the "checks and balances" of the US governmental system, as enshrined in the country's short but succinct Constitution of 1789, prevented this. What proved decisive in the last resort was the clear division of powers between the two houses of Congress, the executive, and a fiercely independent judiciary with its elaborate court system based on the rule of law. Important also was the emergence of a nationwide consensus on the liberal-democratic norms and conventions, which underlay the system. It included a strict separation of church and state and insistence on a free media.

Over time, the growing "democratic spirit" of the majority of voters, at least regarding how the governmental system should work, became deeply embedded and proved to be one of the hidden but very real pillars of the system. There was, however, much less consensus on who should be allowed to participate in the system: the country's severe racial problems greatly preoccupied the United States throughout its history and continue to do so.

Until at least the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act a year later, the United States, in fact, was only a partial democracy, excluding to all intents and purposes many of the descendants of those who had been forced to come to the country as slave workers. Prior to these two landmark Acts in the mid-1960s, American democracy could hardly be viewed as full and inclusive. Most African-American citizens had been excluded by means of large-scale gerrymandering of congressional voting districts and aggressive attempts to prevent them from casting their votes in the first place.[23] In the post–Civil War decades reaching well into the 1960s, democracy in the United States was thus based on racial exclusion, particularly in the south and the former confederate states.

In the last resort only this racial exclusion had made possible the relative stability of the party political landscape as it was entirely dominated by White Americans who shared many essential values across their different party affiliations. These men (usually men), Democrat or Republican, understood each other, and they were happy to cooperate and work with each other in Congress. They certainly did not see each other as existential threats. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act would shake up these cozy arrangements among the White ruling classes of the country. The other side of the coin, as further outlined later, was that over

time it would lead to an increasing polarization of the US electorate and the party political system.

Anti-Semitic priest Father Coughlin, celebrity pro-Nazi aviator Charles Lindbergh, authoritarian Louisiana governor Huey Long, anti-Communist Senator Joseph McCarthy, self-important General MacArthur, and racist twice-presidential candidate and Governor of Alabama George Wallace were populist demagogues who all had huge political ambitions while not being particularly interested in upholding US democracy. Some of these men seriously toyed with the idea of running for president, and Wallace actually did in both 1968 and 1972 as a third-party candidate. He won a sizable 13% of the national vote in 1968.[24] Senator Huey Long, who when governor of Louisiana had ruled the state as a virtual dictator, considered running for president in 1936 to challenge Franklin Roosevelt for the Democratic nomination but was assassinated before he could make up his mind.[25]

Prior to Trump none of these populists had come anywhere close to being catapulted to the presidency by one of the country's two major parties or constituted a formidable national political force for any prolonged period of time. American autocracy was always relegated to and contained at the fringes of the political spectrum or at least well away from the White House. For more than 150 years the "gatekeepers," as Levitsky and Zieblatt write, in the form of the two major political parties and the so-called party bosses kept extreme candidates from getting anywhere close to capturing the nomination with their populist rhetoric. While this denied American voters the chance to vote for such candidates, it made the system fairly predictable. It was, however, a clearly undemocratic and racist system that relied on the maneuvering of the party bosses in smoke-filled backrooms and on the established and mostly White and well-to-do "old boys' networks" to "regulate" who could stand for election. Although this system managed to prevent demagogues from being successful on the national stage, by the 1960s the situation cried out for reform.

Reforms and their unintended consequences

In particular during the anti-Vietnam and civil rights protests of the late 1960s, the old-fashioned and racist nature of the way the party political system worked came in for harsh criticism.[26] The eventual adoption of the McGovern–Fraser Commission report in 1972 made the presidential nomination process greatly more transparent and participatory. With the introduction of the primary election system in the states of the union, the registered voters of each party could now directly vote for and thus choose their country's presidential nominee. Furthermore, the delegates at the national party conventions had to respect the binding results of the primary elections and caucuses and cast their nomination votes accordingly. They were no longer free agents who could vote as they (or the party bosses) pleased; they were thus no longer able to manipulate the conventions or pull a surprise candidate out of the hat. This new system, however, prevented the secretive prescreening of candidates by the party establishment. It made the system more clearly democratic and

participatory but possibly even "too democratic," as it helped skillful populist agitators to obtain a platform. It enabled extreme and populist candidates to circumvent the party establishments and directly appeal to the nationalistic instincts and other basic economic and racist sentiments of the electorate.[27]

The system, as it had been reformed in the early 1970s, finally collapsed in 2016. Donald Trump, who only recently had joined the Republican Party, was able to entirely outmaneuver both the leadership of the party and his Republican competitors, such as Jebb Bush, the younger brother of former president George W. Bush, who represented the mainstream of the party. Trump's loudmouthed campaign rallies, his large donor base, his ruthless and ill-mannered attacks on his competitors during the primary debates and in the media, his exploitation of his celebrity status as a former TV host, and, not least, his canny ability to directly appeal to the American people via his Twitter account, which was followed by millions, assured him the nomination.[28]

During the subsequent presidential election campaign, the widespread unpopularity of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton among swing voters and moderate Republicans, who were not necessarily enamored with Trump, also greatly helped him. Above all, however, it was his rough, antiestablishment and nationalistically charged campaign style that appealed to millions. At campaign rallies Trump even encouraged and chimed in when his supporters started chanting "lock her up," referring to Hillary Clinton and her alleged illegal activities when Secretary of State. Intending to jail his opponent, if he were elected president, was a first in the country's history. Demagogic and clearly illegal statements such as this could normally only be heard after a military coup in a far away "banana republic" or from fascist governments in the mold of those in interwar Italy and Germany.[29] Furthermore, revelations of Trump's dreadful misogynistic utterances during his time as TV celebrity and news about his successful attempts to buy the silence of a porn star with whom he had a brief affair while his first wife was pregnant did not doom his campaign either.[30]

While any of these scandals and antidemocratic outbursts would have meant the end of the political career of any other presidential candidate, after a few days of crisis and low poll numbers somehow Trump always got away with it. In the face of clear evidence to the contrary, he simply denied that these things had ever happened and lied his way out of the situation. And his core supporters always believed him. They appreciated his standing up to the establishment and the "liberal" media. In fact, Trump's vulgar outspokenness and populist strongman macho image became assets.

Trump, moreover, was fortunate that in the aftermath of the devastating Great Recession of 2008–2012 his candidacy coincided with a deep employment and identity crisis in America, in particular, though not exclusively, among noncollege-educated, White lower-income groups. By 2016, this had led to great discontent with the political and economic status quo all across the country. Candidates such as Jebb Bush or Florida senator Marco Rubio, two of Trump's most serious rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, not to speak of Democratic nominee

Hillary Clinton, did not seem to understand the grievances of a vast number of the "forgotten men and women" in the rust belt states of the Great Lakes area, the Northwest and the Midwest, where the industrial glories and jobs of the past had given way to destitution and despair.[31] Certainly, "globalization" had become a dirty word.[32]

Presidential antidemocratic overreach before Trump

Prior to Trump the occasional antidemocratic overreach of incumbent presidents was always quickly contained. While Franklin Roosevelt got away with imprisoning Japanese-Americans in the hysteric aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, his earlier 1935 court-packing scheme to expand the Supreme Court with judges sympathetic to his New Deal failed abysmally as it was not even supported by many of his own allies in Congress.[33] Roosevelt's norm-breaking audacity to allow himself to be elected to four presidential terms led to the 22nd amendment within two years of his death. Returning to the example set by George Washington, the country's first president, retirement after two presidential terms, consecutive or nonconsecutive, was made mandatory.[34]

Richard Nixon's criminal activities regarding first endorsing and then covering up several burglaries to obtain information on the Democratic opposition to advance his reelection prospects as well as his subsequent obstruction of justice to get away with it led to his fall from power in disgrace in 1974. Before the Senate could move to impeach and convict him, Nixon decided to resign, the first and only president to do so.[35]

As Congress wished to avoid another traumatic Watergate crisis, Ronald Reagan was fortunate to escape impeachment due to his illegal activities in the so-called Iran/Contra scandal of the mid-1980s. But it had been a close call.[36] And George W. Bush only got away with the Patriot Act of late October 2001 due to the hyped-up atmosphere in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. The Act included a large number of excessive government surveillance powers that clearly violated the privacy laws meant to protect American citizens from the overwhelming power of the American state. Eventually, in the aftermath of the 2013 leakages of highly classified documents by whistleblower Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee, about the surveillance activities of the National Security Agency (NSA),[37] Congress made sure that some, though by no means all, of the provisions of the Act were allowed to expire in 2015. The overreach of the executive was thus at least partially curtailed.[38]

In all of the above cases America's slide toward autocratic presidential rule in domestic politics had been successfully stopped, though not without difficulties. The expansion of the president's foreign policy authority – the "imperial presidency," as Arthur Schlesinger called it – was never truly reversed, however.[39] Although the Nixon administration's overreach in foreign policy and intelligence matters was somewhat contained by Congress by means of the reforms pushed through by the 1975 Church Committee, it proved to be a temporary success. The

following decades demonstrated, both during and after the Cold War, that Congress had largely abdicated its responsibilities in global affairs and delegated them to the White House.[40]

Still, it also had become clear that if Congress was united in a bipartisan way, the administration could be controlled to a significant extent, though this required some effort. The opposite also held true, however: if Congress was deeply divided, a forceful president could run rings around it. It was the increasing polarization of US society and politics that in the last resort enabled Trump to introduce and pursue an authoritarian style into American politics.

The increasing polarization of American politics from Gingrich to Trump

The deep current polarization of much of American political life can be traced back to the 1990s. These were the years after the end of the Cold War, at a time when the United States was enjoying its prolonged unilateral moment on the global stage. Once the fear of a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union had disappeared almost overnight and the Gulf War of 1991 had been won by means of a huge and fast multilateral military operation, it was as if the country had decided that it now had the leisure to focus on America's domestic travails and internal conflicts.

Reflecting the increasing frustration and discontent in American society at large and the Republican Party in particular, where unhappiness with the centrist government of President George H.W. Bush ran high, a new generation of political leaders began to believe that more hardball politics were needed. Bush's electoral defeat in 1992 confirmed this view. Only with the help of a much more uncompromising strategy, the up-and-coming Republican elite believed, could the much-too liberal and immoral Bill Clinton administration be replaced. Only then would a new Republican majority be able to return to the happy neoliberal and tax-cutting years of the Reagan era. It required the interpretation of "politics as warfare" and "no compromise" to signal the purity of Republican positions to the party base.

This development has been associated with the "Gingrich revolution" after the decisive Republican victory in the congressional elections of 1994, which made Newt Gingrich Speaker of the House and hard-line Texas Congressman Tom DeLay Republican Majority Leader.[41] It also brought a large number of new ideologically minded young hard-line Republicans into Congress. The process eventually culminated in the formation of the Tea Party ("Taxed Enough Already") movement shortly after the beginning of the "Great Recession" and Barack Obama's electoral victory in November 2008. The election of Obama, the first Black president, and the continuing housing crisis and long-lasting economic misery of the "Great Recession" brought America's increasing polarization to breaking point.[42]

In his 2016 election campaign Trump exploited this deep crisis by playing on the economic fears and racist sentiments of many of America's voters, not least

those in the countryside and the rust belt states. Before and after Obama's election, it was Trump who was the most notorious "birther" who questioned particularly ferociously – and without a shred of evidence – whether the new president was born in the United States and thus entitled to be president. He also wondered aloud whether Barack Hussein Obama was a closet Muslim who, he implied, might have greater loyalty to those Muslim terrorists who had attacked America on 9/11 than to his own countrymen.[43]

Once he had become Senate Majority Leader when the Republicans won the Senate in 2014, Mitch McConnell proved to be as uncompromising as DeLay and Gingrich before him and did not hesitate to resort to unconstitutional or at best semi-constitutional methods. Indicative of McConnell's obstructionist attitude was already his statement as Minority Leader in October 2010, on the eve of the mid-term elections, that it was his main political objective to deny Obama a second term.[44] The Democrats lost the House but held on to the Senate in the elections of that year. Subsequently, McConnell and new House Majority Leader Eric Cantor did their best to stymie all of Obama's initiatives. This quickly led to gridlock in Congress and Obama's desperate use of way too many Executive Orders to achieve at least some of his political objectives. Brinkmanship and the threat to shut down the US government occurred several times over disputes about whether or not Congress should agree to raising the debt ceiling; hitherto (with the exception of the Bill Clinton era), this had been a largely symbolic and mostly uncontroversial issue.[45]

But perhaps the most notorious and successful attempt to undermine the Obama administration was the refusal by the Senate majority to allow the president in his last full year in office to fill the Supreme Court seat of the deceased Supreme Court judge Antonin Scalia, one of the Court's most conservative judges. It caused a great deal of bitterness and resentment between the two parties. Scalia had unexpectedly died in mid-February 2016. This unique situation that a Republican Senate majority was confronted with the possibility of a Democratic president appointing a liberal judge shortly before his term in office ended had last occurred in 1895. At that time President Grover Cleveland eventually was able to appoint his nominee to the Court. In 2016, the Republican Senate majority leader, however, even refused to convey hearings to interview Obama's nominee, the eminent judge Merrick Garland. This had never happened before in American history and was a constitutionally highly dubious, though not necessarily, illegal procedure. The Republican-dominated Senate simply stonewalled and refused to deal with the issue. Democrats came to believe that a Supreme Court seat had been stolen from them.

Thus, when Donald Trump embarked on his ugly and contentious 2016 election campaign and eventually moved to the White House in January 2017, the polarization of American politics and society stood at an unprecedented level as did mutual animosity and distrust. Controversially, Trump quickly moved to appoint conservative judge Neil Gorsuch to the vacant Supreme Court seat, thus cementing the conservative majority of the Court.

Trump the autocrat

Trump's autocratic leanings can be observed in both the domestic and foreign policy spheres. Many of Trump's policies – such as his ruthless anti-immigration policies, his anti-environmental policies, his exaggerated pro-business policies, including the massive 2017 tax cuts, which mostly benefitted the wealthy and are estimated to cost the US Treasury $1.9 trillion over ten years,[46] his neo-isolationist policy, and his hostility to multilateralism – were harmful to the country. These policies, however, were not unconstitutional, illegal, or autocratic. They merely reflected the administration's deeply held conservative, nationalistic, and neo-isolationist convictions. Yet his two impeachments by the House of Representatives in December 2019 and January 2021 did not occur without reason. Throughout his term in office Trump pursued a large number of autocratic policies, in both the foreign policy and the domestic policy realms. They frequently strayed into illegality and undermined the rule of law and America's democratic values.

Domestic politics

After Trump's electoral victory in November 2016, it quickly became clear that he did not intend to release his tax returns, though he had promised to do so already at the beginning of his election campaign. Neither did he honor his pledge to divest himself properly of his multiple business interests. He put his sons in charge nominally, but Trump kept himself informed about the success of these businesses and also continued to benefit financially from them. A good case in point was the Trump International Hotel in Washington, DC (the former post-office building), which produced a significant income for him and his family. Many foreign politicians and US lobbyists stayed there and paid the inflated room prices, thus benefiting Trump personally. They were convinced that this would help them with their political and business dealings with the Trump administration. Similar considerations influenced those who stayed at the Trump hotel in New York City or bought an expensive golf club membership at his Mar-al-Lago Florida estate. After his 2016 election victory, Trump doubled the annual membership fee to $200,000, which Norm Eisen, formerly Obama's chief ethics adviser, called "naked profiteering that is more like something out of the era of Louis XVI."[47] Trump clearly breached the emolument clause of the constitution but managed to get away with it. Despite many critical media reports about the corrupt practices of the president and his administration, he just ignored the matter.

Trump also violated Washington's strict nepotism rules. As soon as he was inaugurated he appointed his daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared Kushner as his senior advisers, and they became indeed very influential. Other people he appointed to staff positions in the White House in turn tended to give jobs to their friends and relatives. A point in case was his press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, whose principal assistant press secretary was Chad Gilmartin, a cousin of McEnany's husband Sean Gilmartin.[48]

Trump also had no hesitation to personally intervene in early 2018 and instruct his reluctant Chief of Staff John Kelly to give Kushner a top-secret security clearance, thus overriding intelligence professionals, who for months had expressed severe doubts due to Kushner's entanglements with foreign government officials. US intelligence authorities had intercepted communications where these foreign officials "privately discussed how they could manipulate Kushner, taking advantage of his complex business arrangements, financial difficulties he had at the time and his lack of foreign-policy experience."[49] In late March 2019, a whistleblower approached Congress and claimed that the Trump administration had reversed 25 top-security clearance denials, a most unusual occurrence.[50]

Well-known became Trump's recurrent attacks on the media and even individual journalists, not least on those who covered the White House and asked critical questions at press conferences. On occasion, he even refused permission to admit certain networks and their journalists to his press conferences. At his campaign rallies, before and after winning the presidency, Trump did not hesitate to indirectly encourage his supporters to attack the media and he condoned the use of physical violence on members of the press. Trump took a page out of the playbook of dictators and autocrats, when he frequently referred to the media, one of the pillars of liberal democracy, as "the enemy."[51] To avoid critical questions, during his last year in office he hardly held any press briefings.

While all politicians at times tend to be economical with the truth, downplay and ignore issues, Trump did not hesitate to utter outright lies and clear distortions of the truth in most of his many speeches and statements. When he was found out, he just lied again by claiming that he never made the original statement (often despite the availability of contradictory video or audio evidence) or claimed that he had just been sarcastic. "By the end of his term," the *Washington Post* reported, "Trump had accumulated 30,573 untruths during his presidency – averaging about 21 erroneous claims a day." On November 2, 2020, the day before the presidential election, he made 503 false statements during that day alone.[52] His supporters did not seem to mind.

During his time in office, Trump also frequently broke the existing law. For instance, in view of Congress refusing to fund the Wall along the southern border with Mexico, Trump simply declared a national emergency and then reallocated several billion dollars from the defense budget to the construction of the border fence. The administration ignored or sidestepped protestations from Congress and the Pentagon about this illegal use of money, which Congress had solely provided for defense purposes.[53]

The most disconcerting feature of Trump's time in office were his many attempts to obstruct justice and interfere in the workings of the judicial system as well as the oversight system Congress had created with the appointment of independent inspectors. Across several administrative departments, Trump fired many of these inspectors when their work revealed evidence of corruption and nepotism in the administration and thus came close to endangering the political survival of Trump loyalists in his government.[54]

In particular, Attorney General Bill Barr became a faithful executor of Trump's wishes. The president, often with the help of Barr, interfered in the working of the justice system, such as in the prosecution of Michael Flynn, his first short-lived National Security Adviser, for lying to the FBI. He also put pressure on the Justice Department to ensure that Trump's friend Roger Stone would be given a lighter sentence. Ignoring the traditional careful elaboration of the cases under consideration by the Justice Department, Trump also used the presidential pardon system to the fullest to make sure that some of his political friends and ideological sympathizers would not have to go to prison (including Flynn and Stone). During Barr's tenure as Attorney General, the Department of Justice became politicized as hardly ever before.[55]

Even independent Special Counsel Robert Mueller, a former FBI director, who investigated on behalf of Congress, whether or not Russia had supplied Trump and his team with information on Hillary Clinton and provided political, financial, and other support during the 2016 campaign, was put under enormous pressure from the White House. The president considered dismissing Mueller and wanted him to declare publicly that Moscow had not helped Trump to get elected. The resulting Mueller report, published on April 19, 2019, stated: "While this report does not conclude that the president committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." The report also indicated strongly that Russia had indeed meddled in the 2016 election in favor of Trump. This was also the view of America's eight major intelligence organizations, including the CIA.[56] Mueller, after all, found numerous links between the Russian government and Trump's campaign team. His investigation also established, as stated in the report, "that the Russian government perceived it would benefit from a Trump presidency and worked to secure that outcome," while the Trump "campaign expected it would benefit electorally from information stolen and released through Russian efforts."[57]

There also occurred a large number of other infringements of democratic norms and values during Trump's four years in office. Among them were the "fair and equal treatment of refugees and asylum seekers," including the blanket rejection of asylum requests. The administration did not even shrink from illegally separating parents and children at the border. This was a deliberate policy to send a signal to other potential migrants. It clearly violated US asylum rights and, of course, international human rights legislation. While the parents were frequently imprisoned or sent back to Mexico, many of the children, over 4000 at one stage, ended up in government custody or with temporary foster families that lived far away from the border. By November 2020, only two months before Trump left office, almost 700 children had still not been found and could not be reunited with their parents.[58]

Throughout Trump's presidency, judicial independence, the integrity of elections, and legal protections for guarding against corruption and upholding the rule of law and a free and independent press came under serious attack and were profoundly weakened. In the course of his four years in office Trump showed the hallmarks of an autocrat in the making: he governed and behaved in an increasingly authoritarian way. He supposed he did not need to take the views of Congress or

the inspection system or indeed the critical advice of his intelligence agencies, the State Department, and most other government departments and agencies into account. Trump actually seemed to believe what he tweeted on January 6, 2018: "My two greatest assets have been mental stability and being, like, really smart." On the same day he also tweeted that he "would qualify as not smart, but genius . . . and a very stable genius at that!"[59] And already in March 2016, when asked about whom he consulted for foreign policy advice, he said "I'm speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I've said a lot of things . . . my primary consultant is myself and I have a good instinct for this stuff."[60]

Trump was clearly convinced that contrary to the finely tuned checks and balances of the Constitution, what the United States needed was the rule of one man, himself, who should be allowed to stay in power as long as he pleased. When Chinese president Xi Jinping persuaded the Communist Party to eliminate China's two-term limit for the presidency in March 2018, which would enable him to stay in office indefinitely if he wanted to, Trump was exuberant, according to an audio tape obtained by CNN. "He's now president for life, president for life. And he's great," Trump told the crowd at a closed-door fundraising event in Florida. "And look, he was able to do that. I think it's great. Maybe we'll have to give that a shot someday."[61] Trump probably even meant what he told his supporters.

Trump's admiration for dictators and autocrats

Trump's authoritarian instincts also came through in his foreign policy, no more so than in his admiration for foreign dictators and autocrats. At the same time, he was at loggerheads with many Western democratic leaders. In particular, he had very difficult relations with Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau, French president Emanuel Macron, British prime minister Theresa May, the leaders of the European Union (EU), and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In fact, by strongly supporting Brexit and encouraging other countries to follow the British out of the EU, he advocated for the break-up or at least the weakening of the EU, one of the world's pillars of democracy. Trump believed that a weaker EU would be less of an economic competitor for the United States.[62] He also had bad relations with most of the other democratic leaders of the G-7 and NATO. He questioned publicly the usefulness and necessity of these two organizations. In private he even considered withdrawing the United States from NATO, which would have resulted in the collapse of this long-standing organization of mostly democratic nations, a development that would have pleased Russia above all.[63]

In particular, Trump had almost hostile relations with German chancellor Angela Merkel, who he clearly disliked, though her country had been one of America's most loyal and reliable allies for the previous 70 years. But Trump never forgave Merkel when as part of her congratulatory message after his election victory in November 2016 she issued a set of conditions for cooperating with Trump's government. These conditions ran counter to many of the ugly and nationalistic

pronouncements the president-to-be had made during the election campaign.[64] "Germany and America are bound by common values – democracy, freedom as well as respect for the rule of law and the dignity of each and every person, regardless of their origin, skin color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or political views," Merkel lectured Trump. "It is based on these values," the Chancellor continued, "that I wish to offer close cooperation, both with me personally and between our countries' governments."[65]

It seemed no cooperation was possible if these values were not respected by the incoming president. Although she continued more tactfully, "partnership with the United States is and will remain a keystone of German foreign policy so that we can tackle the great challenges of our time."[66] Trump understood that Merkel was questioning his entire nationalist strategy with her remarkable public statement.

It was Trump's admiration for foreign dictators and autocrats that revealed above all that there was hardly a "democratic bone in his body."[67] The Trump administration's foreign policy became notorious for maintaining unusually close relations with some of the world's most ruthless dictators. This sent out clear signals that the United States had become uninterested in human rights and observing the rule of law. Instead, the Trump White House was all about power politics and being seen as strong and successful in political, military, and, not least, economic terms. Everything else seemed to matter little. Trump hardly ever showed any interest in or made any remarks about human rights. Essentially, he couldn't care less. When his Secretary of State referred to Beijing's "genocide" in Xinjiang toward the end of the administration in December 2020, this occurred for political reasons in the context of the intensifying rivalry with China.[68] It had little to do with real distress about the fate of the Uighurs in Xinjiang or any principled concerns about the neglect of human rights in many other parts of the world.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, for instance, the words "human rights" and "civil liberties" never crossed Trump's lips, despite the country's egregious human rights violations. In fact, the effective ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was one of Trump's favorite dictators. Even after the brutal murder of Saudi national and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in early October 2018, Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had no qualms about dealing with bin Salman in person and continued praising his leadership. US intelligence authorities, however, had traced Kashoggi's murder back to the personal involvement of bin Salman. According to an assessment by the CIA, declassified and made public in late February 2021, bin Salman personally gave the explicit order to capture and murder him.[69] The Trump administration's massive and highly lucrative sales of military equipment to Saudi Arabia were not affected by this crime. In fact, US planes, weapons, and military advisers continued to find their way to Riyadh, where the Saudis deployed them in their ruthless war against Yemen.[70]

For Washington, the regional Middle Eastern power struggle between the regime in Riyadh (mostly Sunni Muslims) and America's arch foe Iran (largely Shia Muslims) was much more important. Trump took the US out of the 2015 Iranian

nuclear deal (JCPOA), negotiated by the Obama administration, and also did his best to contain Iran's expanding influence in the Middle East, greatly pleasing Saudi Arabia in the process.

Riyadh was undecided, however, whether or not it should also normalize relations with Israel as did the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco in the framework of the Abraham Accords – the Trump administration's most important foreign policy achievement. Still, the Accords helped to further isolate Iran. Preventing a victory for the Iran-supported rebel government in Sanaa linked to the Houthi movement in Yemen (and by implication undermining Iranian support of Hezbollah in Libya) was a top objective for the Trump administration.[71] In view of Saudi Arabia's crucial strategic role in the volatile Middle East and due to it having one of the world's largest oil reserves, it was reasoned in Washington that it was unwise to endanger the close partnership with Saudi Arabia. The usefulness of employing Saudi Arabia's oil weapon and the ability to either flood the market with oil or cut the oil flow to influence global oil prices, if needed, remained too important.

Trump also developed a strange relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong un. While initially threatening to bomb and annihilate the country, Trump eventually met with Kim at two international summit meetings in Singapore (June 2018) and Hanoi (February 2019). He also held a somewhat less dramatic brief talk with Kim in the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas in June 2019. Yet these three meetings were unsuccessful; they did not result in the elimination or at least reduction of North Korea's nuclear weapons arsenal. Instead, the Trump–Kim summits upgraded Kim's international standing; he became less of a pariah in world affairs. They even led to a realignment between Panmunjom and Beijing. Prior to his meetings with Trump, China–North Korea relations had been quite cool.

Certainly, in the wake of the Trump–Kim summits, North Korea's harsh political and economic system and its brutal and widespread prison camp system had become much less of a talking point in the international media. But North Korea's terrible human rights violations had never been an issue for Trump. He just wished to go down in world history as the president who resolved the state of war with North Korea that has been in existence since the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950 and perhaps win a Nobel Peace Prize in return. It was all about Trump rather than about resolving complex geopolitical issues in a mutually satisfactory way. Instead of reducing its nuclear arsenal in the aftermath of the summits with the US president, a confidential UN report concluded in early February 2021 that in the course of 2020 North Korea had significantly upgraded its nuclear weapons and missile program.[72]

As Trump hardly ever read his intelligence assessments and other briefing papers and also had a surprisingly short attention span when briefed verbally, Trump tended to be badly informed and ill prepared for most meetings and phone conversations with foreign leaders. Canny international leaders thus found it fairly easy to influence him and often ran rings around him.

One of those who managed to exploit Trump's geopolitical naivety was Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In a phone conversation with Trump in

early October 2019 Erdoğan persuaded the president to withdraw US troops from northern Syria. With his agreement Trump effectively gave the green light to a Turkish military incursion. Erdoğan had clearly outmaneuvered him. Turkish troops were thus able to go after Kurdish forces in northern Syria without coming into conflict with American troops, who had been deployed there as a sort of "trip wire" to prevent an attack on these forces. The Kurds and the United States, after all, were allies in the fight against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. The Kurdish United Protection Units (YPG), with tens of thousands of troops, are the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party of Syria which seeks to establish an autonomous region in northern Syria. The Turkish government, however, views them as terrorists and is strongly opposed to the establishment of an autonomous region or an independent Kurdish state.[73] Without checking with any of his foreign policy advisers in the Pentagon, the National Security Council, or with any of America's NATO allies and thus honoring his promise to Erdoğan, Trump gave the order to withdraw the small number of US troops that were in northern Syria, thereby making way for a Turkish invasion of Syrian territory and persecution of the Kurds. In desperation the Kurds subsequently concluded a new alliance with Syrian president Assad, Washington's enemy.[74]

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, one of the administration's pillars of stability, was outraged, felt his authority undermined, and believed that a close US ally had been needlessly sacrificed. It signaled to the world that the United States had become a rather unreliable ally. Mattis resigned the day after. In his unceremonious letter of resignation Mattis told Trump that his "views on treating allies with respect and also being cleareyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors are strongly held." "Because you have the right to have a Secretary of Defense whose views are better aligned with yours on these and other subjects, I believe it is right for me to step down from my position."[75]

Particularly unusual has been Trump's relationship with Russian president Putin. The Mueller report and other public investigations and top secret intelligence reports have all concluded that Moscow successfully influenced the 2016 presidential elections by doing its best to support Donald Trump's candidacy by means of various illegal activities. After Trump fired FBI director James Comey in May 2017, the FBI even opened an investigation into whether or not the US president was working on behalf of Russian interests.[76] The Kremlin realized at an early stage that a Trump administration would be much less of a formidable foe than a government led by the greatly more experienced Hillary Clinton. There were also various indications from Trump campaign staffers and possibly Trump's first National Security Adviser, Michael Flynn, that the new president was well disposed toward reviewing Western sanctions on Moscow, imposed after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and might lift them.

Subsequently, throughout his presidency, Trump was most reluctant to criticize President Putin in any but mild and restrained terms, despite much pressure on him from America's allies and some cabinet colleagues, to pursue a tougher

policy toward Russian interference in Western politics. Many observers believed that Putin had blackmailing material on Trump, be it information of a financial or sexual kind, but this has not been proven so far. Trump's personal meetings with Putin have frequently remained largely undocumented. Apart from the presence of an interpreter (frequently just a Russian interpreter), the president and Putin often met alone with no other officials in the room. Already at their first meeting in Hamburg in 2017, on the fringes of a G-20 meeting, Trump made sure to confiscate the US interpreter's notes, once he had concluded his long meeting with Putin.[77]

Even the extraordinary information which came to light in the summer of 2020 that Russia made cash payments to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan to encourage them to kill American soldiers did not lead to harsh criticism of Putin and a strong reaction by the White House. While the president was already briefed about this in writing in February 2020, the White House did not issue a protest to Moscow for many months. Even when eventually the *New York Times* found out and reported the story, which the majority of US intelligence organs regarded as credible and reliable, the White House remained evasive for a prolonged period of time. Instead the Trump administration did its best to downplay the reliability and importance of these stunning revelations.[78]

The first impeachment

On December 18, 2019, President Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives. Subsequently, however, the Republican Senate Majority refused to remove him from office. The main impeachment issue was that Trump had withheld military aid from Ukraine (despite Congress having already voted and approved of the aid payments) to put pressure on the Ukrainian government to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden, Trump's main Democratic rival, as well as his son Hunter. The latter was on the board of directors of a Ukrainian company. Trump had also refused to grant Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky a visit to the White House. He first wanted the Ukrainian president to announce the commencement of an investigation into the Bidens.[79] Ukraine was a US ally, at war with Russia and highly dependent on military aid from Washington to resist Russian aggression. The House of Representatives also charged the president with obstructing the investigation of the whole affair.

For mostly partisan political reasons, however, the Republican-dominated Senate did not convict and remove Trump from office. Instead, senators closed ranks around Trump asserting that the Democrats were unable to prove their case and only wanted to overturn the 2016 election result. Most observers, however, agreed that holding up payments to a foreign government, which had been authorized by Congress, contingent on this government helping him personally with his reelection efforts, was clearly a serious violation of the law. It was the action of an autocratic leader who did not think twice about breaking the laws, rules, and conventions of a democratic state.

While the scandal regarding Ukraine may have been the most outrageous episode of Trump asking a foreign leader for electoral help in return for political favors and American military aid, it was by no means the only one. In fact, based on his long experience in the ruthless estate business, this was how Trump understood politics to work: "one hand washes the other." His cooperation with Putin, bin Salman, and also with China's Xi Jinping were based on the same outlook. Trump's former National Security Adviser John Bolton writes in his memoirs, for instance, that during a meeting with Xi Jinping in June 2019, at the margins of the G-20 meeting in Osaka, and thus in the middle of the Chinese-American trade war, Trump urged the Chinese president to buy more US agricultural products. This would help him with the farm vote in the forthcoming elections and would certainly be beneficial to de-escalate the growing tension between Washington and Beijing. When it seemed that Xi was inclined to consider this, Trump was jubilant and told him that he was "the greatest leader in Chinese history."[80]

Insurrection: admiration for White supremacists and disdain for free elections

Trump's authoritarian leanings and disdain for democracy become particularly clear when exploring his support for White supremacist groups while simultaneously being highly critical of not only the legitimate Democratic opposition in Congress but also left-leaning movements such as "Black Lives Matter" and environmental and LBGTQ pressure and interest groups.

Early confirmation of Trump's sympathies for White supremacist views came in August 2017 in Charlottesville, VA. Even many of his supporters in the Republican Party strongly criticized Trump's public response to a White nationalist rally and subsequent riots and fighting with left-wing counter-protesters in the small university town. "Filled with anger," the *Washington Post* reported, White supremacist James A. Fields Jr. from Ohio drove his car into a crowd of protesters; it led to the death of 32-year-old Heather D. Heyer and the severe injury of 35 other people.[81] The "Unite the Right" rally had been organized to protest against the planned removal of a statue of a Confederate general. The rally had been one of the largest of its kind in the country for decades.

In the aftermath of the terrible event, Trump said that he condemned "in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides," thus equating the pro-Nazi and pro-Confederate views of the White supremacists with those who had protested against their march. While soon backtracking his remarks in view of the widespread outrage in the country, a few days later Trump could not refrain from once again declaring: "You had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides."[82]

The highpoint of Trump's dark nationalistic and conspiracy-laden support for White supremacy and racist prejudices came during his last year in office as well as toward the very end of his presidency. The Trump administration's sheer

incompetence, racial ignorance, and contempt for the rule of law proved to be a poisonous mixture.

The president, for instance, was entirely incapable of dealing with the unexpected 2020/21 coronavirus crisis, which due to a contradictory and incompetent federal response saw the United States having by far the largest rates of infections and mortalities worldwide. When Trump left office on January 20, 2021, the United States had a total COVID death rate of just under 412,000 and a daily COVID death rate of almost 3,200.[83] The administration did not only ignore the advice of its own health experts, it also wasted much of the huge amounts allocated by Congress for helping affected Americans and stimulating the economy. For instance, the auditing arm of Congress, the Government Accountability Office, revealed in late June 2020 that in the process of allocating the first major coronavirus relief package to the United States public in March 2020, as authorized by Congress, the Trump government made 130 million erroneous payments to dead taxpayers totaling almost $1.4 billion.[84]

In the summer of 2021 (mostly in the months May and June) the corona crisis coincided with the outbreak of the Black Lives Matter civil rights movement. In the wake of the brutal killing of unarmed Black man George Floyd by a Minneapolis policeman, the country was rocked by protests in most major and many mid-sized cities. Millions of Black and White Americans took to the streets. Frustration about policy brutality, lockdowns, and large-scale unemployment was running high. At its peak in April 2020, almost 40 million Americans lost their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic (a national unemployment rate of just under 15%). It also had become clear that Black and poor Americans were being made unemployed faster than any other group; they also were more likely to get infected by the virus and die from it.

The president was helplessly hunkering down in the White House and resorted to "law and order" slogans. He threatened invoking the rarely used Insurrection Act of 1807 to be able to use the US military to clamp down on the protests.[85] Notorious became Trump's provocative use of St. Johns Church in Lafayette Square just across the White House. To be able to walk there, police and National Guard Forces were instructed to free the square of the peaceful protesters by tear-gassing them and pushing them brutally aside, violating their first amendment right to peaceful assembly "and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Once he was at St. John's Church, Trump together with some of his loyal disciples posed for pictures with a bible in his hand without, however, having much of an idea what to say in the situation. The accompanying Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the latter dressed in military fatigues, looked most uncomfortable. The latter apologized a few days later for having been there.[86] Despite this attempt to portray a strongman image, Trump's weakness and inability to address both the domestic discontent and the virus crisis in a constructive and forward-looking way was clearly revealed. He kept reiterating controversially that he was the "law and order President" and would get the US military involved to fight domestic discontent.

During a presidential debate with Democratic nominee Joe Biden on September 29, 2020, Trump once again refused to condemn White supremacism. When debate moderator Chris Wallace asked him if he was prepared to condemn far-right militias and White supremacist groups, Trump avoided answering in an unambiguous way. Instead he urged the far-right and extreme nationalist group Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" and quickly turned the conversation toward talking about "antifa," left-wing anti-fascist ideologues who he blamed for violent street brawls and a great deal of looting during the summer, not least in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington.[87]

Once he had lost the presidential election on November 20, 2020, Trump claimed that there had been rampant voter fraud and that the election had been stolen from him. For months Trump had talked about the alleged fragility of the US election system and the likelihood that the election procedures would be manipulated. He could now conveniently pick up on this narrative. His administration took out over 50 law suits in the five states which the Democrats had flipped (Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Georgia). Yet all of these cases were rejected and dismissed, including by Trump-appointed judges.[88]

Trump even tried to browbeat Georgia's Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, during a phone conversation. He told him outright to "find" enough votes in Georgia to ensure Trump's election victory in the state which he had narrowly lost to Joe Biden. According to the transcript of the phone conversation, which Raffensperger and an aide taped, Trump told him: "All I want to do is this: I just want to find 11,780 votes."[89] This would have made Trump win the state by exactly one vote. But on December 1, 2020, even Attorney General Bill Barr, one of Trump's most loyal disciples, told the *Associated Press* in an interview, "To date, we have not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election."[90] Trump was not impressed by this statement and soon thereafter Barr resigned his position, only a few weeks before his term in office expired. Trump, however, would never concede the election and never accepted that Joe Biden had won and was thus the rightfully elected new US president.

This attitude inspired the White supremacist mob, which stormed the Capitol building on January 6, 2021. In a speech in the morning of that day and contrary to all available evidence, Trump reiterated his claim that he had actually won the election. He asked his followers to "stop the steal" and to "fight like hell" as they couldn't take back the country "with weakness." The assembled mob took him at his word, broke into the Capitol building, caused widespread damage, and attempted to reach Congressmen and women who were hunkering down in their offices and safe rooms in the basement. Also, shouts were heard which referred to Vice President Mike Pence as a traitor. Pence had broken with Trump at the very last minute by rejecting Trump's expectation that he would not certify the Electoral College vote at a joint session of Congress on January 6, 2021.[91] The insurrectionists erected a gallows in the Capitol grounds to execute Pence by hanging, if he were caught.

While Pence escaped with his life, in total five people died in the insurrection, including a Capitol police officer, and over 140 people were injured. Two more

capitol police officers committed suicide soon after. Eventually, after more than three hours of mayhem and violence, the insurrection was brought under control and repulsed but Trump never distanced himself from the mob. No wonder, he had incited them and was watching the events unfold with glee on the television screens in the White House. Fortunately, the attempted coup on the political system of the United States failed on January 6, 2021, and 14 days later Trump had no option but to retire when his presidency expired at noon on January 20, 2021. Even after he had left the White House, however, Trump continued claiming that the election had been stolen from him.

Conclusion

During Donald Trump's presidency, democratic norms and conventions, and indeed the written law and the Constitution, were repeatedly violated. The clearest evidence that under Trump the United States had moved down the road toward an autocratic system of government was the president's repeated and at times quite successful attempts to obstruct justice and openly interfere with the functioning of the Department of Justice and the US court system. He also courted foreign autocrats and embarked on transactional diplomacy for his own personal benefit, such as in the case of Ukraine, which violated US laws. He asked for his opponent to be jailed, tried to muzzle the free press, and violated many human rights provisions in both his domestic and foreign policies. It turned out that Trump was also quite willing to use violence and incitement to insurrection to achieve a second term in office despite his electoral loss in the presidential election of November 2020.

Trump's autocratic presidency reached its culmination when he encouraged his supporters to go to Washington and the Capitol building to undo the results of the presidential election, referring to his electoral defeat as "this egregious assault on our democracy." He talked about "we will stop the Steal" and "we won this election, and we won it by a landslide." "We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen." Already in a Tweet on December 19, 2020, he had encouraged his supporters to go to Washington, DC, on January 6: "Be there, will be wild!" And in his speech at the Eclipse in Washington on January 6, he asked his supporters to "walk down to the Capitol . . . because you will never take back our country with weakness." He admonished them: "If you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore."[92] And this is what the rioters attempted to do, though eventually quite unsuccessfully.

The huge majority of the Republican Party stood fully behind the president, even after the insurrection on January 6, 2021. The House of Representatives moved quickly and impeached Trump for the second time shortly before his presidential term expired. In February 2021, however, the Republican-dominated Senate refused to convict Trump for having incited the insurrection and the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. As only seven Republican senators voted with all of their 50 Democratic colleagues to convict Trump, the required two-thirds majority for finding him guilty was not achieved. Once again, Trump had

a narrow escape. Still, he is a discredited politician whose influence on American politics may well gradually wither away. He also has to deal with a large number of criminal and financial law suits, which may yet lead to his conviction.

The United States, however, has been fortunate that Trump's sheer incompetence and the organizational chaos in his administration prevented the development of a full-blown autocracy during 2017–2021. US democracy and its institutions, particularly the courts, also proved their in-built resilience. Next time, however, a more competent and skillful dictator-to-be might pose an even bigger challenge. President Joe Biden ought to use his presidency to prepare US democracy and its institutions for the next autocratic onslaught. It is only a matter of time before this assault will happen. The Trump years have certainly demonstrated that "it can indeed happen here." The United States had a narrow escape; next time it might not be so lucky.

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PART IV

Twenty-first-century autocrats

Other influential autocrats

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14

ALI HOSSEINI KHAMENEI

Routinizing revolution in Iran (born 1939)

Kjetil Selvik

Ali Hosseini Khamenei is a proven master of political survival. At 82, he is the longest-serving head of state in the Middle East. His career is as long as the Islamic Republic of Iran has existed. Having first served as president for eight years, he became Supreme Leader (*rahbar*) in 1989. Khamenei was no strongman when he came to office. Both as president and early in his political career, other politicians overshadowed him.[1] However, he built his power step by step and has become the unrivaled political authority in the country. In the process, Iran has moved toward an increasingly closed form of autocracy.[2] Khamenei's rule has been marked by recurring manifestations of political opposition and strong international tensions, especially with the United States. A mainstay of his survival strategy has been to instrumentalize the conflict with the outside to overcome the pressures from below for change.

This chapter analyzes how Khamenei consolidated his rule and the political consequences of his survival strategy. I argue that he has capitalized on the institutional and ideological legacies of his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as on the high potential for repression in revolutionary regimes. Khamenei has invested in nonelected and parallel revolutionary bodies, maintained strong emphasis on the Islamic Revolution's ideology, and recruited a new generation of followers to the ruling coalition. I outline the tensions arising from this routinization of the organizational structures, aims, and elite selection mechanisms of the revolution and the wish of the Iranian population to change the country's course.

Khamenei has a multifaceted experience and background.[3] He was born in Mashhad in 1939 as one of eight children of a poor religious scholar. While studying religion in Qom, he became part of Ayatollah Khomeini's opposition movement. He was influenced by the writings of the Egyptian Islamist theoretician Sayyid Qutb. At the same time, he interacted with secular opposition intellectuals and had a strong interest in music, poetry, and novels. In Ganji's assessment, "no

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other present-day *marja* (senior ayatollah) or prominent *faqih* (Islamic jurist) has such a cosmopolitan past."[4] Khamenei is an intellectual and revolutionary who was influenced by Third Worldism. During the 1960s and 1970s, he was arrested six times by the shah's secret police, endured torture, and spent several years in jail.[5]

Rise to supremacy

After the overthrow of the shah's regime, Khamenei became deputy minister of defense in the new Islamic Republic and supervisor of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). His career could have been short. The radical opposition group People's Mujahedin of Iran targeted him in a 1981 assassination attempt, mutilating his right arm. However, Khamenei survived and went on to become the Supreme Leader. What explains his remarkable resilience?

Khamenei's political survival must be analyzed in the context of the regime he presides over. The Islamic Republic of Iran grew out of a social revolution, which has marked its politics profoundly. Revolutionary regimes have special attributes, which make them resilient to external and internal pressures.[6] According to Lachapelle et al. (2020), the violent conflicts triggered by their efforts to transform the state and the existing social order leave four legacies that enhance authoritarian durability. First, the fight against counterrevolutionaries tends to foster a cohesive ruling elite. Second, revolutionaries take control over the army, police, and intelligence forces and reduce the likelihood of a military coup. Third, the struggle to fade off internal and external existential threats facilitates the creation of a vast coercive apparatus. Fourth, revolutionary and postrevolutionary conflict enables regime elites to "wipe out rivals and alternative centers of power: institutions or social classes whose power, resources, or legitimacy can serve as a basis for mobilizing opposition to the regime."[7]

Iran differs from the standard comparative model in some important respects. The country's most eye-catching uniqueness is its religious appearance and religious justification for the state. This followed Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership in the revolution and was written into the Islamic Republic's constitution.[8] The founding concept was *velayat-e faqih*, prescribing the guardianship of the Islamic jurist (the Supreme Leader who, according to this Shia political thought, has custodianship of the Iranian people).[9]

Another characteristic is that electoral politics have played a more prominent role in Iran than is commonly the case in revolutionary regimes. The Islamic Republic holds competitive elections for both legislative and executive positions and has done so regularly since the revolution. Suffrage is universal, voters have had real (though increasingly limited) alternatives to choose from, and there has been uncertainty about the election result. Historically, there have been high electoral participation rates.[10]

Moreover, as a consequence of the electoral contest and a convoluted institutional structure factionalism is rife in the ruling group.[11] Parallel state organs create overlapping authorities, checks and balances, and havens for competing interests.[12]

The attempt to combine an Islamic State with electoral democracy resulted in a political regime that is charged with built-in tensions. Starting with the constitution, it oscillates between provisions for "divine rule" and arrangements for the rule of the people.[13] As Brumberg explains, the dissonant legitimation principles have been institutionalized in competing political offices.[14] For example, the legislature is divided between the popularly elected Parliament and the Guardian Council, which oversees the compatibility of laws with the *sharia*. Equally, the executive power is divided between an elected president and the "Leader of the revolution."[15]

Khamenei was a trusted follower of Ayatollah Khomeini and held influential positions from the beginning of the revolution.[16] Nonetheless, his rise to leadership was not a foregone conclusion. Khomeini had intended for another of his followers to become his successor, the left-leaning Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri.[17] However, a counter-coalition comprising Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and Khomeini's son Ahmad worked against Montazeri's candidature.[18] Shortly before his death, Khomeini fell out with Montazeri, who had criticized the 1988 mass execution of political prisoners.[19] Hashemi Rafsanjani orchestrated a meeting in the Assembly of Experts in which Khamenei was selected as the new Supreme Leader.

The choice of Khamenei was controversial because he did not possess the necessary religious qualifications. According to the constitution, the Leader of the Islamic Republic should be a *marja-e taqlid*, meaning a religious "source of emulation." However, Khamenei was not an ayatollah – he only held the middle-rank title of *hojjat ol-eslam*. His credentials were first and foremost political. For this reason, when the Assembly of Experts selected Khamenei, it required a (post factum) amendment of the Iranian constitution.[20] The operation created a legal and religious legitimacy problem for the new Leader from the start.[21]

Filling the shoes of Khomeini was difficult. Khamenei lacked his predecessor's charisma, popular support, and authority among the revolutionary elite. He had not led the revolution, did not carry the same theological weight, and was perceived to be part of factional disputes where Khomeini had been above them. That made him vulnerable to attacks from his political opponents. Moreover, Khamenei took office in the shadow of President Hashemi Rafsanjani. Known as a favorite of Khomeini, and coming with a clear political program, the president appeared as the stronger part. He used his authority as the elected president to set the course for the Second Republic.

Throughout Khamenei's long rule, tensions with succeeding presidents have been a constant. A structural explanation is that the Leader seeks to preserve the existing system, whereas the people vote for presidents who promise political change. The drive for reform was felt from Khamenei's early days in office. By the end of the first revolutionary decade, the Iranian population was tired of radical ideologies and the devastating war with Iraq. Hashemi Rafsanjani sensed the people's fatigue and championed an "adjustment" (*ta'dil*) of the Islamic Republic. It consisted in a departure from the foreign policy goal of exporting the Islamic Revolution, a turn toward market economy, and less state intervention in cultural and social affairs.[22]

In 1997, the push for reform turned to the nature of the regime itself when Muhammad Khatami won presidential power in an electoral landslide.[23] Underpinning Khatami's rise was a social and intellectual reform movement that had developed a democratic interpretation of the Islamic Republic.[24] It criticized the theocratic idea of divinely ordained leadership and emphasized the republican foundation of the regime instead. Khatami made a case for strengthening civil society, arguing that the people needed space to invigorate the Islamic Republic. Externally, he represented Iran with a smiling face and called for the "dialogue of civilizations."[25]

For Khamenei, the popular eagerness to move out of revolution mode was a problem. His political raison d'être was to defend the Islamic Revolution and its regime. By fortune, he had become the "Leader of the revolution," but the position's continuing relevance was in question. The voters had switched to Thermidor mood and expressed political preferences that made the Supreme Leader seem out of tune. To put it succinctly, Khamenei faced the task of establishing his (revolutionary) authority at a time when revolutionary slogans were beginning to lose their appeal. He did not have Khomeini's charisma to sway the masses, and he lacked a political program that a majority of the Iranian population would subscribe to. Khamenei's shortage of soft power might not be such a problem if it was not that the Islamic Republic was an ideologically legitimated regime. However, the Leader's power was based on a *doctrine* – the guardianship of the Islamic jurist – and a doctrine needs persuasiveness to be effective.

Keys of authoritarian survival

Khamenei developed a survival strategy based on the resources at his disposal. He inherited three key assets from the first revolutionary leader. First, he had wide institutional powers. Second, he had access to an ideology legitimizing his having and using these prerogatives. Third, he took over a robust repressive apparatus. Through deft deployment of these resources, he overcame the double threat of street protests and the rejection of his rule from within the regime.

Khamenei has a range of powers in the Iranian political system, and many are granted by the constitution. Among many other authorities, the Supreme Leader has the right to determine the general policies of the Islamic Republic, command the armed forces, declare war and peace, reject the suitability of first-term presidential candidates, and appoint and dismiss important officeholders. Among such officeholders are the six clerical members of the Guardian Council; the Head of the Judiciary; the Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting;[26] the Chief of Staff for the Armed forces; the Chief Commander of the IRGC; and the Commanders of the three regular military branches.[27]

In addition, from Ayatollah Khomeini Khamenei took over a network of clerical commissars throughout the state apparatus. Every government ministry is set up with a personally appointed representative of the Leader, ostensibly to provide ideological guidance, in practice constituting networks of patronage and control.

Sometimes, the Supreme Leader's representative can be the ministry's real authority. There are also clerical commissars in the military and security services, in the Foreign Service, as in a host of revolutionary and religious organizations.[28] Khamenei furthermore appoints personal representatives to Iran's 31 provinces who counterweight the government-appointed province governors (*ostandar*). They manage Khamenei's provincial constituencies, pass on messages to the governors, and lead the Friday prayer congregations.

The Leader also has vast economic resources at his disposal. His personal office oversees the activities of parastatal revolutionary foundations (*bonyads*), which are subsidized by the government budget, pay no taxes, and engage in economic transactions and investments without public insight.[29] Intended to serve the revolutionary goal of social justice, these foundations passed from central government control to the authority of the Supreme Leader after 1989.[30] The more business-oriented ones have developed into multibillion-dollar conglomerates, employing tens of thousands of people, the Mostazafan Foundation being the emblematic example. The Leader moreover benefits from the responsibility for collecting the alms tax and administrating Pious Endowments (*awqaf*). The most prominent endowment, Astan-e Qods-e Razavi, is the biggest land owner in Iran's second-largest city Mashhad and the wider Khorasan province.[31] Khamenei's office also manages a secretive business conglomerate called Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam (*setad-e ejrai-ye farman-e hazrat-e emam*). It was created at Ayatollah Khomeini's order in 1989 to deal with abandoned and/or expropriated properties from the 1979 revolution and has gained court authorization to continue confiscating properties under Khamenei. According to Reuters, the Headquarters (*setad*) has used its special status to build up a massive real estate portfolio and expanded into other sectors of the economy, including finance, telecommunications, and oil, as well.[32]

The ideological foundation of Khamenei's rule is a combination of anti-imperialism and political Islam. He has remained committed to Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary vision of resisting domination by colonializing powers, especially the United States and Israel, by awakening the Muslim community and implementing Islam in every aspect of life.[33] Khamenei sees Iran as the frontrunner of a global revolt against imperial subjugation that is bound to dethrone the hegemon in the end. The Islamic Revolution was the breakthrough of the movement of downtrodden nations, and the Islamic Republic is its embodiment. To advance this mission, internal unity must be maintained at all cost. Political dissent is equated with running errands for the forces of oppression.

The nature of religious guardianship in the Islamic Republic is a contested issue. Khamenei promotes the idea that his authority as the Islamic jurist is absolute (*motlaq*). The justification is a 1988 speech by Ayatollah Khomeini where he stated that government in the form of absolute guardianship was "one of the primary injunctions of Islam . . . with priority over all secondary injunctions, even prayer, fasting and *haj* (pilgrimage)."[34] The practical implication is that the Supreme Leader stands above the law. By contrast, the reformist interpretation insists that the Leader is limited by the popular will and the constitution.

To counter the push for reform, Khamenei emphasizes the sanctity of the revolution and magnifies external threats against it and Iran. He portrays submission to the Leader as a matter of defending true Islam. Khamenei works systematically to get the message across. His ideological production is significant,[35] and he regularly addresses state officials, social and professional groups, and the population as a whole. The Supreme Leader's words are amplified through a battery of media channels from the state broadcaster to Press TV, Ofogh TV, Mardom Khabar Internet TV, his websites, and social media accounts. Propagandists in mosques, the religious seminaries, the judicial system, the Basij force, and the information arms of the IRGC also parrot him.[36]

Khamenei attaches great importance to culture, arguing that a nation's strength and the international battle for hearts and minds are rooted there. The aim of the Islamic Revolution was to liberate Muslim societies from the treacherous influence of the West, and this cultural jihad, he exhorts, must never stop. When Hashemi Rafsanjani used his presidential powers to steer Iran out of isolation and liberalize the economy and social restrictions, Khamenei developed a discourse on the dangers of "cultural onslaught" (*tahajum-e farhangi*). He admonished defenders of the Islamic Republic to remain alert and not be lured into the enemy's trap. In response to President Khatami's political opening, he further stressed the necessity of keeping the cultural resistance up. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, he warned that the West was targeting Iran with a "soft war" (*jang-e narm*).[37]

Although Khamenei found a blueprint for survival in Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology, he could not lean on the ruling coalition that his predecessor brought together to the same degree. Among the elites that had governed the Islamic Republic in the first revolutionary decade, a significant portion questioned Khamenei's authority. These elites had revolutionary credentials enabling them to participate in elections, operate political parties, express their views in national media, and hold public office.[38] They also had connections in the clerical and security establishments that made it challenging to repress them.

Khamenei set out to progressively marginalize recalcitrant elites and reshape the ruling coalition, focusing on politicians, the clergy, and the security forces. He facilitated the rise of a new generation of revolutionaries with definite loyalty to him. The Khatami-led heydays of the reform movement were also a time of reorganization and countermobilization among Iran's conservatives, resulting in the emergence of a neoconservative political faction. It consisted to a large degree of young recruits who had served as the Islamic Republic's bulwark in the security apparatus, armed units like the Basij militia, and the Ansar-e Hezbollah vigilantes.[39] Having fought the so-called enemies of the Islamic Republic on the ground, these foot soldiers criticized the old guard of leniency and demanded an ideological return to the original values of the Islamic Revolution, meaning strict moral enforcement, social justice, and anti-imperialism. Ahmadinejad's victory in the 2005 presidential elections chased the reformists from office and put the neoconservatives in charge of the government.[40]

Support in the clergy is essential for a ruler who claims legitimacy with reference to religion, but Khamenei faced resistance in Qom from the start.[41] Top-rank ayatollahs would not recognize him as a scholar entitled to make religious rulings.[42] Critical theologians attacked the very concept of guardianship of the Islamic jurist.[43] Khamenei responded to this challenge by undermining the traditional independence, self-regulation, and pluralism of the religious seminaries and subjecting them to tight political control. He bureaucratized the education system and changed the financial structures in ways that radically increased the clergy's dependence on the state.[44] The Leader invested in the tutoring of students, offering salaries, housing, and other social benefits in exchange for political loyalty.[45] Khamenei's policy has led to a massive growth in the overall number of clerics who find work in government offices, religious organizations, and security agencies.[46]

The security forces form the third pillar of Khamenei's ruling coalition. Above all, he relies on the IRGC. The IRGC is a parallel military organization to the regular military, characterized by its ideological outlook.[47] Since the inception, its role has been to safeguard the Islamic Revolution and its regime.[48] The Guards protect against a possible military coup and repress political dissent. They have developed an intelligence structure that works in parallel to the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. In his Last Will and Testament, Ayatollah Khomeini warned the armed forces, including the IRGC, against involvement in politics.[49] However, after Khamenei resorted to them to contain the reform movement, it became common for former IRGC officers to take political office.[50] The Basij organization is a subdivision of the Guards used for rallying support for the regime and exercising social control. It counts 1–2 million active members, according to Golkar.[51]

The cornerstone of any authoritarian regime is the ability to repress political opposition. Revolutionary regimes have special prerequisites for solving the task, as noted earlier. Khamenei has exploited the full potential of the coercive apparatus he took over. He relies on a panoply of institutions and actors spanning from the aforementioned IRGC and the Basij to the police, vigilantes, multiple intelligence bodies, prisons and detentions centers, the judiciary, and the extraconstitutional Special Court of the Clergy and the Islamic Revolutionary Courts. Most escape oversight from the elected state offices and answer to the Supreme Leader directly.

Khamenei's coercive apparatus has proven its force and resolve on repeated occasions. The first big test was the showdown with the Khatami-led reform movement. Confronted with a president who expanded the freedom of the press and the space for organizing civil society outlets, the judiciary found its place as the Leader's front line of defense. To the dismay of the reformist-dominated government and parliament, the Chief Justice closed reformist publications and dragged reformist politicians and clerics to court. In parallel, the IRGC and regime thugs repressed student protests.[52] The second and even bigger test was the 2009–2010 confrontation with the Green Movement. Citizen perceptions of fraud in Ahmadinejad's reelection as president for a second term inspired mass protests and a civil rights movement.[53] The regime responded with a calibrated mix of beating protesters,

detaining key activists, and putting prominent reformist politicians on trial. The movement's leading figures (and Ahmadinejad's election opponents), Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, were placed under house arrest. Then, in 2017–2018, leaderless demonstrations broke out across the country denouncing the government's economic policies. Their demand was no longer reform but overturn of the political system.[54] The security forces repressed the uprisings harshly. Likewise, the November 2019 protests against a sudden rise in fuel prices were met with an iron fist. Investigation by Amnesty International revealed that 304 people lost their lives.[55]

In all these crisis situations, the security forces stood with Khamenei. Contrary to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, where parts of the coercive apparatus abandoned the heads of state in the wake of the 2011 uprising, Iran's repressive agents followed orders. A key to Khamenei's success was the ideological selection – and continuous indoctrination – of his repressive agents. In the forces that protected him he cultivated a consciousness of being the revolutionary vanguard.[56] Iran's international isolation and siege mentality facilitated this task. Domestic problems and dissent were attributed to outside enemies. Moreover, the ideological orientation and parallel-to-the-state-nature of key security forces also meant that their destinies were tied to the Supreme Leader. Were it not for the claimed necessity of protecting the Islamic Revolution and its regime, an organization like the IRGC could be merged with the regular military and subjected to control of the elected politicians.

The price of success

Khamenei's survival strategy has had far-reaching consequences for both Iran and the politics of the Islamic Republic. In the following I concentrate on the weakening of elected institutions, domestic and international conflicts, and the growing securitization of the political order.

Although the Islamic Republic was never a liberal democracy, elections have historically been a potent political force. Many times they have impacted the overall orientation of Iran and often produced unforeseen results. During Khamenei's rule, however, trust in the electoral institutions has been weakened and the parliament and presidency's weight in the political game has been reduced. Crises like the contestation of Ahmadinejad reelection have undermined the electoral institution's legitimacy, and the Supreme Leader has increased the political influence of unelected bodies. Lack of support from the majority of voters forced Khamenei to rely on the institutions for which he nominates the leaders directly. On the one hand, he invested in parallel revolutionary institutions like the parastatal foundations, the IRGC, and the Basij. On the other hand, he relied on support from the judiciary and the Guardian Council when presidents with a popular mandate put pressure on him.

The Guardian Council's interference in the electoral process has greatly increased under Khamenei. During Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, the examination of candidates for parliamentary elections was undertaken by the Ministry

of the Interior, and the Guardian Council could merely veto the ministry's decisions. However, starting in 1991, the council claimed broader authorities[57] and built capacity for vetting candidates on a bigger scale.[58] In 1988, 19.3% of a total of 2001 registered candidates were disqualified in Iran's parliamentary elections.[59] In 2016, 48.6% of 12,123 registered candidates were denied the right to run.[60] The electoral engineering hit a new low in the 2021 presidential election. All serious competitors to Ebrahim Raisi were excluded from the race, including two-term President Ahmadinejad, former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, and the First Vice President under Rouhani Eshaq Jahangiri.

Another illustration of the growing reach of unelected institutions is the shadow government that Khamenei has built around his personal office. It has long been common for Iranian religious leaders to run a "house" (*beit*) where a representative, usually a son, would coordinate with the religious leader's constituency. Ayatollah Khomeini let personal communication and appointments pass through his son Ahmad but kept the house relatively small. Khamenei, for his part, has created an extensive bureaucracy in the Leader's office. He has entrusted carefully chosen specialists with different files in security, religious, economic, and political affairs. According to Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani, they

> perform such functions as lobbying MPs and cabinet ministers (often behind the scenes); convey the wishes of the Supreme Leader to interested parties; serve as troubleshooters and go-betweens with political, military, and intelligence officials; [and] conduct sociological studies of the citizenry's needs and grievances.[61]

A group of trusted confidants oversees the work of these shadow cabinet members.

A second consequence of Khamenei's survival strategy is domestic and international conflicts. By doubling down on revolutionary bodies and agendas, against the wishes of the majority population, the Leader has alienated wide segments of society from the regime. He has narrowed the Islamic Republic's support base by politically excluding reformists and clamping down on various social movements. The violent repression of protests has generated legitimacy crises and radicalized the opposition's actions and aims. The conflict levels are particularly high with regard to ethnic minorities, such as Iranian Arabs, the Baluch, and the Kurds.[62]

Internationally, Khamenei has done his part to maintain the conflictual relationships with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, although threats and provocations go both ways. The fact that he has based his survival on promoting a revolutionary Islamic ideology and strengthening militia organizations means that the stabilization of Iran's international relations has been difficult to achieve. Khamenei did consent to negotiations with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany on Iran's nuclear program and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, beyond the signing of the JCPOA, he ruled out further normalization with the United States.[63] In the Middle East, Khamenei has nurtured deeper ties with Bashar al-Assad in Syria and non-state armed groups

in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen.[64] This policy has significantly increased Iran's influence in the Arab region, but the influence has come at a price. For instance, it was a central motive for US president Donald Trump's sanctions campaign against the Islamic Republic in 2018–2020 and also for Israel's airstrikes against the IRGC in Syria and Iraq and sabotage operations inside Iran.

Along with this spike in domestic and international conflicts, Khamenei's survival strategy has led to increased securitization of the political order in Iran. This has occurred in the sense that subjects are "moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics," where they can be treated without democratic procedures.[65] Moreover, security elites have gained more prominence in Iran's political and economic life. Khamenei instrumentalizes outside threats against Iran to discredit the internal opposition against him and enable him to deal with these forces as a security matter. He mobilizes the coercive apparatus against regime critics, comparing their task to a war. The pursuit of an internationally contested nuclear development program has both facilitated and contributed to this securitization of politics. It has enabled Khamenei to maintain a state of emergency while at the same time scoring brownie points for the progress being made.

Securitization of the political order also manifests itself in the growing influence of security elites. Khamenei's reign has led to a striking rise of actors with a background in the military or other parts of the security establishment, in both politics and the economy. The main producer of these ascending elites is the IRGC.[66] Many leading politicians began their careers as guardsmen.[67] The IRGC has also built a business empire on Khamenei's watch.[68] Companies like the flagship construction conglomeration Khatam al-Anbiya pay no taxes and have privileged access to state contracts.

Conclusion

Khamenei owes his political survival to a routinization of the Islamic Revolution in Iran's political regime – first and foremost because he inherited a position that was tailor-made for Ayatollah Khomeini, was the institutionalized expression of the first Leader's charisma and came with wide-ranging powers in the constitution and beyond. Moreover, Khamenei has responded to attacks from his peers and the opposition in society by investing in other legacies of the revolution. He has leaned on parallel revolutionary organizations, reemphasized the Islamic Revolution's mission, and applied loyalty to the Leader as criterion in reshaping the ruling elite. Not least has he put the repressive capacity of a revolutionary regime to use. Khamenei's remarkable longevity as ruler is, at the end of the day, a reflection of the authoritarian durability of revolutionary regimes. The continuous external pressures on Iran through sanctions and military encirclement have facilitated his task with controlling society and mobilizing the coercive apparatus. Routinizing revolution would not work in the absence of external and internal enemies. The political consequences of Khamenei's survival strategy have been a weakening of elected institutions, an increase of domestic and international conflicts, and a

growing securitization of the political order. The Supreme Leader has undercut popular support for the Islamic Republic by deepening the impact of revolution at a time when the Iranian population demands something else.

Notes

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15

THE ASSAD DYNASTY

Quo vadis Damascus? (Hafiz: 1930–2000; Bashar: born 1965)

Moshe Ma'oz

For the last half century, Syria has been dominated (or subjugated) by the Assad dynasty: Hafez al-Assad (1970–2000) and his son Bashar (2000 to date) who have referred to their regime as republican, democratic, and socialist. The Assads, members of the Alawite minority, have imposed a strict autocratic rule over a majority Sunni-Muslim population, attempting to forge a new secular, non-sectarian national community. When encountering periodic uprisings by conservative and radical Sunnis, the Assads have used brutal measures against rebels and innocent civilians, including massacres, torture, and destroying homes. Hafez made use of widespread violence in particular during the late 1970s and early 1980s, notably in Hama (1982), which resulted in 20,000 to 30,000 victims. Since 2011, Bashar has been engaged in the Syrian Civil War, which has already caused some half a million dead, numerous wounded, 11 million refugees, and widespread destruction of Syria's socioeconomic infrastructure.

Both father and son have built their autocratic regime with the support of their minority Alawite community, the army's elite forces, the security apparatus, and the extensive, powerful network of the Ba'th party. Based on a number of socioeconomic reforms, media propaganda, which has emphasized alleged foreign policy "successes," as well as global (Russian) and regional (Iranian) support, the regime appeared to be a sort of Jumlukiyya – or a combination of Jumhuriyya (Republic) and Mulukiyya (kingdom).

Since its independence from France in 1946, Syria has experienced many military coups and political conflicts. Based on his military experience and his political-military struggles, Hafez al-Assad managed to establish his autocratic regime with a unique combination of firmness, coolness, shrewdness, stubbornness and cruelty. Pragmatism and flexibility also helped him.

Unlike his father, who had a "killer instinct," Bashar al-Assad was initially devoid of military experience and of interest in politics. He was viewed as "timid," "geeky"

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and nonaggressive. In Ottoman history and terminology, Hafez may be described as "Ghazi" or a warrior-leader, whereas Bashar was a pampered child growing up in the "Kafes," the cage or the palace, and surrounded by servants and women. Indeed, Bashar grew up in Damascus, where his father was a prominent military and political leader. He attended good schools and subsequently specialized in ophthalmology at Damascus University as well as in London's Western Eye Hospital. He was unexpectedly asked to return home in 1994 and assume military and political positions, subsequently becoming Syria's autocratic president six years later.

Despite his poor record as a leader, Bashar has now been in power for more than 20 years, including over 10 years of a widespread violent uprising. In comparison, several Arab autocratic leaders, more mature and experienced than Bashar, were deposed by popular rebellions: Zayn Ali of Tunisia (January 2011); Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (February 2012); Mu'ammar Qadhafi of Libya (October 2012) and Ali Abdallah Salih of Yemen (June 2012), who belonged to the Zaydi-Shi'ite Community, which makes up 35% of the majority Sunni population. Unlike these leaders, Bashar has managed to survive, despite being a member of the Alawite minority, which makes up only 12% of the Syrian population and is considered by many among the Sunni majority as religiously heretic, as well as socially and culturally inferior.

Notwithstanding his initial attempts to introduce social and political reforms and embrace the Sunnis, Bashar has encountered more violent rebellions than his father ever did. He has nevertheless managed to stay in power and control most of his country by using brutal force and repression, possibly owing to his insecurity and inexperience. His late father never had to resort to extreme force to the same extent. True, in his struggle for survival Bashar has greatly benefited from the help of his Alawite community, the military and security apparatuses, and Ba'th activists, not to mention significant Iranian and Russian military support. But his political perseverance has stemmed also from his tenacity of purpose, stubborn adherence to his position, and his desperate fight for the survival of his community. It was perhaps a situation of "to be or not to be."

In the following essay I attempting to explain how the Assad Alawite dynasty has attained and maintained power for some 50 years in Syria, despite periods of strong popular and military Sunni resistance. Drawing a comparison between Hafez and Bashar, I am also tracing the personal qualities, domestic and foreign policies, and other factors that have enabled the autocratic Assads to dominate their country for more than half a century with little prospect of regime change.

The Assads before their ascendancy to power

There were big differences in the upbringing, education, and early careers of Hafez and Bashar before their advent to power. Bashar grew up in Damascus in a powerful and affluent family, benefited from an advanced education, and harbored no discernible political or military ambitions.

By contrast, his father Hafez grew up in a remote Syrian village under harsh social and political conditions. Born on October 6, 1930, in Qardaha, northwest Syria, three years after his grandfather Sulayman had changed his name from "al-Wahsh" (the savage) to al-Assad (the Lion), Hafez grew up as a member of the despised minority Alawite sect, caught between French foreign rule and Syrian-Arab nationalistic struggle for independence. In those days Alawites were denounced by the conservative Sunni Muslims (some 70% of the population) as heretics, and thus worse than Christians and Jews, and socially and culturally inferior. Many uneducated Alawite young people served as shoe-shiners and servants for Sunnis. Fortunately for Hafez, who was one of 11 children, his father, Ali Sulayman, was a respected member of his community and held an official post at the French Mandate's administration. He could afford to send one of his sons, which turned out to be Hafez, to an elementary village school and, when Hafez was nine, to a secondary school in Latakia city. Latakia was mostly inhabited by Sunnis and there, for the first time, Hafez was exposed to the Sunni-Alawite rift. He was a bright student and deeply interested in the history and geography of the Arab world. This perhaps motivated him later to join the secular, non-sectarian, socialist and pan Arab Ba'th (renaissance) party, founded in 1947. Hafez was politically active as a student. Together with success in his military career, the Ba'th party became one of the vehicles for Hafez's ascendancy to power.

Regarding his military service, which he embarked upon after graduating from high school, Hafez said in 1948: "I thought of going to university and study medicine but I also considered the military academy. The use of force and violence (by the French) against my people convinced me that military service would be the most effective way to serve my country . . . I chose to become a pilot because I thought . . . I could stop this [French] bombing of our towns."[1]

Like many young Alawites, as well as other minority sects such as the Druze and Kurds, Assad viewed his military service under the French Mandate as a vehicle for socioeconomic mobility. The nascent Ba'th party also encouraged its young followers to enlist in the Syrian army and air force – two Alawite officers even commanded the Syrian air force in 1950 and 1952 respectively.

In 1952, young Hafez registered at the military academy in Homs and then attended the air force academy in Aleppo. He graduated as a combat pilot in 1955. He reportedly shot down a British bomber that had strayed over Syrian airspace during the Anglo-French-Israeli Suez war in 1956. He continued his advanced military training in Egypt alongside Hosni Mubarak – Egypt's president from 1981 to 2011 – as well as in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union he flew the MIG-17, the outstanding high-subsonic fighter aircraft which Moscow provided to many countries around the world.[2]

Deeply active in the Ba'thist faction of the army, Hafez was sent to Egypt upon the creation of the Egyptian-Syrian Union (the United Arab Republic, 1958–1961). Despite being merely a captain by rank, in the late 1950s Hafez became an important member of the clandestine Syrian military committee in Egypt, alongside

high ranking officers – Alawites, Druze and Sunnis. These officers emerged as the backbone of the Ba'th military coup of March 1963.

Hafez was thrice promoted within a short time to the rank of major general (and in 1968 to Field Marshal) and commander of the air force, and subsequently Defense Minister. He then transformed the air force into his power base, appointing his confidants to senior positions in the army as well as establishing his own intelligence network. He alternately outmaneuvered or ousted his military partners and rivals, including his fellow Alawite comrade, Salah Jadid, the leader of the neo-Ba'th, bloody coup in 1966. He subsequently blamed Jadid for Syria's defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel, claiming that Jadid had "ruined the army by political purges."[3] He also made Jadid responsible for the military fiasco of September 1970 during the Jordanian civil war, when the invading Syrian army was defeated and forced to withdraw under heavy pressure from the United States, Jordan, and Israel.

Following the death of Egyptian president Abd al Nasser on September, 28, 1970, Hafez ordered the arrest of Jadid and his allies on November 13, 1970. Soon thereafter Hafez became Syria's new prime minister. A few months later, on March 12, 1971, Hafez was endorsed as president by a people's referendum. He received 99.2% of the votes cast (subsequently, in 1978 and 1985, he received 99.6% and 99.9% of the votes cast).

To be sure, it was not this formal endorsement that enabled Hafez to govern his unstable and tumultuous country. Back in 1958 then Syrian president Shukri al-Quwatli had warned Nasser on the eve of the Syrian-Egyptian union, "you will find Syria a difficult country to govern . . . forty percent of the Syrians consider themselves national leaders, twenty-five percent think they are prophets, and ten percent imagine they are gods."[4] Indeed Nasser failed to dominate Syria during the union, which only lasted for three years (1958–1961). But for 30 years Hafez al-Assad did manage to govern Syria, tackling enormous internal and external challenges. He succeeded at retaining power largely due to his unique combination of autocratic traits: firmness, shrewdness, and cruelty, as well as pragmatism and flexibility.

Bashar al-Assad: transition to power

Bashar al-Assad did not inherit his father's unique personality characteristics, nor did he have the benefit of extensive leadership experience. When he succeeded Hafez in 2000, he was "the polite and slightly ungainly middle child, carrying out his identity . . . by excelling academically."[5] He grew up in Sunni Damascus where his father was a military leader and president, enjoying the good life and education of an elite fraternity school. He lacked military or political interest and training, though he registered with the Ba'th party by age 14.

Graduating from the Arab-French secondary school in Damascus in 1982, Bashar studied medicine at Damascus University with specialized training in

ophthalmology. Following his graduation in 1988, he served as an army doctor at a military hospital near Damascus. In 1992 he continued his specialization in ophthalmology at the Western Eye Hospital in London. His superior, Dr. Schulanberg, alluded to Bashar's personality after he became president:

> I thought that the Bashar al-Asad who I knew is too delicate to be a state president, I did not think that he will be sufficiently aggressive and harsh to govern Syria. On the other hand, I could not ignore his tenacity; as a resident Bashar was very focused and stubborn in reaching his goal to be an eye doctor.[6]

While in London, Bashar also took an interest in the Internet and other modern technologies, and was exposed to the English way of life. He married Asma Akhras, an English-born and educated daughter of a renowned Syrian-Sunni cardiologist in London. In 1994 Bashar was forced to give up his promising medical career and luxurious London lifestyle to return home. He was to prepare to become Syria's next president, as his older brother Basil, a popular figure in Syrian society and a senior military officer, had unexpectedly died in a car crash. Bashar was next in line to succeed his ailing father.

Hafez was well aware that Bashar was unfit to succeed him. His younger son lacked charisma, military experience, and any notable leadership qualities. He needed to be trained. Hafez systematically and ruthlessly paved the road for Bashar's ascent to the presidency. He gradually ousted potential candidates for succession, namely Rifat al-Assad, Hafez's ambitious younger brother and the Chief of Staff, as well as General Hikmat Shihabi and Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam and a handful of other senior Sunni officers. Hafez endeavored to groom his son mainly through the military, a major vehicle for political ascendancy in Syria. Bashar thus undertook various advanced crash military courses and was quickly promoted from the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1994 to Field Marshal in 2000. Alongside him young military officers, mostly Alawites and loyal to Bashar, were also nominated to high positions.

Parallel to his military training, Bashar also became publicly engaged in civilian and political issues to gain experience and increase his prestige. Thus, in addition to his close Ba'th party links, he widened his circle by being nominated in the mid-1990s as president of the Syrian Computer Society as well as being put in charge of combating corruption ("Mr. Clean"). This was part of a media campaign, which also targeted the Western media, to promote his public image as a reformer. To this end, Bashar made well-publicized visits to Syrian towns and Arab states. Early in 1998 he was appointed to handle the "Lebanese File," thus replacing Vice President Abdul-Halim Khaddam, and becoming involved in the intricate politics of Lebanon, which for years had been under firm Syrian control.

Similar to the trajectory of other young Arab leaders such as Jordan's Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein, by the late 1990s Bashar and the Syrian media were frequently

alluding to his imminent replacement of his father's position. Still, Hafez himself stated:

> I am not preparing my son to take my place. The fact that such possibility is mentioned derives from his activity, which give him the esteem and love of his colleagues as well as respect among the citizens of the country. As for the issue of succession, there is no clause in our constitution that gives the right of succession to family members.[7]

However, a day after Hafez's death on June 11, 2000, the Syrian national assembly quickly amended article 83 of the constitution that stated that the president must be at least 40 years old. It was changed to 34 years, Bashar's exact age. This act alongside many other steps demonstrated that the Assads used fake democratic gestures to gain legitimacy. In the same vein, the Ba'th party unanimously nominated Bashar as president on June 11, 2000. This move was subsequently approved by the Syrian parliament and endorsed by a national referendum with Bashar receiving 97.29% of the votes.

At the helm

Bashar's peaceful rise to power contrasted starkly with his father's methods a generation earlier. Hafez had seized power by brutal force in November 1970, was nominated president in February 1971 by the People's Council, and endorsed by a national referendum in March 1971. According to the 1973 constitution, the president was the secretary general of the Ba'th party as well as chief commander of the Syrian military and in charge of a wide network of security and intelligence organizations, largely staffed with Alawites. He was also responsible for shaping and supervising legislative domestic and foreign policies, both directly and through his appointed government ministers and the "elected" parliament. Thus, although the Assads named their regime "democratic" and non-sectarian, in fact it resembled the Communist-style peoples' democracies in Eastern Europe. To this day, the regime has been led by just two autocrats, and both have largely relied on their minority Alawite group, in addition to loyal partisans from the Sunni, Christian and Druze communities for support. This, along with socioeconomic reforms tended to legitimate the regime's non-sectarian image and helped forge a national-secular community.

However, the two leaders' autocratic styles and approaches differ in significant ways. Bashar, the delicate London-educated physician, has been more aggressive and brutal than his military-trained father in his efforts to maintain his autocratic rule. Possibly this has stemmed from his lack of political and military experience, or from his sense of insecurity and other character traits that distinguish him from his father. During his many years in power, Hafez was depicted by foreign leaders and observers as having an "element of genius" (President Nixon); being "a brilliant man" (President Carter) and "the most interesting man in the Middle East"

(Henry Kissinger).[8] He was also praised as the "founder of modern Syria, who built a strong, independent and self-confident Syria" (Ehud Barak, former Israeli prime minister). Hafez was indeed highly intelligent with an original mind, reflecting dignity and authority. He was also secretive, aloof and enigmatic to the public, widely known as the Sphinx. He ruled the country through a small group of loyal comrades – the Jama'a, which consisted of both Alawites and Sunnis. Nevertheless, Hafez encouraged the formation of a personality cult around him.

> In no other country in recent memory . . . not in Mao's China, nor Tito's Yugoslavia has the intensity of personality cult reached such extremes. [Hafez] Assad's image . . . is everywhere . . . his face envelops, telephone poles and trucks, churches and mosques. His is the visage a Syrian sees when he opens a newspaper.[9]

By contrast, when Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000, he initially discouraged a personality cult but promoted his image as a reformer and modernizer, energetic and modest while preaching for the establishment of a "unique democracy deriving from our history, culture and civilization and stemming from the needs of our society and the reality of life."[10] More than his father, Bashar traveled to various places in his country, talked to common people, and consulted experts. He was praised by senior colleagues and the Syrian media for having inherited "his father's traits of wisdom, courage, durability and commitment to the people's interests."[11] His semi-official American biographer, David Lesch, labeled him "The Anti-Dictator."[12] Several Arab and Western journalists and politicians described him as "having a potential to become a prominent Arab leader," "curious," intelligent and "open." By contrast, a Syrian Communist leader alleged that "Syria has become the private property of the (Assad) family . . . it is a big prison." A non-Syrian Arab journalist sneered that the Assads have turned the "democratic popular and socialist republic into a family estate." A senior Israeli official believed that the Alawite child hardly had more than a 50% chance to survive.[13] But Bashar has indeed survived against all odds and predictions. The powerful military and political elite backed his nomination as president to prevent instability and an internal power struggle and ensure the survival and continuation of Hafez's legacy and policies.

Hafez and Bashar al-Assad's domestic policies

Both Hafez and Bashar followed the Ba'th socialist principles and expanded socio-economic reforms to further improve the conditions of the lower classes, while simultaneously promoting their loyalty and obedience to the Assads' autocratic regimes. The two regimes endeavored to mobilize those classes with partial success in order to combat the radical-conservative Islamists who struggled against the Assads' attempt to forge a non-sectarian, secular national community. To be sure, since independence from France in 1946, Hafez al-Assad was the first Syrian leader who succeeded in establishing an autocratic presidential system on the Egyptian

Nasserite model. But he was in a Catch-22 situation: to remain in power and create a non-sectarian national community he needed to rely heavily on the support of his minority Alawite base, and this triggered fierce resistance among the Sunni majority. To cut this Gordian knot, Hafez created a dual system: an informal power base, mostly derived from Alawite military officers and security chiefs; and the formal system, consisting of the government, the Ba'th party, the parliament (where Hafez allowed for some criticism of his socioeconomic policies), and many social and professional associations. This formal system was mostly staffed with Sunnis, Christians and Druze.[14]

Under the banner of the "corrective movement" Hafez expanded a series of socioeconomic measures, such as land reform, rural education, and industrial modernization, including improved socioeconomic conditions for urban workers. These policies were mostly associated with and controlled by the Ba'th party. Similarly, the new middle classes – made up of Sunnis, Christians and Alawites – mostly drew their salaries from government agencies and thus became dependent on the regime for their livelihoods. Through these means and others, the Ba'th party systematically influenced various factions, students, and the media and made them dependent on the regime.

Accordingly, most of them actively supported Hafez al-Assad in public demonstrations and in armed combat against his domestic "enemies." For instance, during the Islamic uprising in the early 1980s large numbers of armed militias of peasants and workers were used to "liquidate gangs of reactionaries, killers and saboteurs."[15]

The Islamic challenge

These "reactionaries, killers and saboteurs" were Syrian Islamists mostly led by the Muslim Brotherhood movement that has constituted the 'Achilles Heel' of the Ba'th regime since 1963. The Brotherhood struggled intensely against the secular, socialist measures and the heretical Alawite rule which took over the country in 1966. A series of strikes, demonstrations and riots took place during the years 1964, 1965 and 1967, which were all ruthlessly suppressed by the army. More pragmatic than his predecessor, General Salah Jadid, Hafez lifted many of the restrictions previously imposed on the Muslim religious institutions and made various gestures toward the Ulama (religious sages). He asked the chief Mufti of Damascus to verify him as an authentic Sunni Muslim, participated in public prayers, and made an alternative Hajj (or Umra) to Mecca. At the same time he also persuaded the Shi'i Imam of Lebanon, Musa al-Sadr, to verify in 1973 that the Alawites in Lebanon were Shi'ite Muslims instead of heretics.

During the October 1973 war with Israel, Hafez al-Assad and the media used Islamic terms, such as jihad (holy war) to gain legitimacy among the majority Sunni population. But many of them, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, were not impressed by these gestures and launched their own jihad against Hafez's "atheist" regime. Already in early 1973 they were fiercely demonstrating against Hafez's

decision to delete from the draft of the new constitution the clause stipulating that Islam should be the president's religion. And although the clause was subsequently reinstated, violent riots by Muslims erupted again in the summer of 1976 when it became known that Assad was actively supporting the Christian Maronites in their war against Muslim radicals and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the civil war in Lebanon.

Naming themselves Mujahideen (holy warriors), a growing number of Muslim militants were preparing to topple the regime, while the newly formed Islamic Front made the following statement in 1980:

> [T]he great majority of our nation due to poverty, ignorance and autocracy, became a victim of a well-planned brainwashing operation . . . Those leaders flattered Islam . . . and used it to serve their aims . . . the image of democracy was also distorted by the (Ba'th) party; the constitution became a lie, the referendums changed to comedy acts . . . the Syrian regions fell into the mire of sectarianism.

An Islamic Front publication (*Al Nadhir*), labeled Hafez as "the tyrant of Syria," a "bloodthirsty dictator" who was "guilty of kufr" (heresy).[16] The Mujahideen soon stepped up their bold attacks on military and government sites, including an attempt to assassinate Hafez himself in June 1980.

In his endeavors to quell the Islamic militant uprising, Hafez began to praise Islamic and nationalist values as well as Syria's "popular democracy" and political stability. But he also adopted brutal measures against the Muslim Brotherhood, which, according to an 1983 *Amnesty International* report included "23 methods of ill treatment and torture . . . electric shock, burning . . . sexual violation . . . mass political killings."[17] Even Hafez's semi-official biographer and advocate, Patrick Seale, wrote in March 1981:

> So President Assad, the longest-serving ruler of independent Syria and an astute and reasonable man, now finds himself running a morally flawed regime practicing gangster methods indistinguishable from those of his adversaries. To meet terror Assad has resorted to ferocious counter-terror, indiscriminate arrests, beatings and torture . . . shoot-outs and mass killings.[18]

Seale also referred to Hafez's "narrow, essentially sectarian bases of authority" and that the regime was "run by and for the Alawite minority."[19]

The peak of the clash between Hafez and the Muslim Brotherhood occurred in Hama, an important hub of the Brotherhood, in early 1982. Hafez's troops besieged the city and reportedly killed a great number of Muslim Brotherhood followers. In reaction, hundreds of Mujahideen attacked many government and security sites and Ba'th party locations on February 2, 1981, killing 250 people. They took control of the city and called for jihad against Hafez's "atheist" regime. Hafez's troops suppressed the rebellion with brutal force and much bloodshed:

20,000 to 30,000 were killed, including women and children, and part of the city was destroyed, including many mosques and churches.[20]

Up until 2011, the Hama massacre did serve to deter many Muslims from rebelling again against the Assad regime. But it also made the Assads more aware of the Islamist challenge and the necessity to appease the Islamists with the help of politically conciliatory gestures. Consequently, thousands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood were released from prison and the role of Islam in Syria and the Assads' adherence to its values were soon glorified.

From gestures to killings: Bashar al-Assad's policies

Upon his ascendancy in 2000, Bashar expanded his religious gestures, going on an Umra pilgrimage to Mecca and performing public prayers at Hama mosques. He also released from jail more members of the Muslim Brotherhood and permitted some exiles to return to Syria. Muslim Brotherhood leaders residing in London pronounced their inclination to open a new chapter with Bashar, who had "inherited many years of a totalitarian rule" but was "not responsible for what has happened in Hama."[21] Possibly to relax the autocratic rule of his father, Bashar's rapport with the Muslim Brotherhood was part of his new policy of democratization, liberalism and pluralism. Labeling it the "Spring of Damascus," this policy provided for the opening of new newspapers, radio stations and private universities, as well as intellectual and political forums and clubs.

Bashar also visited cities outside Damascus, conversed with ordinary people, and increased his connections with professional experts and advisers from various political parties. Many intellectuals and businessmen reacted favorably to Bashar's gestures. In September 2000 and again in October 2005, more than 99 intellectuals (and subsequently thousands) called for the creation of a democratic, pluralistic and non-violent civil society with Islamic values at its heart.[22]

However, induced by his Alawite and Ba'thist security guards, Bashar cut short the Damascus Spring in 2001 by shutting down the new clubs and forums and arresting many intellectual and political activists.[23] Cementing his personal rule, which included keeping away members of the old guard and promoting new and younger comrades, Bashar continued to limit and violate the human and political rights of several factions of Syrian society, including the Kurds. Political and intellectual activists were arrested without trial, new political parties were not allowed to organize, and strict censorship was imposed on the media. In the words of Riyad al-Turk, a Syrian Communist leader, Syria became a "Kingdom of Silence."[24]

Nevertheless, Bashar gained popularity among the new urban middle classes, owing to his economic reforms and despite serious setbacks in his relations with Lebanon, Israel and the United States. He was "reelected" as president on May 21, 2007, by a public referendum which saw him win 99.82% of the vote. He also held talks with foreign leaders and received some praise from the EU (especially France) and senior US officials, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. By 2010, no foreign or domestic leader demanded the removal of Bashar from office. Rather,

the Sunni upper and middle classes in the big cities supported him and credited him with restricting the Ba'th party's control over the economy while boosting the private economic sector. While the nouveau riche greatly benefited from concessions and monopolies in trade (notably Rami Makhluf, Bashar's cousin) and agriculture, the lower classes were increasingly impoverished. The conditions of farmers also severely deteriorated due to the three-year drought from 2007 to 2009.[25] This stood in stark contrast to his father's socioeconomic policies, which had significantly improved the conditions of urban and rural workers. Perhaps it was little wonder that Bashar was faced with an uprising, which started on March 15, 2011. The often heard slogan was "your time is up . . . go away Bashar."[26] The rebellion began in Dar'a in southern rural Syria and quickly spread to other small towns and villages throughout the country.

The 2011 uprising

Impervious to the socioeconomic hardships of these groups and not alert to the previous popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Bashar bragged in late January 2011 that "Syria is not Egypt" and that his regime was stable and more attentive to its people. When the uprising started, he tried to appease the protesters by granting financial benefits and promising political reforms, but to no avail. Anti-Bashar protests and riots expanded and strengthened, while several members of Parliament and hundreds of Ba'th party comrades resigned in protest against the regime. The Syrian army, an important pedestal of Bashar's rule, brutally suppressed the rebellion. The army also used artillery, rockets, combat planes and helicopters, as well as chemical weapons. For instance, in August 2013 the Syrian army (and subsequently also Hezbollah fighters and Russian aircraft) killed and wounded thousands of Syrian rebels and innocent civilians. By then in total already half a million Syrians (civilians, rebels and government forces) had been killed. Moreover, some 11 million refugees had been made homeless and half of them had fled to neighboring countries. A massive destruction of buildings and infrastructure had also occurred.[27]

The magnitude of killing and destruction in Syria was unprecedented, far exceeding the death rates of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, or even the Hama massacre of 1982 and previous oppressive actions by Hafez al-Assad. Under Hafez's rule, the Muslim Brotherhood had been the only large rebellious group in Syria, but the Brotherhood played a minor role in the 2011 uprising. Instead, hundreds of Islamic militant groups (and some secular ones, including army defectors) fought against Bashar's regime. The boldest, best equipped, and most organized group proved to be ISIS ("The Islamic State") as well as Jabhat al Nusra ("The Support Front") or later Jabhat Fath al-Sham (The Front for Greater Syria Conquest). Largely composed of Sunni warriors from Syria and other Arab and foreign countries, these militant organizations took control of large Syrian territories in the countryside as well as around Damascus and Aleppo. By 2014, they severely threatened Bashar's rule, unlike several civilian-political groups that had established ineffective opposition fronts mainly outside Syria's borders. Bashar ignored or rejected

suggestions by Arab and foreign leaders to leave office or transfer power to his Sunni deputy, Faruq al-Shar'a, following the model of power transfer in Yemen. Instead, Bashar continued to promise socioeconomic reforms (Islah), while blaming local "criminals," "terrorists," and foreign conspiracies – notably conceived by Israel – for the domestic unrest.[28]

In October 2011 and again in August 2012, Bashar claimed that the conflict was "fully under control and there is no concern regarding its future." But he also alluded to his shortcomings and to a possible political solution to the fighting when he said that he would

> continue to be the brother and friend for his people . . . I'm only a president . . . the state does not belong to me, nor the security forces . . . there have been some mistakes done by functionaries . . . we have never claimed that we are a democratic state, but we progress along the route of reforms.[29]

In July 2011, Bashar also assigned Faruq al-Shar'a to open a "national dialogue" with all political parties. In April 2012, elections were held for the National Council (Parliament), and in June 2014, Bashar was reelected as president after winning 88.7% of the votes cast.[30]

While blaming the Islamists of sectarianism, Bashar simultaneously courted minority groups that were worried about an imminent radical Islamic domination and oppression. In particular there were Christians (some 10% of the population); Druze (some 4%) as well as Kurds (10%, mostly Sunnis), and he granted all of them significant favors. Essentially, however, Assad mostly relied on the loyalty, solidarity, and support of his Alawite community (some 12% of the population, notably the army officers and soldiers, as well as the "shabiha" – ghosts – of armed militias) against the assault of radical Islamism. Initially Bashar withstood the Islamic rebellion, not least thanks to his stamina, strength, stubbornness, his tenacity of purpose, and control of the army.

Regional and global support and challenges

Nevertheless, by late 2012, Bashar al-Assad and his dwindling army were unable to ward off the rapidly expanding rebellion. He therefore sought and received military aid from Iran, Hezbollah, and other Shi'ite military groups. Starting in late 2015, Russia stepped in with air support. These forces have greatly contributed to the survival of Bashar as Syria's autocrat to this day. With their active backing, Bashar has also been able to parry the threat to his regime posed at various times throughout the conflict by the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. In the process, however, Bashar was forced to submit to Russian and Iranian dictates, thus limiting his independent decision-making. In addition, US, Turkish, and Israeli military encroachments are ongoing to some extent, and may yet end up impacting Bashar's fate.

By comparison, Hafez, albeit under different circumstances, was fairly independent and even periodically assertive in his relations with the regional and global

actors. For instance, despite his strategic alliance with Tehran (1980), Hafez ignored Iran's displeasure over his significant role in the United States-led Gulf War against Iraq in 1990–1991, his peace negotiations with Israel (1992–2000), and his endeavors to constrain Hezbollah and its efforts to turn Lebanon into an Islamic republic.

Similarly, in spite of the long-standing strategic military cooperation between Moscow and Damascus since 1955, Hafez had cooperated with Washington in the Gulf War and in the peace overtures (1988–1990) and negotiations with Israel (1992–2000). Indeed, Hafez had negotiated with Israel from a position of military and political strength, unlike Bashar, who has been mostly exposed to painful Israeli assaults, from the destruction of the Syrian nuclear site in 2007 to numerous air attacks on Syrian (and Iranian) positions during recent years.

Turkey is another regional power which seriously breached Syrian territorial sovereignty while Bashar was in office. Thus, Turkey has occupied in recent years Kurdish-inhabited territories in the north and northeast of Syria and has backed Islamic rebels who have controlled the Idlib region in northwestern Syria. Furthermore, unlike his father, in 2005 Bashar indirectly but effectively recognized Turkish sovereignty over the disputed Iskenderun-Hatay province, annexed by Turkey in 1939. He also lost his military presence and part of his political influence in Lebanon, which, during Hafez's term, had been fully under Syria's control. Since Bashar's ascendancy, Lebanon has also become one of the focal areas of the Shi'ite-Sunni regional conflict. In addition, he has to deal with Iran leading a would-be Shi'ite crescent in Iraq while Yemen and Saudi Arabia head a weaker Sunni camp.

To be sure, Tehran will continue to safeguard Bashar's autocratic rule with the help of Iranian troops as well as the support of Hezbollah and other Shi'ite militias. "Iran will absolutely not allow the axis of resistance (the Shi'ite axis) of which it considers Syria to be a main pillar to be broken in any way," Iranian president Hassan Rouhani said. "We shall support him to the end of the road."[31] This would probably also be Russia's course of action if necessary. Moscow, after all, is the supreme military and political authority in Syria. The Kremlin has insisted on Bashar adopting a new constitution, suggested as early as 2017, and has been discussing this with a UN committee. The draft constitution provides for Syria to become a democratic and pluralist republic, with equality for all citizens and freedom for all religions and national and religious minorities, including cultural autonomy for the Kurds (article 15). The president would be elected by Syrian citizens for a term of seven years and would not be allowed to hold office for more than two terms (article 49). The president, however, would hold wide powers, including high command of the armed forces (article 60) and would appoint the prime minister and ministers (article 64).[32]

Apparently, Russian president, Vladimir Putin, is working on a political settlement of the Syrian Civil War, whereby all sections of the population – notably also the Sunni majority – will be firmly integrated into the State. He wishes to turn the future regime in Damascus into a democratic and pluralist country in order to gain the support of the West. But Putin is essentially endorsing an autocratic rule in Damascus, similar to his own position in Moscow. Presumably he will not

object to have Bashar replaced by another ruler, provided it suits Russian strategic interests. Most Arab states, led by Egypt, no longer oppose Bashar's further rule over Syria. Neither does Turkey, provided Syria's Kurds disarm and sever ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey regards as a terrorist organization. Israel is also prepared to accept Bashar's continued rule, if Iran and Hezbollah withdraw their forces from Syria. This is also the American position. Washington will not help to rebuild Syria's destroyed infrastructure unless it becomes a truly democratic republic. The Biden administration may well continue the stationing of a small contingent of American troops in northeast Syria to protect oil fields there and support the Kurdish bid for political autonomy, in view of Turkish and Syrian endeavors to occupy the Kurdish region. Encountering all these constraints and challenges, Bashar can hardly be considered any longer the autocrat of Syria in the undisputed mold of his father Hafez. It is also unlikely that his own son, Hafez Jr., will succeed in continuing the Assad dynasty unchallenged.

The imminent end of the Assad dynasty confirms the writing of Ibn Khaldun, the great fourteenth-century historian and philosopher. He explained that

> the term of life of a dynasty does not normally exceed three generations. For in the first generation are still preserved the characteristic features of a rough, uncivilized rural life, such as hard conditions of life – courage, ferocity and partnership in authority. Therefore the strength of the 'Asabiyya is maintained.[33]

Still, compared to other contemporary Arab autocrats, the unique features of the Assads' 50-year rule have resulted in a two-generation dynasty based mainly on the Asabiyya (solidarity) of the Alawite minority community, considered heretic and inferior by many Sunnis.

At first, the Assads used brutal force against the Sunni rebels, but after they failed to gain public legitimacy, they co-opted the Sunnis and integrated them into a non-sectarian national community. But these efforts were proved largely unsuccessful as the Assad autocrats essentially continued to rely on their Alawite sect. Functioning under different circumstances, Hafez and Bashar produced diverse balance sheets: Hafez established a strong and stable state, a regional power, rendering socioeconomic reforms to peasants and workers. Bashar, by contrast, had to react to a widespread uprising which led to a widening gap between rich and poor. He killed many more Syrians than his father, contributed to the destruction of the economic infrastructure, and managed to lose a significant part of Syrian sovereignty to Russia and Iran. These two powers are going to shape the future of Bashar's role in Syrian politics until the end of the Assad's dynasty.

Conclusion

Al-Assad's autocratic dynasty has dominated its country for half a century, the longest of any regime in the post WWII Arab world. And while the Arab dictators of

Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were deposed within short periods by the "Arab Spring" uprisings, Bashar al-Assad has managed to survive. He achieved this despite belonging to the Alawite minority community considered by the majority Sunni population as religiously heretic and socially inferior. Unlike his father Hafez, a strong military autocrat with a "killer instinct," Bashar was devoid of military and political experience. Still, he has stayed in power, despite widespread Sunni rebellion, by killing some half a million of them. Like his father, Bashar has been supported by his Alawite comrades in the military and security networks, but his own personal stamina and stubborn adherence to his position and the survival of his community served him well. On the brink of the imminent collapse of his regime in 2013, he became dependent on military aid from Shi'ite Iran and Hezbollah and in particular from Russia. With their support, Bashar has regained most of the lost territories and solidified his rule, despite serious challenges from the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Still, the future and nature of his autocratic regime depends greatly on continued support from Russia and Iran. On May 26, 2021, Bashar was "reelected" as Syria's President for his fourth term by 95% of the vote. Would he and the Assad's dynasty further control Damascus?

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16

KIM JONG UN

Rise to power and leadership style (born 1984)

Rachel Minyoung Lee

Much skepticism prevailed over North Korea's fate following Kim Jong Il's death in December 2011. North Korea was in the hands of a 20-something-year-old leader who underwent a much shorter grooming process than his father, who had at least two decades of leadership experience under the wings of Kim Il Sung.[1] Moreover, the country entered an unchartered territory of being the only modern state that is not a constitutional monarchy to be led by a third-generation hereditary successor.[2] North Korea, however, has once again proven to be resilient, defying voices of doubt and concern.

North Korea has acquired greater tactical and strategic weapons capabilities under the young leader. At the same time, the country picked up and built on a series of economic reform measures started in Kim Jong Il's time, even codifying Kim Jong Un's reform measures in the constitution. The country seems to be pulling through, despite ongoing economic hardships from prolonged international sanctions that even North Korean state media and Kim Jong Un himself have openly acknowledged, only aggravated in 2020 by the country's strict self-imposed quarantine measures against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the summer floods.

Due to North Korea's unique power structure centered on the top Kim leader, comprehending the sources of Kim Jong Un's power and his leadership style is crucial to understanding the Kim regime.[3] In that vein, this chapter will review Kim Jong Un in three parts, focusing on internal political factors and dynamics: the origins of Kim Jong Un's power; the process by which he cemented his power; and how Kim has continued to bolster his position as the supreme leader through his leadership style, which is a unique combination of Kim Il Sung's and his own.

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The legacy

Kim Jong Un's (Table 16.1) greatest claim to succession is his bloodline. The symbolism of Kim Jong Un on a white horse on Mt. Paektu in October 2019 was unequivocal to internal and external observers alike: Kim Jong Un is the legitimate successor to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, carrying on the "bloodline of Paektu," a widely known reference to the Kim family.[4]

He was chosen over his two older brothers, which defied the Confucian tradition of handing over the reins of power to the eldest son of the family. Ko Yong-suk, Kim Jong Un's maternal aunt, claimed that there were signals since Kim was eight years old that he would one day succeed Kim Jong Il.[5] South Korean media reported that Kim Jong Il issued a "directive around January 8," 2009, Kim Jong Un's birthday, that he had named his youngest son the successor.[6] Kim Jong Il's stroke in the summer of 2008, which resulted in his longest public absence of 50 days, expedited the succession process.[7]

Path to Solidifying Power

TABLE 16.1 Kim Jong Un at a Glance

Date of Birth	January 8, 1984 (year of birth also rumored to be 1982 or 1983)
Place of Birth	Unknown
Education	Kim Il Sung Military University
Family	Father: Kim Jong Il
	Mother: Ko Yong Hui
	Full siblings: Kim Jong Chol (older brother), Kim Yo Jong (younger sister)
	Wife: Ri Sol Ju
Career Highlights	September 2010: Korean People's Army (KPA) four-star general; Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Central Committee (CC) member; WPK Central Military Commission (CMC) vice chairman
	December 2011: Member of the State Funeral Committee for Kim Jong Il
	December 2011: KPA supreme commander
	April 2012: WPK first secretary; WPK CC Political Bureau (PB) Presidium member; WPK CC PB member; WPK CMC chairman; National Defense Commission (NDC) first chairman
	July 2012: Republic Marshal
	March 2014: Deputy to the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) (Paektusan Constituency (No. 111))
	May 2016: WPK chairman; reelected as WPK CC member, WPK CC PB Presidium member, WPK CC PB member, and WPK CMC chairman
	June 2016: State Affairs Commission (SAC) chairman
	April 2019: Reelected as SAC chairman
	January 2021: WPK general secretary; reelected as WPK CC member, WPK CC PB Presidium member, WPK CC PB member, and WPK CMC chairman

Cementing power as successor-designate

Kim Jong Un has cemented his power in phases through the years. He made his public debut at the Third Party Representatives Conference in September 2010. Unlike his father, who was elected to all top three bodies of the Party Central Committee (CC) at the Sixth Party Congress in October 1980, his coming-out venue, Kim Jong Un received only one major party title: vice chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Central Military Commission (CMC). The CMC is the party's top military guidance organ, and Kim Jong Un's second-in-command position in the CMC, only after Kim Jong Il, placed him well for seizing control of the Korean People's Army (KPA) through the CMC. Concerns about Kim Jong Il's health and the potential curtailment of the young leader's succession process loomed large by the time Kim Jong Un was anointed the successor in late 2008 or January 2009. Kim Jong Un's sole major title reflected the primacy of strengthening his power within the military for stable succession and post-succession regime stability. Kim Jong Il himself began to further cement his position in the military after he was elected as a CMC member at the 1980 party congress.[8]

North Korean state-run television's first documentary dedicated to Kim Jong Un – aired on his first birthday following Kim Jong Il's death – showed a number of his previously undisclosed on-site military inspections, with or without his father, prior to his official debut in September 2010. The documentary was clearly intended to portray Kim Jong Un as the legitimate and well-prepared successor to Kim Jong Il's military-first politics. It confirmed that Kim started building his credentials in the military first while being groomed the successor.

Solidifying the foundation as leader

Following Kim Jong Il's death, Kim Jong Un took all of his father's titles in the military, party, and state – in that order – in the course of four months. Just 13 days after Kim Jong Il died, Kim Jong Un proceeded to take the KPA supreme commander title, consistent with his efforts since he was the successor-designate to seize control of the military first. At the Fourth Party Representatives Conference in April 2012, Kim was elected to the top party post and all other party positions that had been held by his father, heralding the official launch of the Kim Jong Un era. Moreover, North Korea codified in the preamble of the party charter "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism" – Kim Il Sung's *Juche* (self-reliance) idea and Kim Jong Il's *Songun* (military-first) idea – as the "monolithic guiding idea" of the party. It was clearly an effort to bolster the ideological foundation of the Kim Jong Un regime and legitimize him as the late leaders' successor.[9] Two days after the conference, Kim was elected as the head of the National Defense Commission (NDC), the top state organ, at a Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) meeting. This is the equivalent of a parliamentary session.

Kim Jong Un's efforts to solidify his power base in the military continued into the early years of his rule. This is evidenced by the unusually frequent reshuffles of

the top North Korean military officials – ministers of the People's Armed Forces (MPAF) and chiefs of the KPA General Staff (GS) – in the first few years of Kim's leadership. The MPAF officially represents the military and performs military administration while the KPA GS commands military operations. In the first two years of his rule, Kim appointed four ministers of the People's Armed Forces, each serving between six and 13 months. Similarly, three KPA GS chiefs served Kim Jong Un in just the first 21 months of his leadership, each serving between three to nine months. The volatility of the MPAF head and KPA GS chief positions in the early years of Kim Jong Un's leadership was a stark contrast to Kim Jong Il's 17-year tenure, during which only three ministers of the People's Armed Forces and four KPA GS chiefs served. According to the South Korean intelligence agency's tally in July 2015, Kim Jong Un had replaced 20 to 30% of party and state officials while reshuffling more than 40% of military personnel since ascending to power.[10] The agency attributed Kim's extensive military personnel shuffles to his intent to curb the military's further expansion of power.

Kim Jong Un's leadership consolidation campaign culminated in the execution of his uncle Jang Song Thaek in December 2013. Jang is widely known to have played a key role in Kim Jong Un's succession process, but when Kim Jong Un ascended to power, he likely perceived Jang's power base in the party as a threat to his own leadership and policies.[11] The process of Jang's purge and execution was unusually high-profile, reminiscent of the purge and subsequent execution of Kim Il Sung's top rival Pak Hon Yong in the 1950s. Pak's removal cleared the way for Kim Il Sung to cement his monolithic rule in the party. Similarly, North Korean media used Jang's execution to promote domestic unity and rally the entire country around Kim Jong Un.[12] North Korea reportedly completed executions of Jang's close confidants and associates in 2014, closing the chapter on this crucial milestone of Kim Jong Un's path to cementing leadership.[13]

Social controls and nuclear development, long-standing legacies of the successive Kim regimes, are two other means by which Kim has sought to bolster his power and regime security.

North Korea's atrocious human rights records are well known. The UN General Assembly has passed a resolution on the country's human rights every year since 2005.[14] Kim Jong Un's half-brother Jong Nam was assassinated in Malaysia in 2017, almost certainly at the direct order of the North Korean leader himself. There was also the high-profile case of Otto Warmbier, the American student who died within days of returning home after being detained in North Korea for 17 months. These are just two examples of North Korean security apparatuses' vast network of social surveillance and the extent to which Pyongyang will go to preserve regime security.[15] Kim continues to operate political prisons and execute officials to instill a sense of fear in the populace.[16]

The history of North Korea's nuclear program goes back to the 1950s, and since its inception, it has been inextricably linked to regime survival, the continuity of the Kim family's leadership, and economic development.[17] Kim Jong Un from the early years of his leadership unveiled his resolve to be recognized as

a nuclear state and made nuclear and missile development a regime priority. In April 2012, North Korea revised the constitution to stipulate that the country was a "nuclear state."[18] One year later, at a party plenary meeting in March 2013, Kim proclaimed the *byungjin* line – a "new strategic line on carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously."[19] In an apparent attempt to legitimize his focus on arms development in lieu of fully concentrating on the economy, Kim pointed out that he was building on a legacy started by his forefathers and explained how building nuclear forces would also be beneficial to the economy. North Korean state media portrayed the "hydrogen bomb" test on September 3, 2017, and test-fire of the *Hwasong*-15 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on November 29 in that same year as "completing the state nuclear force."[20] These events ended North Korea's provocation cycle that had peaked in 2016 and 2017 and paved the way for a momentous party meeting in April 2018 where Kim announced a moratorium on nuclear and ICBM testing and a shift from the *byungjin* policy to a "new strategic line" of "concentrating all efforts on socialist economic construction."[21]

Elevating own status

North Korea held the Seventh Party Congress in May 2016, the country's first party congress since 1980.[22] It showed off a confident Kim Jong Un at the helm of the party, delivering multiple speeches and setting major domestic and foreign policy goals for the country, just as his grandfather did in past party congresses.

If the Fourth Party Representatives Conference in 2012 highlighted Kim Jong Un as the successor to his forefathers' legacies, the Seventh Party Congress cemented Kim as the leader of the North Korean party in his own right. The congress revised the party charter's preamble to add language about Kim Jong Un's achievements as party leader. This was notable progress from the existing preamble to the party charter, whose opening paragraphs were solely dedicated to the late leaders' accomplishments, with only three brief mentions of Kim Jong Un. Furthermore, the revised party charter changed the "secretary" positions in the WPK to "chairman" titles. Accordingly, "WPK first secretary" became "WPK chairman," and WPK CC secretaries became WPK CC vice chairmen. Kim Jong Un was thus coronated as "chairman of the WPK" at the Seventh Party Congress, finally shedding his "WPK first secretary" title, a remnant from his father's time. He now possessed his own title.

North Korea followed up on the revision of the party charter with constitutional revisions at a SPA session the following month. Unlike the previous two constitutional revisions under Kim Jong Un in 2012 and 2013, which were primarily focused on paying proper respects to Kim Jong Il, the 2016 revisions were focused on empowering Kim Jong Un and the state organ he dominated. The constitution replaced the National Defense Commission, a legacy from Kim Jong Il's era, with a new top state organ, the State Affairs Commission (SAC). It broadened the scope of the SAC's and the SAC chairman's (Kim Jong Un) authority to

all policy areas, not just national defense. Although the pre-2016 North Korean constitution gave the head of the NDC the authority to "direct the overall affairs of the state" (Article 103 (1)), some clauses limited the reach of the NDC and its first chairman to defense personnel and policy. Similar to his new party title, the SAC's replacement of the NDC meant Kim Jong Un could stow away the "NDC first chairman" title and enjoy his own unique state appellation of "SAC chairman."

Joining the ranks of the forefathers

Building on the expansion of the SAC's and the SAC chairman's powers in 2016, North Korea conducted two back-to-back constitutional revisions in 2019 that further increased the authority of the SAC and SAC chairman. North Korea has not only restored to Kim Jong Un some of Kim Il Sung's powers as DPRK president, Kim's powers as SAC chairman now even surpass those of his grandfather in some ways. For example, the constitutional revision in April 2019 reinstated to Kim Jong Un the right to "represent" North Korea, mirroring Kim Il Sung's status as DPRK president.[23] The revision in August 2019 gave the SAC chairman the right to appoint or recall North Korean diplomatic representatives (Article 104(5)), exceeding even Kim Il Sung's powers as DPRK president.

North Korea's back-to-back constitutional revisions were a first since the birth of the country's socialist constitution in 1972. They provide a unique insight into the country's planning for further elevating the supreme leader against the backdrop of his diplomatic successes that began in early 2018, after North Korea declared the completion of the construction of its nuclear armed forces in late 2017. Kim engaged in a string of summit talks with the Chinese, South Korean, US, and Cuban presidents that year. Kim's international debut at the first US-North Korea summit in Singapore in June 2018 was a successful one. He and Trump signed a historic joint statement and built personal rapport. Perhaps just as importantly, Kim projected an image of a normal head of state meeting with the president of the world's most powerful nation. This experience seems to have given Kim the confidence that he would be able to hammer out a deal at the second summit with Trump that would result in the lifting of key economic sanctions in exchange for North Korea's dismantlement of Yongbyon nuclear facilities. Convinced of another success in Hanoi, North Korea appears to have planned for rolling out the back-to-back constitutional changes in one stroke, at the April 2019 SPA session, when Kim Jong Un's diplomatic accomplishment would still be fresh in the minds of the people.

When Kim returned home empty-handed due to differences with Trump over the extent of North Korea's nuclear dismantlement, Pyongyang seems to have shifted to a more prudent path of phasing out its sweeping constitutional changes, rather than implementing them all at once.[24] This was probably out of concern about how the domestic public, and perhaps even the top echelons of the North Korean leadership, might perceive the expansive broadening of Kim powers, some of which would have been evocative of Kim Il Sung's, in the wake of a failed summit with

Washington. This explains why Pyongyang made only one key change to the SAC chairman section of the constitution in April – that the SAC chairman represents the state – without even disclosing the change to the public, an unprecedented secrecy surrounding a constitutional revision in Kim Jong Un's time. Between the April and August SPA sessions, North Korea intensified a leadership campaign designed to indoctrinate the populace in Kim Jong Un's attributes, competence, and achievements. The campaign culminated in an unusual national meeting that was clearly intended to further elevate the SAC's and the SAC chairman's public profile prior to completing the constitutional revisions in August.[25]

At the week-long Eighth Party Congress that started on January 5, 2021, Kim Jong Un was elected as the "general secretary" of the WPK. This was a symbolically significant development in Kim Jong Un's leadership timeline: Kim at last claimed the party leadership title that was held by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, effectively placing himself in the same ranks as the late leaders. Kim's title change aligned with a revision of the party charter at the party congress that changed back all the "chairman" titles to "secretary" titles in party committees. North Korean media explained the reason for this change as "thoroughly guaranteeing the party's authority as the supreme form of political organization," pointing out that "chairman" titles were used not just in party committees but non-WPK organizations as well.[26] This underscores an effort to give a sense of exclusivity to the WPK and further elevate the status of the party and therefore that of its head, Kim Jong Un.

Leadership style

In addition to the leadership titles, purges, and the party charter and constitutional revisions, the Pyongyang regime has sought to reinforce Kim Jong Un's legitimacy and leadership by dexterously building a public persona of him that was modeled on Kim Il Sung in many ways. Kim Jong Un even went beyond his grandfather by creating his own brand of leadership – pragmatism and transparency.

Propaganda matters in a closed society like North Korea: it shapes and manages public opinion at home and abroad, and it has been a pivotal tool for propping up the North Korean regime. In that context, the North Korean propaganda apparatus carefully calibrates how the top leader is portrayed in state media, ranging from his words, looks, and the cadres accompanying the leader, to the frequency of his public appearances and the places he visits. In North Korea, reports on and photos and footage of the Kim leader's public activities are labeled "No. 1," for example "No. 1 report" and "No. 1 photo." They undergo the strictest vetting processes, given their top importance in the hierarchy of all North Korean propaganda content.[27]

It's all about the image

> Our officers and men have taken on too much and are suffering much hardship. So I am so sorry, and my heart aches because I cannot be with them all on this night of glory. . . . I have received such great trust from our people,

> who are like the sky and the sea, and I am really ashamed that I have not once been able to repay them properly in kind. . . . [M]y efforts and devotion have fallen short, and our people have not yet been able to break away from the difficulties of their everyday life.[28]

It is hard to believe that these humble, apologetic words were uttered in tears and a choked-up voice by North Korea's young, charismatic leader at, of all venues, a military parade commemorating one of the major political celebrations of the country: the 75th founding anniversary of the WPK in October 2020.[29]

Kim's emotional speech, though it may have seemed a candid acknowledgment of failure and even a sign of weakness, only belied the leader's growing confidence as the supreme leader of North Korea. The speech, a departure from the norm on multiple levels, was a testament to how much the country's propaganda has evolved over the years. It was carefully curated to resonate with, rather than indoctrinate, the public by doing away with the traditional ideological themes and appealing to the people with pragmatic language and the leader's human side.

It was the latest in Kim Jong Un's many public speeches since he delivered his first at a military parade on April 15, 2012 marking Kim Il Sung's birth centennial.[30] His maiden speech at that politically significant event was clearly intended to underscore Kim Jong Un as his grandfather's heir and evoke images of Kim Il Sung. Kim revived Kim Il Sung's practice of delivering public speeches. Accordingly, he resumed making New Year's speeches, policy speeches at the opening sessions of the SPA, and speeches at party meetings, in addition to giving speeches at military parades. Kim Jong Il, who did not enjoy public spotlight as did his father, discontinued giving public speeches. He replaced New Year's speeches with "joint editorials." He attended all SPA opening sessions but did not speak. Party meetings were near-defunct under Kim Jong Il.

Attire was another means by which Kim Jong Un attempted to liken himself to his grandfather. For his first public speech on his grandfather's birth centennial, for example, Kim Jong Un wore a dark Mao jacket, similar to what Kim Il Sung enjoyed wearing in public.

Furthermore, like his grandfather, Kim Jong Un brought his wife out into the open. Kim Jong Un's wife Ri Sol Ju has made regular public appearances with Kim Jong Un since July 2012, shortly after Kim Jong Un gained all the top party, state, and military titles. Similarly, Kim Il Sung's second wife Kim Song Ae regularly appeared in public with her husband between 1964 and the mid-1970s. Kim Jong Il's spouse, however, was not once disclosed to the general public in official state media.

Pragmatism and transparency

Despite the prevailing ideological rhetoric in North Korean state media, a closer reading between the lines shows that pragmatism and results take precedence over ideology and talk under Kim Jong Un. Kim's speech at the military parade marking

the WPK's 75th founding anniversary, which was largely devoid of ideological themes, is a stark example of how ideology is no longer the North Korean leadership's main concern. Another major indicator is the steady decline of ideological themes and language in Kim Jong Un's New Year's speeches over the years.

Kim's tendency to play down ideology and emphasize pragmatism has most keenly affected the cultural and economic sectors.

In July 2012, shortly after Kim Jong Un ascended to power, North Korea surprised the world with Moranbong Band's debut show. It showcased female performers wearing skin-tight Western attire, foreign songs, and Western cartoon characters such as Winnie the Pooh. It was a major deviation from the country's past music performances, which typically featured female performers wearing traditional Korean garb or KPA musicians clad in military uniforms. According to North Korean state media, Kim Jong Un praised the band for "innovating boldly" and encouraged it to "boldly introduce good things, even if they are from other countries."[31] It was an unusual top North Korean leadership endorsement of foreign cultural elements.

The country's state media took another extraordinary step of associating the top leader with openness to foreign culture in May 2013, when state-run television showed him tour a Pyongyang shop where logos of renowned French and South Korean cosmetics brands were prominently displayed in English.[32] North Korea's cultural and propaganda modernization efforts are ongoing. A recent example is the military parade marking the party's 75th founding anniversary in October 2020, which was held in a festival-like atmosphere with live music and singing similar to major political celebrations in South Korea and Western countries, setting it apart from the rigid North Korean military parades of the past.

North Korea has increased crackdown on foreign cultural elements, particularly South Korean, since the passage of the "law on rejecting the reactionary ideology and culture" in December 2020 as part of its intensified self-reliance campaign.[33] Kim Jong Un's past track record, however, indicates that North Korea may return to a more forward-leaning position on foreign culture once its domestic situation improves, and the strictest forms of social control are no longer required.

Kim Jong Un's unprecedented receptiveness to experimentation and innovation in the realm of culture is reflected in his economic policy as well. He reportedly presented reform-oriented guidelines to a group of economic officials and academics at the end of 2011, shortly after his father's death.[34] They were reviewed, tested out in some units, and rolled out incrementally across the country. These measures included the "socialist enterprise responsibility management system [SERMS]," which was significant for its shift away from the state's unilaterally handing down of production goals to each economic unit, to a system of giving individual economic units greater latitude across the entire process of planning, production, and management of resources and profits. SERMS was launched on a full scale in May 2014 after a trial period. It was officially proclaimed as part of North Korea's "economic management methods" during the Seventh Party Congress in May 2016, before being codified in the North Korean constitution (Article 33) in April 2019.

Another key reform measure is the "field responsibility system," small-scale incentivized farming that was first executed on a trial basis in the early 2000s under Kim Jong Il and was picked up again by Kim Jong Un.[35] Greater rights for lower units translate into increased accountability for planning, production, and management. This, in turn, requires initiative and outside-the-box thinking. Accordingly, "innovation" and "creativity" consistently have been the key themes of Kim Jong Un's economic policy.

Transparency, arguably an offshoot of pragmatism, also is a noted hallmark of Kim Jong Un's leadership style. North Korea rarely acknowledged problems, let alone apologized for them under Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Kim Jong Un took a different path by openly acknowledging shortcomings and apologizing for them as needed, rather than concealing them or painting a mirage that all is well. An early example is when North Korean media reported on a group of senior leadership taking turns apologizing to the victims of a building collapse at a housing construction site in Pyongyang in May 2014. Furthermore, state media often report on Kim Jong Un pointing out problems and criticizing functionaries during his field inspections.[36] Most recently, in addition to the apology in his October 2020 military parade speech, Kim in his opening speech at the Eighth Party Congress acknowledged that "almost all sectors fell a long way short" of meeting the 2016–2020 five-year national economic development strategy's targets.[37]

Collective decision-making

Kim Jong Un revived party meetings that were regularly held under Kim Il Sung but remained largely defunct under Kim Jong Il, clearly signaling that he prefers collective decision-making processes. North Korean state media coverage of party meetings often shows Kim talking at a roundtable surrounded by party officials, projecting an image of the highest North Korean leadership reaching policy decisions as a group through a process, rather than the supreme leader unilaterally calling the shots. Further underscoring this angle, state media in 2020 started to focus less on *Kim Jong Un*'s remarks at party meetings and more on the *meetings* or the *Political Bureau* (PB) having discussions or reaching decisions.

Kim Jong Un has utilized the gamut of party meetings – ranging from politburo (Political Bureau), CMC, and Executive Policy Council meetings to party plenary meetings, party representatives conferences, and party congresses – to discuss and proclaim domestic and foreign policy decisions and conduct party personnel shuffles. Lately, the leader has aggressively used party meetings to project an image of looking after the people. Kim Jong Un presided over an unusual flurry of party meetings between June and September 2020, mostly to discuss COVID, the economy, and flooding, all issues that have a direct bearing on the people's livelihood. This resulted in a skyrocketing number of North Korean party meetings in 2020. According to a review of North Korean state media reporting, Kim Jong Un presided over 20 party meetings in 2020 alone, 12 of them politburo meetings. This is a significant

increase over the number of party meetings in previous years. Kim attended or guided between one and five party meetings each year between 2012 and 2019.

At the Eighth Party Congress in January 2021, North Korea took a step further to institutionalize collective decision-making processes and delegation of duties centered on the Presidium of the PB, composed of the regime's top officials, including Kim Jong Un. The revised party charter created a new article empowering the Presidium of the PB to discuss and reach decisions on key political, economic, military, and personnel issues, and PB Presidium members to preside over PB meetings at Kim Jong Un's authorization.[38] The revised party charter paves the way for fewer Kim appearances at PB meetings and possibly portends more selective public appearances in the future by the leader, which in turn would also have the effect of setting Kim further apart from the rest of the PB Presidium members in terms of prestige.

Conclusion

The systematic way in which Kim Jong Un ascended to power and cemented his position shows the resilience of North Korea's intricate web of apparatuses and tools mobilized for the Kim leadership. This machinery was not institutionalized overnight. It was created, strengthened, and streamlined over decades, going back to the time Kim Il Sung defeated his political rivals in the 1950s and 1960s and installed himself as the sole top leader. This system has withstood multiple storms from within and without over the years, and it will continue to serve as the buffer as well as enabler for the top Kim leader.

A dearth of credible North Korean economic and trade data makes it impossible to know the exact extent to which the national COVID lockdown and prolonged international sanctions have impacted the country's economy.[39] Experts, however, unanimously agree that the year 2020 has aggravated the country's economic hardships, also corroborated by North Korean state media's consistently heavy focus on the economy and Kim Jong Un's acknowledgment of economic difficulties in his opening address to the Eighth Party Congress.[40] Kim's key message to the public in the wake of the second US-North Korea summit was "self-reliance."[41] The collapse of the Hanoi summit, followed by a tug-of-war between Pyongyang and Washington that yielded no deal by the end of 2019, hardened Kim Jong Un's stance that North Korea was in a long-term stand-off with the United States, and that the only way to keep his country together was maintaining domestic order and striving for a self-sufficient economy. North Korea's attempts at greater political, social, and economic control since the spring of 2019, triggered by the failure of the Hanoi summit, escalated in 2020 as the COVID lockdown continued and the deteriorating economic conditions and rising discontent in the country called for more drastic control mechanisms. This culminated in the passage of laws on "rejecting reactionary ideology and culture" and mobile telecommunications at the end of 2020 and the creation of a "new discipline and supervision system" in the party in early 2021.[42]

North Korea now appears to be gearing up for a post-COVID era, judging from Kim's comment at the Eighth Party Congress on "comprehensively developing the external relations."[43] To revive the country's ailing economy, Kim will almost certainly focus on expanding ties with China first, building on a rare succession of five summits he held with Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2018 and 2019.[44] North Korea's recent appointment of trade expert Ri Ryong Nam, former foreign trade minister and most recently a cabinet vice premier, as ambassador to China shows the primacy Pyongyang gives to further expanding economic ties with Beijing.[45]

These latest developments alone show that the Kim Jong Un regime will remain a force to be reckoned with, whether we like it or not. In that vein, accurate understanding of North Korea's leadership dynamics and institutions is essential for gaining insight into the country's stability and Kim Jong Un's present and future domestic and foreign policy calculations. The relevance of North Korea's stability to regional and global security is unequivocal; the importance of Kim Jong Un's intent cannot be understated for the policies of countries concerned.

That said, the closed nature of North Korean society and the regime's strict control of information make North Korea a highly elusive target, even for trained experts with years of experience watching the country. The difficulty of tracking North Korea becomes significantly amplified with leadership issues, particularly those concerning the top Kim leader, which are hardly made transparent due to political sensitivities.[46] In researching, collecting on, and analyzing this "hard target," North Korea experts hopefully will be guided by time-tested methodologies rather than instinct, speculation, or a misreading of signals in North Korean propaganda.

Notes

1 For a comparison of succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il, and from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un, see Jae-Cheon Lim, "North Korea's Hereditary Succession: Comparing Two Key Transitions in the DPRK," *Asian Survey*, vol. 52/3 (2012): 550–570.
2 Ibid.
3 For a broader discussion of autocratic regimes' survival tools and how these apply to North Korea, see Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea," *International Security*, vol. 35/1 (2010): 44–74.
4 Mt. Paektu has long figured as the centerpiece of North Korean leadership propaganda. To North Koreans, this sacred mountain is the main setting of Kim Il Sung's battles against the Japanese during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea; it is also publicized as Kim Jong Il's birthplace. White horses also have deep ties to the Kim leadership. According to North Korean propaganda, a white horse miraculously saved Kim Il Sung's life during a battle against the Japanese. Since then, Kim Il Sung on a white horse has become part of the legend, and Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un also have been pictured on white horses.
5 Anna Fifield, "The Secret Life of Kim Jong Un's Aunt, Who Has Lived in the U.S. Since 1998," *Washington Post* (May 27, 2016): www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/the-secret-life-of-kim-jong-uns-aunt-who-has-lived-in-the-us-since-1998/2016/05/26/522e4ec8-12d7-11e6-a9b5-bf703a5a7191_story.html.

6 Kim Hyun, "(2nd LD) N. Korean Leader Names Third Son as Successor: Sources," *Yonhap* (January 15, 2009): https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20090115008200315. In the meantime, North Korea leadership expert Cheong Seong-Chang of the Sejong Institute observed that Kim Jong Un had already been designated as the successor within the North Korean leadership by December 2008. See Cheong Seong-Chang, "Kim Jong Un-ui jongchi lidosip [Kim Jong Un's Political Leadership]," in *Kim Jong Un lidosip yongu* [*Research on Kim Jong Un's Leadership*] (Seongnam: Sejong Institute, 2017), 25.

7 North Korean state media actually started laying the groundwork for third-generation hereditary succession in the early 2000s, years prior to Kim Jong Un's public debut in 2010. The succession campaign was extremely subtle and would have been discernible to only knowledgeable insiders, reflecting the highly sensitive nature of succession in North Korean politics. After a few years of dormancy, the campaign picked up again following Kim Jong Il's stroke in 2008. North Korean state media's succession campaign for Kim Jong Un was modeled on Kim Jong Il's succession process in the 1970s. For more on North Korean media's Kim Jong Il succession campaign and Pyongyang's succession politics, see Morgan E. Clippinger, "Kim Chong-il in the North Korean Mass Media: A Study of Semi-Esoteric Communication," *Asian Survey*, vol. 21/3 (1981): 289–309.

8 Cheong Seong-Chang, *Hyondae bukhanui jongchi: Yoksa, inyom, gwollyokchegye* [*The Contemporary North Korean Politics: History, Ideology and Power System*] (Seoul: Hanul Publishing, 2011), 107–108.

9 "Joson rodongdang gyuyak somun [Preamble of the WPK]," *Minju Joson* (April 12, 2012). Building on the 2012 party charter revision, a North Korean constitutional revision in April 2019 replaced Kim Il Sung's *Juche* idea and Kim Jong Il's *Songun* idea with Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as the "monolithic guiding principle" (Article 3). See "Sahoejuui honbop [Socialist Constitution]," *Naenara* (July 11, 2019): http://naenara.com.kp/index.php/Main/index/ko/politics?arg_val=constitution. In another revision of the party charter at the Eighth Party Congress in January 2021, North Korea "further highlighted" Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism. See "WPK Rules Revised at 8th Congress of WPK," *Rodong Sinmun* (January 10, 2021): http://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2021-01-10-0001.

10 Chin Sung-hoon and Kim Yong-shin, "Gukjongwon 'buk naebu buranjongyoin jungga . . . Kim Jong Un yechuk bulga' [National Intelligence Agency: "Unstable Factors Inside the North Increasing . . . Kim Jong Un Unpredictable"]," *News1* (July 14, 2015): www.news1.kr/articles/?2328990.

11 According to North Korean state media, Jang was executed on grounds of attempted "state subversion" that included "anti-party, counter-revolutionary factional acts." See "Traitor Jang Song Thaek Executed," *KCNA* (December 13, 2013): www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201312/news13/20131213-05ee.html.

12 The party daily *Rodong Sinmun*'s December 9, 2013 report on Jang's purge was immediately followed by a score and lyrics dedicated to Kim Jong Un. On December 13, 2013, the day it reported on Jang's execution, *Rodong Sinmun* carried an authoritative and rare full-front-page article on party unity.

13 Cheong Seong-Chang, "Kim Jong Un-ui jongchi lidosip," 40–41.

14 Byun Duk-kun, "(LEAD) UN Passes N. Korean Human Rights Resolution for 16th Consecutive Year," *Yonhap* (December 17, 2020): https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20201217000251325.

15 "Pyongyang Gov't Behind Murder of Kim Jong-nam: Spy Agency," *Yonhap* (February 27, 2017): https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170227010900315; Chang Jae-soon, "(3rd LD) U.S. Student Released from N. Korea Dies," *Yonhap* (June 20, 2017): https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170620000553315.

16 Sookyung Kim, Kyu-chang Lee, Kyung-ok Do, and Jea-hwan Hong, "Political Prison Camps," in *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2019* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2019), 452–465; Cheong Seong-Chang, "Kim Jong Un-ui jongchi lidosip," 38–42.

17 Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., "North Korea's Development of a Nuclear Strategy," *38 North* (August 3, 2015): www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/NKNF_Nuclear-Weapons-Strategy_Bermudez.pdf.
18 Lee Chi-dong, "U.S. to 'Never' Accept N. Korea as Nuclear State: State Dept.," *Yonhap* (May 31, 2012): https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20120531000300315.
19 "Report on Plenary Meeting of WPK Central Committee," *KCNA* (March 31, 2013): http://kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201303/news31/20130331-24ee.html.
20 "DPRK Nuclear Weapons Institute on Successful Test of H-Bomb for ICBM," *Rodong Sinmun* (September 4, 2017): https://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2017-09-04-0009; Political News Team, "Kim Jong Un Guides Test-Fire of ICBM Hwasong-15," *Rodong Sinmun* (November 29, 2017): https://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2017-11-29-0001.
21 Political News Team, "3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK Held in Presence of Kim Jong Un," *Rodong Sinmun* (April 21, 2018): https://rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2018-04-21-0019.
22 According to the WPK Charter, the party congress is the WPK's supreme organ and is convened to review the work of the WPK CC and the WPK Central Auditing Commission; adopt, revise, or supplement party programs and the party charter; discuss and decide party lines, policies, strategies, and tactics; elect the head of the WPK; and elect the party leadership. The agenda of the Eighth Party Congress convened in January 2021 was reviewing the work of the WPK CC and the WPK Central Auditing Commission; revising the party charter; and electing the WPK leadership.
23 Article 100 of the North Korean constitution reads: "The DPRK SAC chairman is the supreme leader of the DPRK who represents the state." See the similarity in the corresponding provision in the 1972 constitution: "The DPRK president is the head of state and represents the national sovereignty of the DPRK" (Article 89).
24 In a news conference following the collapse of the Hanoi summit, North Korean Foreign Ministry officials said they had offered Washington the permanent dismantlement of Yongbyon nuclear facilities for the lifting of key economic sanctions but the United States asked for "one more" measure. In a background briefing following the Hanoi summit, a senior US State Department official clarified that the United States had asked for "complete elimination of their weapons of mass destruction program." See Sarah Kim, "North Denies Trump's Take on Summit's Failure," *Korea JoongAng Daily* (March 1, 2019): https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2019/03/01/politics/North-denies-Trumps-take-on-summits-failure/3060045.html; "Special Briefing: Senior State Department Official on North Korea," *US Department of State Website* (March 7, 2019): https://2017-2021.state.gov/senior-state-department-official-on-north-korea/index.html.
25 This meeting was unusual because it was the country's first official commemoration of Kim Jong Un's election as the SAC chairman three years after he was first elected to that position in 2016. What made this event even more unusual was that Kim Jong Un's sole portrait was placed on stage at a national meeting for the first observed time. Chung Kyo-jin, a Seoul-based North Korea researcher, observed that the appearance of Kim Jong Un's smiling portrait – known as *taeyangsang,* or "image of the sun" – said much about Kim Jong Un's status because smiling portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il only appeared after their deaths. Chung noted that "images of the sun" should be distinguished from regular portraits of a Kim leader, or portraits where he is not smiling. See Chung Kyo-jin, "Pyongyang pokosu: Kim Jong Un taeyangsang chosanghwa dungjang, gabyopke bol il anida [Pyongyang Focus: Appearance of Kim Jong Un's Image of the Sun Should Not Be Taken Lightly]," *Daily NK* (July 19, 2019): www.dailynk.com/%ED%8F%89%EC%96%91-%ED%8F%AC%EC%BB%A4%EC%8A%A4-%EA%B9%80%EC%A0%95%EC%9D%80-%ED%83%9C%EC%96%91%EC%83%81-%EC%B4%88%EC%83%81%ED%99%94-%EB%93%B1%EC%9E%A5-%EA%B0%80%EB%B3%8D%EA%B2%8C-%EB%B3%BC-%EC%9D%BC/.

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17

ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI

The one and only Egyptian dictator (born 1954)

Robert Springborg

An investigation of how Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi attained and has subsequently maintained power reveals classic characteristics of modern dictators. Since their rule rests primarily upon fear, the key characteristic is manifest intent and capacity to instill it. The related dictatorial strategy is cultivating greed, fear's companion as twin driver of behavior, both in equity markets and in authoritarian regimes. Providing preferential access to material resources, primarily through corruption, serves as glue with which the dictator can cement loyalty of underlings, and as solvent, with which the dictator can dissolve opposition by associating it with corruption. A third characteristic of the dictator is the distinctive, if very distorted image he cultivates. He fosters an at least grudging respect for his audacity, accomplishments, and alleged self-sacrifice in the service of the nation. He merges his person with the nation, intertwining in the popular view his and his country's fates. The constructed dictatorial image may also emphasize personal austerity and toughness, leavened by ostensible concern for the poor and downtrodden, characteristics associated with mafia "godfathers."

Dictatorial rule is inherently conspiratorial, requiring of the dictator that he suspect all, keeps his own counsel, moves suddenly and decisively against perceived competitors, and lies brazenly, all behaviors which President Sisi manifests abundantly. Another dictatorial characteristic is disdain for institutions that might constrain his freedom of action. In Sisi's case this disdain applies to all civilian institutions, whether political, economic or social. The only institution which he respects and empowers is the one he directly controls and which can assist him in imposing his will on the nation – the military.

While some dictatorial behavior is driven by self-conscious image creation or sheer necessities of rule, the characteristics just noted likely also reflect the dictator's core personality, as they do in the case of Sisi. Were dictators not at heart ruthless killers who truly believe in their own exceptionalism and the inferiority of those

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around them and those over whom they rule, they would neither aspire to, nor have, the possibility of becoming classical dictators. Although such beliefs may stem from an underlying inferiority complex, as Harold Laswell contended in his classic study of political leadership, they are nevertheless genuine in their manifestations and consequences.[1]

Sisi possesses the prototypical dictatorial political persona, as the following assessment of his behavior will suggest. That his dictatorship is not simply the product of an inherently dictatorial political system will be demonstrated by briefly comparing him to his presidential predecessors, all of whom have been termed dictators but none of whom sought nor succeeded in imposing such thoroughgoing, brutal one-man rule as Sisi has done. Egypt's is an authoritarian political system, not necessarily a dictatorial one.

Cursus honorum

Sisi's desire and capacity to instill fear in those around him, coupled with his conspiratorial nature, seem deeply rooted in his personality. Spending his early years in the densely inhabited Khan al Khalili quarter of Cairo, where his father owned a successful workshop and retail store producing and selling handicrafts, Sisi stood out as a loner in the sociable surrounds of a densely inhabited urban quarter in a country renowned for its gregarious peoples. Quiet, reserved, ambitious and devout, his passion was physical exercise, especially solitary weightlifting. His entry into the military academy may have been facilitated by one or more of his commissioned officer relatives, but it was likely also thanks to his austere, focused, physical approach to life. His instructors at the US Army War College noted his aloofness from fellow Egyptian officers, as well as his religiosity and dedication to studies. The rather awkwardly conceived and written mini-thesis he produced there noted incompatibilities between Islam and Western democracy. It argued that in Egypt the precepts of the former had to take precedence over those of the latter, which in any case was deemed not to be problematic because Islam he contended is inherently democratic.[2]

Presumably his appeal to senior officers lay not only in his dedication, but also in his loyalty, probably inferred by them because of his aloofness from more gregarious comrades. At an early stage he was obviously earmarked for rapid promotion in a planned career trajectory intended to take him to the military's high command, including as it did operational field and intelligence commands, as well as overseas postings to Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States. His closeness to Field Marshal and Minister of Defense Muhammad Husayn Tantawi, who was serving as head of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in the wake of President Mubarak's overthrow, was revealed in the spring of 2011, when Tantawi personally recruited Sisi into the SCAF as its youngest, lowest ranking, but most visible member.

He was immediately made responsible for that body's public communications, a vital position as Tantawi was hoping to be vaulted into the presidency from

the SCAF so needed to improve the military's public image. Sisi's initial media appearance was to explain away the SCAF's ordering of "virginity tests" on arrested female demonstrators, which he did in disingenuous fashion, implicitly denying the military's intent to intimidate demonstrators, claiming that it had only sought to protect feminine "honor." Not long after that episode Tantawi abandoned his ill-fated, floundering presidential campaign and put Sisi in charge of the SCAF's relations with the increasingly important Muslim Brotherhood, with whom the military had decided to cooperate in order to marginalize other protesters. From this strategically vital position Sisi leveraged his role as confidant of both Tantawi and the Brotherhood's leadership. In August 2012, by which time the Brother Muhammad Mursi had become president, Sisi was tapped by Mursi to replace Tantawi, whom Sisi in turn protected from further retribution, presumably not just out of loyalty to his former patron, but because siding with the Brotherhood to punish a fellow officer would undermine his standing in the military.

Over the next nine months Sisi continually reassured Mursi of his and the military's loyalty to the government, while behind the scenes he prepared its overthrow. He approached the sympathetic rulers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to provide funding for the *Tamarrud* movement, which was coaxed into existence by Sisi's old command, Military Intelligence. It organized civilians, especially youth, against Mursi and the Brotherhood, whose rule had already been weakened by its own shortcomings, compounded by the military and intelligence-led deep state's purposeful interruption of fuel and other vital commodities. The petition *Tamarrud* circulated and on which it falsely claimed to have attracted more than twenty million signatures provided key legitimation for Sisi's coup of July 3, 2013.[3] A year later more than 97% of voters supported Sisi's bid for the presidency, a year during which this cautious cultivator of powerful figures, calculating formulator of a leadership image, and adept conspirator, added that vital missing ingredient of dictatorial rule – fear – to his already impressive credentials as aspiring dictator.

Instilling fear in the population

The until-then apparently benign, youthful appearing general unleashed a reign of terror from the moment he brushed the Brotherhood aside. He ordered troops and security personnel to fire on essentially peaceful, almost entirely unarmed protesters against the coup in Cairo's Raba'a al Adawiya and Nahda squares, killing some 1,000 of them. He followed this up with a nationwide round-up of Muslim Brothers and others deemed to be opposed to the regime, incarcerating some 40,000 suspects. In 2016 a campaign of "disappearing" alleged opponents of the regime was revealed by NGO activists, whereby hundreds of suspects were grabbed off the streets and imprisoned without notification to relatives or attorneys, or formal charges or public trials. To further frighten potential regime opponents, a raft of oppressive legislation was rammed through the quiescent parliament, now headed by a former security official supported by a secretary general with a military background, the first time in the history of the Arab world's oldest parliament that

position was not held by a civilian. In addition to declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, hence subject to recently passed legislation to combat terrorism, new laws criminalized virtually any activities with potential political relevance, thereby nullifying any and all political freedoms nominally guaranteed in the new constitution ratified in 2014. That document afforded the military powers beyond those it had ever previously enjoyed, including rendering its entire budget immune from any civilian oversight. The tentacles of Sisi's former command, Military Intelligence, were spread throughout the political system, with it serving as the principal organizer of newly organized political parties that won control of parliament. To ensure that the public received the message loud and clear that there would be no constraints on Sisi's exercise of power, hundreds of executions were conducted annually from 2013 of those convicted in what were essentially show trials, many in military courts. Thousands of others were sentenced to death in absentia, and thousands more tortured in police stations and prisons, with remarkably little effort made to cover up this brutality.

To demonstrate that no one was immune to such draconian treatment, the regime also meted it out to foreigners. Among the first was al Jazeera correspondent Muhammad Fahmy, who was imprisoned for some two and a half years before the new Liberal Canadian government applied sufficient pressure to gain his release on condition that he give up his Egyptian citizenship. In January 2016 Giulio Regeni, an Italian graduate student at Cambridge University, was "disappeared," his corpse mutilated by torture being dropped ten days later along a main road on the periphery of Cairo where it was sure to be found. Initially the regime claimed his killing was done by a criminal gang, but when that explanation proved utterly implausible, it offered no other explanation amid rumors that it was in fact Sisi's very son, an officer recruited into General Intelligence from Military Intelligence, who had overseen the torture and killing. A University of Washington PhD student conducting research on the judiciary was picked up in Cairo in early 2018, held on a series of 15-day detention orders, mistreated in prison and in that spring charged with committing terrorist acts.

Instilling fear in the inner circle

Brutal and fear inspiring as this widespread, indiscriminate crackdown has been, it is of less political importance to Sisi's rule than his more targeted campaign at regime insiders. As Sheena Greitens has demonstrated in her review of hundreds of cases worldwide, less than a third of authoritarian regimes removed from power fall as a result of popular uprisings, whereas more than two thirds of those that succumb do so at the hands of regime insiders, most frequently in the form of military coups.[4]

Seemingly aware of this balance of threats to his regime, Sisi has personally selected victims from among his high-ranking military and security officer colleagues to signal that no one is beyond his reach and that the slightest breach of loyalty will be severely punished. Even those with whom he has long standing,

seemingly close personal relationships are not immune to retribution. Sidqy Subhi, for example, Sisi's classmate at the military academy and then again in the US Army War College in 2004–2005, accompanied Sisi in his rise to the top of the Egyptian military under Mursi's Muslim Brother government, being appointed Chief of Staff by Mursi simultaneously with Sisi's promotion to Minister of Defense. This would not have been possible without Sisi, who was then close to Mursi, personally vouching for and probably in fact selecting Subhi to serve in this capacity. When Sisi resigned as Minister of Defense in March 2014 to run for the presidency, he appointed Subhi as his successor. Subhi held that portfolio until June 2018 when he was unceremoniously dropped from the newly formed cabinet, being given the meaningless job of Adviser to the President. In those four years Subhi had far fewer public appearances than virtually all of his predecessors, his banishment to the political shadows presumably the result of Sisi's reluctance to share the political limelight with his old classmate and potential rival who could claim to speak on behalf of the military and indeed, possibly could have removed Sisi just as Muhammad Husayn Tantawi had removed Mubarak. Subhi was replaced by Lieutenant General Muhammad Zaki Higazi, the head of the ultra-loyal Republican Guard, the praetorian force charged with defending the president and commanded directly by him through its nominal military head. Six months previously General Higazi had been one of two officers who benefited from special legislation passed by parliament raising the retirement age for lieutenant generals from 62 to 64. The constitution requires the Minister of Defense be an active duty officer, hence in the absence of this legislation Higazi would not have qualified.

General Mahmud Higazi's (no relation to Muhammad Zaki Higazi) career trajectory similarly reveals Sisi's calculated signaling intended to strike fear into the hearts of the powerful. Higazi's daughter is married to one of Sisi's sons. When Sisi was promoted to Minister of Defense in 2012, he immediately named his old mentor at Military Intelligence, Mahmud Higazi, to replace him as head of that organization, even though Higazi was known to be strongly opposed to the Brotherhood. Higazi was then named Chief of Staff when Subhi vacated the position in 2014 to become Minister of Defense. But like Subhi, in October 2017 he was unceremoniously demoted to a presidential advisor position, implicitly being made the scapegoat for security lapses in the northern Sinai. The real cause, however, may have been his possible appeal to American decision makers as a replacement to Sisi, with whom he was meeting in Washington two days prior to his dismissal.

Sisi's treatment of another of his former officer colleagues, Sami Abul Anan, who served as Chief of Staff under Mubarak and who supported Sisi's 2013 coup, was yet more severe. Abul Anan declared his intent to offer his candidacy for the presidency in the 2018 election. He launched his campaign with a speech critical of Sisi's economic policies and their negative impacts on poor and even middle-class Egyptians, a particularly sensitive issue given IMF mandated, unpopular austerity measures which Sisi was then implementing. He nominated as his Vice-Presidential running mate Hisham Ginaina, former head of the Central Auditing Organization, who had accused the government, including the military, of corruption in the

amount of billions of dollars. Sisi countered by unleashing a campaign against Abul Anan on the grounds he was collaborating with the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the fact he had been removed by Brotherhood President Mursi from his position of Chief of Staff in 2012 when Sisi became Minister of Defense. Sisi then banned Abul Anan's candidacy on the grounds that he was still a serving military officer, which was technically but not substantively true, then upped the ante by having him arrested and incarcerated in a military prison. He suffered a stroke in the spring of 2018 and, according to his son, his transfer to a hospital was purposely delayed. His vice-presidential running mate had in the meantime been accused of various crimes and placed under arrest.

The other significant challenger to Sisi in the 2018 presidential election, former head of the Air Force and Egypt Air, Ahmad Shafiq, who had run second to Mursi in the 2012 presidential election, was placed under house arrest in a hotel adjacent to Cairo International Airport when he returned from Dubai in early 2018 to contest the election. There he sat until he announced his decision to abandon his candidacy.

General Khalid Fawzi, head of General Intelligence, which had been President Nasser's creation and the principal intelligence organization upon which he, Sadat and then Mubarak had relied, was replaced in January 2018 by General Abbas Kamil, the director of Sisi's office and long-standing colleague from the days both served in Military Intelligence. This reshuffle may have been part of a more general overhaul intended to purge General Intelligence of leftover loyalists to Mubarak who had supported either or both Abul Anan and Shafiq. To further backstop his personal control of General Intelligence Sisi transferred his son Mahmud into it from Military Intelligence.

In addition to securing his control over vital intelligence agencies, Sisi's personnel reshuffles in them sent the unmistakable message that he is on the alert for any signs of disloyalty and ready to take immediate measures to deal with potential threats, real or imagined. The same message was sent to the military with the treatments of Subhi, Higazi, Abul Anan and Shafiq. The unmistakable conclusion officers were meant to draw is that personal ties to Sisi, whether formed in the military or even through family intermarriage, are of little or no account if he perceives a lack of absolute deference and loyalty.

Counter-balancing intelligence services

In November 2019 this message was further amplified by Sisi pulling his very own son Mahmud out of General Intelligence, dispatching him as defense attache to Moscow amid a rumor campaign, presumably orchestrated by the President's office, that Mahmud had botched his handling of several "files," one of them being parliament. This interpretation should be understood within the context of Sisi's creation of a new security/intelligence triangle comprised of Military Intelligence, General Intelligence, and the National Security Agency (NSA), a triangle intended to counterbalance each of its legs. Each, for example, ensured the election

of deputies loyal to itself to parliament. Military Intelligence and General Intelligence both played a role in the 2018 presidential elections and the 2019 constitutional amendment campaign. The NSA was rumored to have been put in charge of intervening in parliament in 2019 as a result of Sisi's dissatisfaction with Speaker Abd al Aal, who apparently in his view had been too tolerant of opposition voices, possibly because he had been allowed to do so by Mahmud Sisi.

The role of Military Intelligence in civilian affairs has been circumscribed as a consequence of emphasis on its primary roles of monitoring the officer corps and overseeing the counter terrorism campaign, especially in northern Sinai. In December 2018, for example, General Muhammad al Shahat was replaced as head of Military Intelligence by General Khalid Megawar, the reason being his failure to suppress terrorism in northern Sinai. Yet Military Intelligence remains overall the strongest of the three organs, as evidenced by purges of General Intelligence officers in the Fall of 2019 as a result of the allegation they were the source of some of the information a former contractor and part-time actor, Muhammad Ali, provided about corruption in the military and presidency in gripping videos produced in Barcelona and widely viewed in Egypt.

In sum, the tripartite relationship between the key security/intelligence organs is one of competition engineered by Sisi to facilitate his personal control, especially over the military, whose high command has been repeatedly reshuffled and purged since Sisi became President. Of the original 18 members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in 2011, for example, only two remained in 2020, with 32 having been churned through. The Chief of Staff has been changed twice and the Minister of Defense once since Sisi became President, far higher turnover rates for those posts than was the case under Mubarak.

La Famiglia

But the carefully structured competition and collaboration between security organs tells only part of the story of how Sisi has extended his control. The rest of the tale can be summed up in one Italian word, *la Famiglia*. From medieval to at least some parts of contemporary Italy:

> The *famiglia* embraced a very wide field . . . not only a man's descendants . . . but even people bound to the family by common economic interests or by dependence. . . (and) was an economic entity as well as a social one.[5]

Sisi's *famiglia* thus consists of his blood relatives as well as his very close associates, tied to him by personal bonds originally forged in the military. As for the former, his sons have been sprinkled into key positions in the security organs. Mahmud, who like his father served in Military Intelligence prior to being shifted to General Intelligence where in 2018 he was promoted by his father from Major General to Brigadier General, nominally ranked number two in that body but in fact was the key figure in it prior to being removed in 2019. His director of communications

within General Intelligence was his brother Hassan, who his father transferred into the organization from a state-owned oil company where he previously had worked. Their other brother, Mustafa, is the equivalent to Mahmud in that while nominally he is number two in the vitally important Administrative Monitoring Agency (AMA) which controls the civil service and private sector of the economy, in reality he leads it. Also like his brother Mahmud, Mustafa is a career Military Intelligence officer. The Sisi brothers' only sister, Aya, was educated at the Naval Academy, quite unusual for a young Egyptian woman. As for the siblings' uncle, Sisi's brother, their father placed him in charge of the unit in the Central Bank that investigates money laundering. In that capacity he nominally reports to Tariq Amer the Director of the Central Bank and son of Abd al Hakim Amer, Nasser's long serving Minister of Defense and competitor who was ultimately liquidated. Sisi's brother's position at the Central Bank enables the President to monitor the flow of money, public or private, into and out of the country.

Members of Sisi's *famiglia* not related by blood but known to be intimately connected to Abd al Fattah himself and presumably also to one or more of his offspring, include General Muhammad al Irfan, who served for three years as head of the AMA before being kicked upstairs in 2018 to make way for Sisi's son Mustafa. Abbas Kamil, Sisi's trusted colleague and office director was placed in charge of General Intelligence in 2018. Mahmud Higazy, Sisi's fellow graduate in the class of 1977 and close colleague in several commands, including Military Intelligence, and at the US Army War College which they attended simultaneously, and whose son is married to Sisi's daughter, was President Sisi's first Chief of Staff and served in that capacity for three years, before being jettisoned amid a broader purge of the officer corps connected to the upcoming presidential election and challenges arising to Sisi from among other military officers.

The tale of *la famiglia* Sisi is reminiscent of those of Saddam Hussayn, Muammar al Qadhafi, Hafiz al Asad, and to some extent, Tunisia's Ben Ali. All these Arab presidents were renowned for relying upon their kin or relations by marriage to play key military, security and economic roles, as well as upon very close associates who in the Italian sense formed part of their extended family. These cases stand in sharp contrast to those of Nasser, Sadat and even Mubarak, none of whom elevated a son or other member of their family to vital military or security roles, although Gamal Mubarak did play, if badly, a role in the political economy. After Sadat's death some of his male relatives have pursued political careers, if ineffectually. But Egypt has no equivalent to infamous presidential sons such as Qusay, Uday, or Saif al Islam. That is because Egypt's state has traditionally been a much more institutionalized enterprise than those of these other Arab countries. The strength and coherence of its military and other institutions rendered kinship connections of secondary importance and even liabilities if publicly known. Nasser, for example, was careful to marginalize his son Khaled, who spent much of his life outside Egypt. That under Sisi sons Mahmud, Mustafa, and Hassan have been pulling levers of power in vital security agencies is indicative of the decline of the Egyptian state and its institutions into a crude dictatorship.

Manipulating secondary elites

As for those in the outer circle of the elite, meaning they are not in the military, security agencies, or the police, hence not in a position to orchestrate a coup, it is less fear than uncertainty and a sense of dependence that Sisi seeks to instill. Cabinet members, media personalities, members of parliament, judges, and so on, are all subject to personalized presidential control, which includes unpredicted, relatively rapid turnovers in such positions. This creates an air of uncertainty and militates against any person even striving for significant public recognition, much less attaining it. As President, Sisi has chosen technocratic prime ministers unknown to the vast majority of Egyptians before, during, or after their incumbency. The two most prominent civilians with cabinet rank are Sahar Nasr, Minister of International Cooperation and Investment, and Tariq Amer, Governor of the Central Bank, are both related to key members of Nasser's deep state, the former being the daughter of Salah Nasr, Nasser's long serving head of General Intelligence, the latter being the nephew of Abd al Hakim Amer, Nasser's nemesis.

Virtually all other civilians whose position nominally places them in the second stratum of the political elite, labor in the political shadows for indeterminate but typically brief periods. Whereas cabinets under all former officers who preceded Sisi as president included prominent figures with national reputations who served repeatedly in one or more portfolios, only Sahar Nasr has done so under Sisi. A woman, she is necessarily of lower political stature than equivalently prominent males who served under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Sisi's Speaker of Parliament is a political nonentity, as have been his Chief Justices of the Supreme Court. Under Nasser and Sadat both these positions were at least intermittently occupied by well-known figures. Sisi's media has produced no "stars" of political brilliance akin to that of Muhammad Hassanain Haykal under Nasser, or numerous editors, writers or performers of slightly lower public wattage under Sadat and Mubarak. All civilians in these positions know they are serving at the behest of the president, that they will not be permitted to construct an independent political or economic base, and that if their public profile grows, they will be removed. In Sisi's Egypt, the limelight is reserved for one man. Those in the shadows are destined to remain there, in relative peace and prosperity even if briefly if they are civilian, but in possible disgrace and even punishment if they are military or intelligence officers.

Encouraging greed

Sisi has encouraged greed as fear's twin mechanism of political control. He has concentrated that effort on those in the political elite capable of physically removing him from power, rather than on the elite's second rank of civilians or on the general public, neither of which pose an immediate threat and both of which are controlled primarily by fear. A reflection of this strategy is widespread corruption. Egypt's score on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, for example, has bounced around the mid-30s mark since 2014, for an average ranking

of some 115 out of 180 countries. An important legal provision that has facilitated the growth of corruption in its most politically central institution, the military, is legislation decreed by the SCAF in May 2011 which extended immunity to serving and retired military officers from prosecution in civilian courts on charges of a financial nature. This was further expanded in 2018 by a law which extended to officers' diplomatic immunity and prohibited them from being sued or interrogated. In 2020 officers were guaranteed by new legislation an annual salary raise of 15% in each of the coming seven years.[6]

The main channel through which greed is cultivated is the military economy, which under Sisi has displaced Mubarak's crony capitalists as the key pillar of the political economy and the one capturing most rents. The burgeoning literature on Egypt's military economy, of which the most thorough is Yezid Sayigh's *Owners of the Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt's Military Economy*, concurs on its evolution into three principal organizational components.[7] The oldest is the defense industry founded under Nasser and comprised of companies established then and subsequently to produce weapons, ammunition, and other military supplies, as well as various commands under the Ministry of Defense that contract with the state. The second component of the military economy is what Sayigh has termed the "officers' republic," which he defines as "the extensive, informal officer networks that permeate the state civilian apparatus as well as state-owned companies and government entities engaged in public works and infrastructure, services, natural resource management, and commercial production."[8] The third, newest and most rapidly growing element of the military economy under Sisi consists of "officers-turned-entrepreneurs and privileged private sector partners" including "companies that are subcontracted by the military establishment, some of them fronts for EAF officers seeking to profit from the opportunities opened up by the military economy." The three components of the military economy are all beyond effective oversight by civilian state institutions and, according to Sayigh, collectively extract "a disproportionate share of public revenues and resources that would otherwise have gone to competing state institutions and private companies, diverting capital from productive sectors of the economy."

Under Sisi the state's legal-regulatory framework has been refashioned to advantage all elements of the military economy. At the heart of the nominal oversight framework is the Administrative Monitoring Authority (AMA), the only state regulatory agency that has the legal mandate and administrative capacity to undertake independent, judicially empowered investigations of potential violations. Since it was founded by Nasser in 1958 it has always been headed by a retired officer. The importance of the AMA to Sisi's control strategy is indicated by the transfer of his son Mustafa from his post as Lieutenant Colonel in the Army to the AMA, where his work has been lauded in the pro-government media as dealing "a painful blow to the 'corruption mafia' in Egypt."[9] In October 2017, the AMA was converted by an act of parliament from being an autonomous agency to being one directly under the presidency, thus giving Sisi absolute control over it, hence over deciding who would and who would not be investigated for corruption.

The centrality to Sisi's strategy of ensuring the loyalty of the officer corps by providing access to corruption and/or punishing it was further underscored in July 2018 when virtually overnight he had legislation passed in parliament that granted to the President the power to grant impunity and privileges to selected high ranking officers. The legislation was passed with breakneck speed and virtually without public knowledge since no journalists were present when it was introduced without notice on the floor on a Monday morning or when it was passed in committee the following day. The legislation provided for a list of high-ranking officers to be drawn up by the President that would extend to them lifelong status as members of the military reserve, while empowering the President to determine their privileges as reservists. These listed officers are granted impunity from prosecution for any acts committed while serving on active duty. Furthermore, officers on active duty or in reserve status are according to the legislation to be considered as diplomats in the sense that they are to receive diplomatic immunity. The act does not define the ranks of those to receive these privileges, leaving it to the President to personally select them.

Sisi has thus gathered both the carrot of material reward and the stick of punishment for alleged corruption offenses into his own hands. He personally controls the fates of the military's top brass who in turn preside directly or indirectly over the military economy through which the officer corps is enriched. The stick in the form of the AMA in which his former classmate and son serve, to say nothing of military tribunals which back it up, or since the summer of 2018 the presidential power to grant or withhold impunity to selected officers, is entirely in Sisi's hands. He can make or break, enrich or impoverish any and all officers in the military or security services.

Cultivating an image

Sisi appears to abhor politics. The image projected is one in which he is above such sordid matters. He is not an accomplished speaker and his utterances tend to be platitudinous, frequently seeming disconnected from the ostensible topic. In his public appearances he appears remote from those around him, standing or sitting in front of all others who are made to appear as if they were in the presence of royalty. He is never presented as an equal in a group nor shown embracing friends or colleagues. He is portrayed as in direct communication with "the people" rather than dealing with them through intermediary politicians. In May 2018, for example, he launched an online service for members of the public to submit questions directly to him over a two-day period.[10] Speaking at the Fifth Annual National Youth Conference a few days later he emphasized his and his regime's exalted status and knowledge as compared to that of youths, stipulating "that anyone who wishes to participate in the country's political life must have a comprehensive understanding of Egypt's political and economic landscape," implying that youths are too politically immature, at least as compared to him, to engage in politics.[11]

He underscored the point of his maturity compared to the people's immaturity and irresponsibility the following day in the wake of protests against fare hikes at Cairo's metro stations. "All of you have put me in charge of protecting Egypt," he said. "I am worried about it. . . . Protesters will go home in the end and sleep at home, while they don't know the effects on the state and its stability, tourism industry and other sectors."[12] At a ceremony at the military academy to mark the 66th anniversary of the "July 23 revolution" of 1952, Sisi warned the cadets and their follow citizens to be wary of false news, claiming that in the past three months 21,000 rumors had been propagated.[13]

Sisi's exalted, narcissistic self-image is suggested by his occasional reference to visions. In late 2013 he declared in a TV interview that

> I have a long history with visions. For example, I once saw myself carrying a sword with 'No God but Allah' engraved on it in red. . . . In another I saw President Sadat and he told me that he knew he would be President of Egypt, so I responded that I know I will be President too.

In June 2015, while speaking to Egyptian expatriates in Germany, he claimed that "God made me a doctor to diagnose the problem, he made me like this so I could see and understand the problems. It is a blessing from God."[14]

His physicality and toughness are emphasized both in deed and word, the former for example by his being depicted bicycling in what appeared to be the grounds of one of the presidential palaces in Cairo as part of a short-lived campaign to encourage it as a form of exercise and transport in that impossibly crowded city; and the latter by verbal emphasis on strength and toughness. Shortly after being elected president in 2014, for example, he stated that "I'm not leaving a chance for people to act on their own. My program will be mandatory." During that election campaign he had been recorded saying "You want to be a first-class nation? Will you bear it if I make you walk on your own feet? When I wake you up at 5 in the morning every day?"

The emphasis on austerity and tough leadership is balanced with depiction of himself as loving and caring. In December 2013, for example, he described himself and the military as being "like the very big brother, the very big father who has a son who is a bit of a failure and does not understand the facts. Does the father kill the son? Or does he always shelter him and say, "'ll be patient until my son understands." Three years later he appeared to break down and cry during an appearance at the opening of a military factory when a soldier yelled out, possibly on orders, "We love you President. . . . We are with you." In June 2018 amid a flurry of announcements of price increases, a newspaper that serves as a mouthpiece for the presidency ran a long article under the title "7 Situations Affirm Leader's Humanitarian Side Dominated." Those situations were described as being releases of debtors from prison, pardons of criminals, opening of the Rafah crossing at Egypt's border with Gaza, celebrating with the families of "martyrs" killed while performing their military and police duties, honoring women, stopping his motorcade to listen to

the complaint of a woman, and meeting cancer patients.[15] Whether this effort to soften Sisi's image was orchestrated by him, his presidential office, or undertaken by a sycophantic journalist is unknown, but it is suggestive of the perceived need to dilute the tough image with an admixture of humanitarianism.

Implied in Sisi's emphasis on toughness and sacrifice is that since he requires these attributes of himself, citizens must as well. In the wake of cuts to subsidies to electricity that resulted in price increases to consumers of about one quarter in June 2018, he stated that "All challenges and difficulties can be easy if Egyptians endure the conditions the Egyptian state is passing through. We have to pay the price together."[16] That he was paying less of a price for austerity than they, however, is suggested by the fact that some two years previously he had ordered for the presidency four new Falcon executive jets from Dassault Aviation at a cost of $340 million.[17]

Sisi's public image is thus one of a self-sacrificing, austere, tough leader above politics and even family life, dedicated to Egypt's improvement. Photos of his politically important sons are never published in the media and those of his wife sparingly and primarily after 2018. Unlike all previous presidents, the whereabouts of his personal home remains unknown to the public. The rumor, possibly instigated by the presidency, is that he sleeps at a different location every night, ostensibly because of the constant threat of assassination by terrorists. Whatever the truth of that claim, the image that is conveyed by it is far from that of a family man comfortable at home, which was how Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak presented themselves to the public. Sisi is obviously keen to appear to be above everyone and everything, communicating upwards to God and downwards to his people. In his political universe there is no room for competitors, for politicians, for close or equal colleagues, or for strong institutions. The country is intended by him to rest solely upon his broad, capable shoulders and to be thankful for his support.

The arch but crude conspirator

In the preceding discussions of Sisi's *cursus honorum*, his cultivation of fear and greed, and his construction of a rather unique public image of strength, independence, and caring, evidence was provided of his prowess as a conspirator. He cozied up to Minister of Defense Tantawi at an early stage in his career, then served as his spokesperson on the SCAF in the critical weeks after the 2011 uprising, before becoming the instrument of his removal by the Muslim Brotherhood. He presented himself to that organization as a devout Muslim, possibly even a secret fellow traveler. He constantly reassured its leadership from August 2012 until he moved against it in June 2013 that he would cement the military's loyalty to the Brotherhood government, only then to implement the most bloodthirsty, brutal, thoroughgoing campaign against oppositionists since Muhammad Ali's slaughter of the Mamlukes and their entourages in the early nineteenth century. Since becoming President, he has cashiered a string of high-ranking officers, several of whom

fostered his career and others of whom were his fellow classmates or served with him in the field. He reached out to the leaders of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to financially support his coup and then his government, praising them unreservedly in public, but depicting them to fellow Egyptian officers as rich fools who could easily be parted from their money.[18] He continued to reassure Washington that Egypt was committed to its relationship with the United States, while reaching out to Russia to counterbalance the Americans militarily, economically, and politically. He had his government release an official statement to the effect that Egypt is hosting 5 million refugees, a vastly inflated figure intended as a thinly veiled threat against EU countries they would be faced with a new wave of illegal migration if they did not support his regime.[19]

He also has indicated Egypt's support for the UN-backed government in Tripoli, Libya, while providing military support to its opponent, General Haftar and his "National Libyan Army" based in Benghazi. He has had his government negotiating with Ethiopia over that country's Greater Renaissance Dam on the Nile for years, pledging his commitment to World Bank backed dispute resolution procedures, while simultaneously providing military support to Eritrea to be used against Ethiopia. His outright lies, misrepresentations and cover ups have at times been ludicrous, as was the case with the explanation of the cause of Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni's death, which was beyond reasonable doubt at the hands of his own security service. Similarly, when all of his government's measures to obstruct and delay the French investigation of the 2016 crash of an Egypt Air flight from Paris to Cairo, including refusal to release bodies of French passengers, finally failed and the French investigators declared the crash in July 2018 to be the result of a cockpit fire probably due to poor aircraft maintenance, not to terrorism as Sisi claimed, Sisi's government responded with stubborn, absolute denial.

These cases suggest that Sisi is so accustomed to controlling information in Egypt and being able to present it as he likes, that when it comes to dealing with foreigners his disregard for truth leads him into trouble. He is a master conspirator in his own country, but a bumbling one outside of it where standards of information and truth are higher. But it is his domestic conspiracies that brought him to power and keep him there. His contempt for foreigners, presumably rooted in his experience that they can be lied to with impunity so long as their national interests can be served or threatened, has thus far enhanced rather than undermined his rule, even though it has not endeared him to them, whether American, European, Arab or possibly Russian. He is, in other words, not a slick, smooth conspirator, but one who plays hardball against his opponents, trusting that his threats, real and implied, will cause them to back down. The sympathetic, benign image projected by what appear as carefully staged presentations of his consideration for the domestic poor and downtrodden, seems more a product of public relations than of an inherent personality characteristic. He is a conspirator who would turn on anyone at any time, a vital characteristic of his and anyone's dictatorial rule.

Personalism and militarism over civilian institutions

According to Greiten's data on authoritarian rule, when it is based on a single or dominant political party it persists longer than when there is no regime party, largely because party activists become loyal to the regime and are willing to delay their material and power rewards as they move up party ranks.[20] While presumably Sisi has not read Greiten's work, he is certainly aware that Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak and Mursi all presided over a single or dominant party that was reasonably important in sustaining their power by performing various political tasks, such as recruiting new entrants to the elite, implementing the executive's will in parliament, defending the regime's policies and performance, interfacing with foreigners, and in general occupying domestic political space that would otherwise be open to competitors. This begs the question of why Sisi has shied away from forming his own party, although it is the case that in 2013 he ordered Military Intelligence to create two party-like coalitions of regime clients that together would constitute a majority in parliament.

The explanation of Sisi's reluctance is no doubt overdetermined. First, Mubarak's dominant National Democratic Party, the lineal descendant of Nasser's Arab Socialist Union, died in disgrace when Mubarak was overthrown. Its headquarters adjacent to Tahrir Square were burned by demonstrators who considered it a symbol of repression. Creating yet another presidential party in the wake of Mubarak's downfall carried the risk of negative popular reaction.

Second, unlike his predecessors, Sisi was totally and utterly a military officer, having no political experience or even discernible political interests. Nasser and Sadat were ardent nationalists, active in underground movements and engaged in political debates with Muslim Brothers, Communists, liberals, and others prior to 1952. Mubarak was more in the mold of the traditional officer even though he had served for several years as Sadat's vice president. He was less politically minded and engaged than Nasser or Sadat, preferring to rule from behind the scenes. Nevertheless, he felt compelled to associate himself with the dominant party and most importantly, to use it as the vehicle with which he hoped to transport his son Gamal into the presidency. President Mursi was a long-time party loyalist within the Muslim Brotherhood whose candidacy was entirely due to that connection and who, once in the presidency, depended completely upon it.

By contrast, Sisi had no political education or experience prior to being elected president in 2014. He wrote nothing about politics, did not speak about them, and did not have personal relations with political figures. Sisi is far less comfortable with politics and the institutions in which they are conducted, such as parties and the parliament, than he is with the military, within which he spent his life after joining the military academy as a teenager. It is clear from his utterances that he views politics as detrimental to the health of the nation, as they emphasize difference rather than unity and by their nature, challenge authority.

Thus, it is to the military and, to a lesser extent, the intelligence services, that Sisi has turned not only to take over and run the economy but to do the same

with the polity. Like the economy, the polity has been militarized, organized in top-down fashion. In both cases this suits Sisi better than would the less predictable, less controllable worlds of independent entrepreneurs, economic or political, contesting for power, rewards, and public attention. Sisi's preferred methods of control based in conspiracy coupled with instilling fear and manipulating greed work well within a hierarchical structure, but in a more open, horizontal political world would be difficult to implement. He is at best a reluctant political figure but an ardent dictator.

A third factor that accounts for Sisi's orientation toward the political world in general and political parties in particular is that Egypt is a comparatively highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, nominally legalistic country and long has been. While Sisi is a vicious, brutal man, he is not a Pol Pot. He is careful to ensure that he rules legally, even if that rule includes forced disappearances, torture, and outright killings in public. As noted above, he has insisted that legislation be passed that provides immunity for such and other behavior by military and intelligence officers. His campaign against the Brotherhood rests upon legislation declaring it a terrorist organization. Those disappeared are held on the maximum 15- day detention orders, which in some cases are rolled over countless times. Legitimacy in Egypt thus rests on nominal respect for the rule of law or, more accurately, legal procedures. It rests much less on democratic competition, involving say political parties and a vigorous parliament. This paradox provides the opening for Sisi's approach, which is to cloak himself and his regime with procedural legality, while simultaneously quashing political organization and behavior.

The further question to be asked is if this Egyptian model of anti-politics renders the Sisi regime, lacking as it does a ruling party or even any identifiable political interest, less vulnerable to collapse than the Greitens data implies. The answer is an indirect test of the dictatorial methods reviewed above. If they are truly effective, they presumably render politics in whatever form irrelevant. The core of the matter in this view is that fear, greed, image creation and conspiring are central and sufficient political behaviors, all others peripheral and largely irrelevant. If, on the other hand, politics legitimates the regime and buffers it from both outsiders and insiders and renders its need for draconian measures less, then an apolitical regime is inherently more fragile, less able to withstand the pressures of economic decay, loss in war, succession of political leadership, and the like.

It is this second answer that seems more correct, at least in Sisi's case. Since 2014 he has subdued the population and continually purged the top leadership of the military and intelligence services. No other Egyptian enjoys real stature or political standing. Sisi is alone at the top. But if that were sufficient, it is hard to understand signs of his nervousness, most importantly the continually purging of the ranks around him and its intensification since 2017. He seems to be a man cognizant of his lack of a popular base, such as that enjoyed by Nasser and to a lesser extent Sadat, or a politically institutionalized one, which Mubarak possessed in greater measure. He may feel compelled, therefore, to rule as dictator, lashing out at any

he deems to be a threat. His then, like that of most if not all dictators, is a solitary high-wire act, inherently unstable, in constant danger of toppling over.

Conclusion: Sisi is sui generis, not just another Egyptian dictator

Heretofore republican Egypt has been ruled by authoritarian leaders, not absolute dictators. Along the dimensions of dictatorial rule – instilling fear and greed, creating an image of toughness leavened by concern for the weak and poor, conspiring against domestic and foreign challengers, and ruling without institutional political constraints such as those embodied in even a single party – Sisi is at the top end of each. None of his presidential predecessors so brutalized the population nor appeared so disdainful of close colleagues. All previous presidents retained the services of top security and military officials for much longer periods than Sisi has done. Similarly, no previous president gathered so much direct control of economic resources in his own hands as has Sisi. Nor did any of them bring the vital regulatory agencies into the presidency nor establish a judicial system in which military courts vastly expanded their jurisdictions at the expense of civilian ones. Sisi's cultivated image as a tough guy, virtually divorced from personal and family relations and based in a self-perception of mystical, quasi-religious powers and insights, is more unusual than the comparatively personable images of his predecessors, none of whom gave any sign of thinking they had a direct line to God. All three military presidents prior to Sisi engaged in conspiratorial behavior, but none seemed to regularly subject close colleagues to it as Sisi has done, nor so blatantly disregard the obvious truth when presented with it. None of Egypt's presidents before Sisi was a committed democrat, but all had some interest in and commitment to a national political life as evidenced by discussion, debate, and institutionalized politics. Sisi is the only one to demonstrate a personal contempt for politics in any and all forms, which may be the best indicator of his status as Egypt's sole dictatorial president.

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18

PRAYUTH CHAN-O-CHA

From the barracks to the ballot box (born 1954)

Pasuth Thothaveesansuk

Bangkok woke up on May 20, 2014, to a familiar sight of tanks rolling down the streets carrying armed soldiers, who then took up positions in key government buildings and commercial areas. After over half a year of continuous protests, Army Chief General Prayuth Chan-o-cha decided to intervene in the political deadlock and declared martial law.[1] At first, he claimed that he merely intended to restore peace and order following an uptick of unrest and violence in the preceding few weeks. He denied that covering the city in camouflage constituted a coup d'état. Nevertheless, even without formally assuming governmental powers, the army disbanded the protests, took over government offices that the demonstrators had occupied, and imposed media censorship.[2] The caretaker civilian government found itself powerless. The army had neither consulted nor notified the acting prime minister of its decision to step in and impose martial law. It became clear that Prayuth had complete control.

The following day, the army chief assembled representatives of the main conflicting factions with the stated aim of reaching a negotiated political solution. The groups ranged from the governing Pheu Thai Party, the opposition Democrat Party, the pro-government "Red Shirt" protestors, as well as the anti-government People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) – the group responsible for the protests across Bangkok since November 2013.[3] The opposition and the anti-government protestors demanded that the government resign. The government refused to do so, claiming that the constitution provided no provision for a caretaker administration to resign as the House of Representatives had already dissolved itself back in February. After hours of talks, all parties remained unwilling and unable to break this stalemate. At the end of that afternoon, Prayuth stood up and said, "I am sorry, I must seize power."[4]

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Prayuth's coup d'état

Just two days after intervening in the name of peace and order, the army usurped power and completed the twelfth military takeover since the Kingdom of Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in June 1932 and just eight years following the previous coup in 2006. Prayuth took charge of Thailand as head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and appointed commanders of other service branches as his deputies. Organizing itself as the military Junta, each of the chiefs assumed command of a handful of ministries – effectively replacing a regular civilian cabinet.[5] Martial law allowed the military to detain without charge any leaders who had attended the failed negotiations as well as over a hundred of other political notables across the country. Furthermore, the NCPO banned all political gatherings, instituted a nationwide curfew, and ordered television stations to cease regular programming and instead only relay the army feed.

A few days later, King Bhumibol Adulyadej officially acknowledged the military takeover and gave royal assent to Prayuth and the NCPO.[6] Although the transition to a constitutional monarchy eight decades prior had transferred sovereignty in the kingdom to the people, the sovereign nevertheless remained highly revered in society and influential in politics. Thus, the royal endorsement gave the military Junta the ultimate legitimacy with which it needed to govern. After all, every previous successful military coup had received such consent from the palace. Over the course of the week, Prayuth expediently executed the same playbook many army chiefs before him had followed to usurp governmental power. Coups d'état have become such a common occurrence in Thai politics that the takeover proved rather painless, but consolidating and holding onto power would become the true challenge for Prayuth Chan-o-cha.

In the years following the coup, scholars have paid considerable attention to how the military government consolidated the kingdom's backslide into authoritarianism through instituting a repressive regime against political dissidents.[7] These five years of military rule have dispelled any once widespread hope of Thai democratization following the end of the Cold War. It was a myth that had survived the relatively brief duration of the previous coup in 2006. Instead, Prayuth's Junta brought to the surface the politically active aspect of the military that never went away to begin with. While the military has recently refrained from prolonged rule in contrast to its twentieth-century history, the army continued to meddle in civilian political affairs such as brokering a coalition agreement in 2008 and cracking down on protestors in 2010. Yet the reappearance of a traditional Junta seemed an ancient relic and thus Prayuth had to construct a military dictatorship with Thai characteristics apt for a new era.

Prayuth's rule for the better half of a decade also marked the longest period since the turn of the century that neither former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra nor one of his proxies governed Thailand. Since entering politics in 2001, Thaksin had singlehandedly shaped the political landscape after leading his Thai Rak Thai

party to a landslide victory just short of an absolute majority. His platform, which became known as "Thaksinomics," included deficit-financed economic populist policies such as debt forgiveness for farmers, agricultural price controls and subsidies, large infrastructure investments, a universal health-care scheme as well as tax breaks and support for free enterprise.[8] Although himself a telecommunications tycoon, Thaksin crafted a folksy political image that largely appealed to the working-class and rural farmers. To them, he appeared as the first politician to truly care about the plight of ordinary people and the issues of socioeconomic inequality. Coupled with his pro-business policies, Thaksin assembled a broad electoral coalition that bridged both the class and rural-urban divides. When he sought reelection in 2005, his Thai Rak Thai party won a supermajority in parliament.

During his second term, he faced massive street protests of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD, colloquially known as the "yellow shirts") who accused Thaksin of illiberal tendencies, antiroyalism, and corruption. Though they sometimes politically differed, the PAD essentially served as the extra-parliamentary counterpart to the official opposition, the Democrat Party, that found itself powerless in view of Thaksin's supermajority. In 2006, pressure from the PAD and Thaksin's alleged anti-monarchy stance led the army to oust Thaksin in a coup d'état. A series of trials found Thaksin guilty of corruption. His Thai Rak Thai Party was dissolved. From then on, Thaksin lived in self-exile to avoid serving his corruption sentence. Nevertheless, his proxy political parties went on to win two general elections in 2007 and 2011. His proxies ran the country for most of those years since 2007, except for an army-brokered Democrat Party-led coalition from 2008 to 2011. In his 2014 coup, Prayuth ousted Thaksin's latest proxy – Thaksin's own sister, Yingluck Shinawatra.

This chapter argues that despite its undemocratic origins and reliance on repressive means to consolidate power, Prayuth Chan-o-cha's military dictatorship worked to construct an appearance of public consent and popular support for the regime. The Junta took advantage of a general sense of political burnout in a society that has endured over a decade of contentious and literally inflammable politics. Moreover, the lack of a matured democratic tradition allowed the regime to promote an alternative authoritarian route to political reconciliation – one that did not necessarily require truth nor justice. This understanding of reconciliation reflected a Thai value for harmony above all else and a Buddhist understanding of unconditional forgiveness.[9] The Prayuth government gained considerable popularity through making such cultural appeals.

Until October 13, 2016, most Thais had grown up not knowing a monarch other than Bhumibol. Also known by his regal title, Rama IX, the king assumed the throne as a teenager in 1946 and reigned over the kingdom for seventy years until his death in 2016. To have a monarch other than Bhumibol seemed an unimaginable prospect until it suddenly became reality. With the late king's passing, Prayuth had the responsibility to govern a kingdom in shock. Thais highly revere the monarchy as an institution and specifically Bhumibol himself as the monarch.

As the Thai military has always taken pride in serving as "the king's men," facilitating a royal transition served as the perfect opportunity to prove its loyalty to the crown and thus shore up popular support for the regime. Together, the palace and the Prayuth government put together a somber yet sublime royal funeral that captured the hearts of the people. The spectacular coronation for Bhumibol's son and successor, King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), marked the beginning of a new era while the military ensured a sense of continuity.

Though Prayuth would perhaps find it most expedient to rule with a military Junta forever, discontent with the regime grew after the royal succession as the public became more impatient for a return to democracy. Since it took power in 2014, the military committed itself to avoiding the perceived mistakes of the 2006 coup, namely that the general election following the brief military rule returned a direct proxy of the very government the coup ousted. Unlike the leaders of the previous coup, Prayuth also had no interest in giving up power either – at least not right away. Therefore, he had to conjure up a nominally democratic process that would guarantee he would remain in power. This involved his close allies setting up the Palang Pracharat Party to serve as the vehicle through which the Junta would stand in a general election. A military hand-picked constitutional convention also drafted a charter that implemented an electoral system that would guarantee the need for a coalition in the lower house – a process Prayuth believed he could maneuver successfully in his favor. Additionally, the constitution permitted the appointment of an unelected prime minister, which meant the former army chief would not even have to become a member of parliament to remain in power. Altogether, he came to power with a convincing argument to facilitate reconciliation, fulfilled his duty as royal servant to shore up legitimacy for his coup and the crown, and ensured he would remain in power after the country returned to the ballot box.

Constructing consent for the coup

In the first few weeks after the coup, the military Junta frequently took advantage of the television and radio airwaves it controlled to broadcast its messages and orders, as well as launch a campaign convincing the people of the regime's mission. During any intermission, television screens across the nation would show the national flag overlayed with the emblems of the army, navy, air force, supreme defense command, and the police. Even during regular programming, channels had to display a logo containing the Thai acronym for the NCPO on the top right corner of the screen.[10] If this screen became the visual motif for the regime, a new ballad became its audio counterpart. For a country with a lively popular music scene, new songs often appear out of nowhere and become popular overnight. The appearance of a new lyricist however came as a surprise for most in the kingdom. Army chief and Junta leader Prayuth Chan-o-cha had released his debut piece. Entitled "Return Happiness to Thailand," the ballad became the soundtrack to the first year of military rule. The song had a simple message: the military has selflessly

come to save the country from catastrophe and the Junta will return happiness to the people. The chorus pledged:

> We will do as we promised, we only ask for a short time;
> Then the beautiful land will return;
> We will do so with honesty, we only ask that you trust and believe;
> The land will soon become better, let us return happiness to you, the people.[11]

Much more than just a piece of kitschy propaganda, "Return Happiness to Thailand" outlined the Junta's agenda and revealed the premise upon which the military regime operated. The lyric appealed to the prosperity of a Thai nation inherently linked to its king. The army served as the guardians of that connection and that it had intervened "before it became too late." Despite requesting only a little more time in the chorus, Prayuth also wrote in the final verse that "soldiers will never surrender" and vowed that the Junta will fight the danger facing the country to fulfill its mission. Through constant allusions to flames in the ballad, the general also presented a dichotomy between political chaos of the previous years and his military dictatorship that would ensure peace and stability.

In constructing support for the coup through popular culture, the Junta extended beyond serenading the country in song. During its first summer in power, the military regime transformed "returning happiness" into an entire populist program and brand for the Junta. Soldiers otherwise stationed throughout Bangkok as well as upcountry to enforce martial law turned into suppliers of happiness, attracting flowers and hand-formed hearts from passersby.[12] Beside their comrades armed with semi-automatic rifles, the Junta deployed musicians from the army band to play music at these happiness events – with the general's ballad as the encore.[13] Thais also had the chance to find happiness in the cinema. To drum up patriotic fervor, the Junta provided free screenings of the film *King Naresuan the Great*, which depicts a mythologized medieval Thai king and his wars to free his kingdom from Burmese vassalage.[14] More extravagantly, to return happiness to soccer fans, the regime also acquired rights to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and broadcasted the matches on the army's free-to-air television channel.[15]

While these anecdotes may seem trivial, the Junta's attempt to win the hearts and minds of the people proved an effective measure for a country politically burned out and a capital city beleaguered by over half a year of protests. Additionally, the happiness campaign also produced concrete political changes. For instance, supporters of the ousted government in its northern stronghold of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai resolved to disband in the name of harmony and returning happiness to the country.[16] To further this political message, Prayuth began hosting a "Returning Happiness" television program during the coveted Friday night prime-time slot before the weekend soap operas.[17] He used the airtime to directly explain the work of the NCPO and ensured that the Junta's message constantly filled the minds of the people.

After three months of constructing support for the coup by returning happiness to the people, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha officially assumed the office of prime minister.[18] The new cabinet comprised a mixture of military officers, many of whom have already served in the NCPO, focusing on security and technocrats brought in to work on the economy.[19] Now the de jure leader of the country, Prayuth traded his military uniform for a civilian suit as he entered the government house.[20] Nevertheless, he still kept martial law in place for the near future and maintained the NCPO Junta structure parallel to the cabinet for the next five years. Echoing the soft power campaign of happiness, Prayuth fashioned himself as a dutiful soldier who became a reluctant leader. To warm his personality, he would occasionally use informal speech and joke with the press and the public.

Though under the Junta's restrictions, the media generally covered the new prime minister positively, echoing the general contentment with the new regime and success of the happiness campaign. The new premier became the "knight in shining armor," saving the country he serenaded.[21] This honeymoon period for the Junta lasted into the following year. Celebrities began producing their own covers of Prayuth's ballad, including the famous rock duo Asanee-Wasan. Their version of the Junta anthem topped the final charts for 2014. In October, radio channels played their cover over a thousand times with the army band's version earning over eight hundred play times.[22] Thais wanted happiness even at the cost of losing democracy.[23]

The King's men

On October 13, 2016, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha appeared on television before the nation to announce the unthinkable. King Bhumibol Adulyadej had died after reigning as monarch for just over seven decades.[24] Most Thais have grown up and lived only under this king and the prospect of having a different occupant of the throne seemed incomprehensible. While governments – civilian and military – would come and go, Bhumibol reigned as the one constant force throughout postwar Thai history. Indeed, he was synonymous with the institution of the monarchy itself. Having come to power in the name of defending the nation and its king, Prayuth presided over a country in mourning and facilitated the royal succession. In organizing the royal funeral, the Junta had the opportunity to prove itself as loyal servants to the king – even after his death.

In his statement on the King's passing, Prayuth appealed for Thais to honor the late King by maintaining love and harmony within the nation. In doing so, he merged the Junta's platform with the monarch's legacy – showing loyalty to Bhumibol meant following the government's agenda. A period of mourning began from the day of the king's passing to the scheduled royal funeral in the following year. The government ordered flags to fly at half-mast for thirty days and for the public to wear black clothing.[25] Events such as concerts and sporting matches became prohibited. The media also had to refrain from broadcasting entertainment programs as well as discussing political issues in a way that could spur national

disunity. Instead, the government directed broadcasters to air documentaries celebrating Bhumibol's numerous royal projects.[26] Along these lines, the Junta adapted its primetime propaganda broadcast into a show on the "royal theory for sustainable development."[27] While the government may have requested these measures out of genuine loyalty for the king, the mourning period ultimately provided pretext for renewed censorship not too dissimilar from what the Junta had imposed immediately following the coup.

For the next few months, Thailand turned into a grey country. While the state worked hard to ensure compliance, the official mourning period also generally received genuine broad support and participation. The public continued to wear black and refrained from entertainment even after the strict initial thirty days.[28] Businesses adapted their operations to the grieving atmosphere and department stores toned down the usual Christmas and New Year's Eve festivities.[29] Public notables also took to television and social media to display their sadness on the king's passing. In an interesting parallel to how celebrities rushed to perform covers of Prayuth's ballad following the coup, the king's passing produced a renewed interest in Bhumibol's music. For instance, a cover of a song composed by the king, "Khwarm Fun Un Soongsood" ("The Ultimate Dream"), went viral.[30] Additionally, following the initial mourning period, a feature film based on a soundtrack made up of royal compositions hit theatres to widespread acclaim. The media even celebrated the film as both honoring the legacy of Bhumibol and the Junta's "return happiness" campaign.[31]

While most of the country wore black out of their own volition, a small minority either chose not to or had circumstances that prevented them from doing so, such as economic reasons. In fact, the mourning period had induced such increased demand for black clothing that prices for them began to skyrocket – both out of genuine shortages as well as prohibitive price gouging. The problem became so acute that the Commerce Ministry had to intervene to ensure black clothing remained affordable.[32] Nevertheless, under the guise of national lamentation, a darker aspect of excessive royalism also emerged. Those who did not wear black in public found themselves criticized and harassed either on the streets or after the fact in viral social media posts.[33]

In the southern island of Phuket, for instance, over a thousand angry monarchists demonstrated to demand prosecutors charge anyone who failed to sufficiently exhibit grief with lèse majesté.[34] Even for an authoritarian nationalist Junta, vigilant royalists taking matters into their own hands have gone too far. Prayuth called on the population to stop harassing those who did not wear black in public as such acts did nothing productive, but would only destroy national harmony. Yet, he also warned those with thoughts that violated the sanctity of the monarchy.[35] The government expressed its reluctance to prosecute lèse majesté cases during the mourning period, but said that it would be willing to do whatever it takes to maintain national security and stability.[36] In other words, while the Junta agreed with the vigilantes in sentiment, it sought to hold on to a monopoly on enforcing royalism as the king's men.

The royal funeral and succession marked an inflection point in the regime's usage of lèse majesté charges to persecute political dissidents. Increased royalist sentiments among the general population provided ample cover for the government to eliminate opponents under the guise of defending the monarchy. Since Prayuth took office as prime minister, the state has prosecuted over a hundred lèse majesté cases per year.[37] While the punishment for defaming the crown ranges from three to fifteen years in prison, prosecutors frequently charge political dissidents with many counts of the same crime, thus leading to sentences of over three decades in prison.[38] Despite the government's claim to objectively prosecuting lèse majesté only to protect the sanctity of the monarchy, the international community saw through the lies and criticized the regime for going after political opponents.[39] Indeed, many of those fleeing lèse majesté sentences sought and received political asylum overseas.[40] As if the law itself was not draconian enough, the regime also chose to prosecute lèse majesté cases not in ordinary civilian criminal courts, but in military courts, where defendants did not always enjoy the same due process and rights as in usual legal proceedings.[41] To curb political dissent, the regime combined cultural support for royalism with existing punitive procedures.

The royal succession provided not only the backdrop to the continuation of Prayuth's rule, but it also marked a transformation in the monarch's own direct power. While Bhumibol exerted considerable political influence during his reign, he often did so indirectly through the privy council as well as military and civilian channels as part of the so-called network monarchy.[42] Popular reverence for the late king led to the "Bhumibol Consensus" – acceptance of the monarch's role "above" politics, regardless of the democratic, semi-democratic or outright autocratic government of the day.[43]

In contrast to Bhumibol, his son and successor, Vajiralongkorn, never enjoyed such reverence from the people and therefore could not expect to wield royal influence through informal channels. Therefore, he strove instead to explicitly consolidate personal powers within his prerogative. He amended the draft constitution to remove the necessity to appoint a regent while the king travels overseas, allowing him to retain full sovereign powers regardless of his actual presence in his kingdom. He assumed full and direct command of two King's Guard units, formerly subservient to the usual army chain of command. He also became the world's richest monarch through abolishing the distinction between personal and crown property. Under Prayuth Chan-o-cha's watch, Thailand crowned its most powerful monarch since the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932.

Although drafted by a Junta-picked committee and agreed to by the military-appointed rubber-stamp assembly, approval from three-fifths of those who voted in the constitutional referendum allowed the regime to claim the charter had democratic support.[44] Yet, the draft presented to the people before the plebiscite would not become the adopted constitution. As the head of state, the king had to formally approve the constitution before it took effect. However, Vajiralongkorn ordered the government to unilaterally amend the already-agreed-to charter, removing an existing provision that required the king to appoint a regent when the king was not

present in the kingdom. Instead, the amended charter left it to the king to decide whether or not to appoint a regent.[45] The government obeyed the king without objection. While undiscussed in Thailand due to lèse-majesté laws, the international press has thoroughly documented that, since becoming king, Vajiralongkorn has spent the bulk of his time in Germany.[46] This constitutional amendment allowed him to continue doing so without appointing a regent and therefore his stay overseas would not become public knowledge in the local press. The government also refused to return the amended draft to the people for another referendum. Prayuth justified ignoring voters by saying that the amendment "had nothing to do with the people, it only grants royal powers to the king."[47] The king towered over the power of the ballot box and Prayuth agreed.

Despite a long history of the military meddling in politics, the civilian government officially held command over the army, navy, and air force. While the constitutional monarch's role as the head of state meant the king also serves as the ceremonial commander-in-chief, in practice the power to command the military rests with the prime minister and is often delegated to the minister of defense. Under the purview of the defense ministry, and thus de jure civilian oversight, King's Guards serve as ceremonial guards, while the Royal Security Command provides everyday protection for the sovereign and the royal family. After Vajiralongkorn ascended to the throne, the Royal Security Command was detached from the defense ministry and became an independent entity under direct command of the monarch. As a result, royal security officers no longer answered to the usual chain of command, but directly to the king.[48]

If transforming state security services into a personal bodyguard unit appeared not radical enough, two years later the Royal Security Command took control of two King's Guards regiments – the 1st and 11th infantry regiments.[49] Entire battalions of enlisted men and women, officers, and support staff no longer served in the country's military, but instead in Vajiralongkorn's personal army. The decree ordering the transfer cited emergency provisions in the constitution, which allowed Prayuth to authorize such a dramatic reorganization of the armed forces without parliamentary approval.[50] Nevertheless, the decree did not specify any emergency.[51] Perhaps as with the constitution, creating a personal army for the king "had nothing to do with the people."

As noted, upon succeeding his father as king, Vajiralongkorn became the world's richest monarch with an estimated net wealth of at least $30 billion.[52] The bulk of his wealth officially belongs to the Crown Property Bureau, which he placed under direct personal control in 2017. The People's Party first established the Crown Property Bureau in 1936 for the state to manage royal assets after transforming the kingdom to a constitutional monarchy four years prior to this. The original design of the bureau distinguished the monarch's personal property, akin to the property of a private citizen, from royal public property and crown property.[53] A government committee chaired *ex officio* by the finance minister managed these assembled royal assets. When Forbes once proclaimed Bhumibol the richest monarch in the world, the foreign ministry rushed to explain that royal assets constituted public

property and not the king's personal effects.[54] Prayuth, however, turned royal assets into precisely just that – the king's private property.

Since the establishment of the Crown Property Bureau in 1936, the management of royal assets only changed in 1948 to remove the monarch's personal property from oversight, though the remaining crown property remained under the state's purview. In 2017, the Junta's rubber-stamp assembly replaced the existing Crown Property Bureau Act with one that removed any government oversight of royal assets and merged royal public property, such as palaces, into crown property.[55] A year later, the national assembly replaced this act with a newer one that merged the monarch's personal property and crown property into a single category under the king's sole purview with no oversight.[56] Through this massive reorganization of royal assets, Prayuth has permitted public wealth of at least $30 billion to flow out of the state's, and by extension the people's, oversight and management and into the King's private purse.

While Vajiralongkorn's consolidation of power may appear tangential to Prayuth's autocratic rule, both make sense considering that the military and the palace have mutually relied upon one another to maintain power throughout contemporary Thai history. Although not for personal gain, Prayuth's unprecedented shift of power and wealth to the monarch represents a disregard for the people. Prayuth authorized the charter amendment and royal asset transfer under the dictatorial rule of his Junta. While the military reorganization came after the election, Prayuth did so autocratically, invoking emergency powers without justification. Expanded royal powers are therefore part of the larger, dark reality that in Thailand the people are powerless.

Back to the ballot box

Though Prayuth promised a swift return to democracy, it would ultimately take almost five years since the coup d'état in May 2014 for a general election to take place in March 2019. In the intervening half decade, the Junta took every measure necessary to ensure that Prayuth would remain prime minister following the transition. Regime-picked constitutional drafters came up with a charter that negated the electoral advantages of the governing party ousted in 2014 and provided undemocratic mechanisms such as an appointed senate to prolong the influence of the NCPO. Meanwhile, key members of the government turned toward establishing a new political party that would serve as the electoral arm of the Junta. A return to democracy would not mean a return to the barracks for Prayuth and the military.

When the constitution drafting process first began, hopes for a short military rule still remained. Within a year of seizing power, Prayuth's hand-picked drafters, led by Borwornsak Uwanno, presented a new charter to the national assembly. Legal scholar and professor emeritus at Chulalongkorn University, Borwornsak had previously served in the drafting committees for the 1997 "people's constitution" as well as the interim constitution that replaced the 1997 charter following the coup in 2006. Heeding Prayuth's rhetoric of national reform before returning to

democracy, Borwornsak drafted a charter that earned a reputation as the "reform edition."[57] While the lead author claimed his proposed constitution would reduce politicians' powers and return them to the people, his academic colleagues berated the antidemocratic nature of the provisions.[58] The most controversial parts included establishing an unelected reconciliation council with powers to influence policy as well as creating an official political position for the armed forces.[59] Despite all its imperfections, if Prayuth and the NCPO had real intentions to quickly relinquish power, then the draft charter could fulfill the role of returning the country to the ballot box. Yet the national assembly rejected the draft and democratization returned to square one. Reflecting on his failure, Borwornsak lamented the lost opportunity, but revealed he understood that it was less about his draft and more about that "he," meaning Prayuth, "wanted to stay for a long time."[60]

While the defeated draft charter was dubbed the "reform edition," the constitution that would ultimately pass a referendum and become adopted was dubbed the "charter against corruption." The nicknames for the two Junta drafts echoed the central tenets of Prayuth's legitimacy. To him, the country needed a military dictatorship and could not yet return to democracy as it lacked appropriate reform and that politicians were too corrupt.

The Junta then turned to legal expert and former acting Prime Minister Meechai Ruchuphan to lead the next charter commission. Though the proponents of the new draft claimed it would eradicate corruption, critics of the Junta denounced it as a "helmet wearing constitution," alluding to military combat gear.[61] The draft followed many ideas similar to the Borwornsak effort, such as enshrining unelected independent agencies as well as codifying the mission for political reform along with a "national roadmap."[62] More importantly, the draft constitution also permitted an unelected prime minister and created a Junta-appointed 250-member senate with powers to counterbalance the elected lower house and to block any proposed constitutional amendments.

As a result, the proposed charter paved the way for Prayuth to remain in office without having to even stand for election and for the Junta to retain legislative powers. Additionally, the draft changed the election method for members of parliament from a parallel voting system to a single-ballot mixed-member proportional (MMP) system. The shift to MMP disadvantaged the deposed Pheu Thai Party, which won an absolute majority in the 2011 general election thanks to constituency seats in its rural strongholds.[63] Instead, the new charter favored smaller parties and essentially ensured the need for a coalition government. To this end, a leader of the newly founded Junta-backed Palang Pracharat Party proudly proclaimed "this constitution was designed for us."[64]

As per the Junta's own rules, the national assembly submitted the draft constitution for voters to decide in a referendum. Prayuth hoped that, despite his tight control on everything about the charter, the referendum would allow him to claim democratic legitimacy for the new constitution. Even so, the referendum did not simply ask a yes/no question on the charter. The Junta also appended an additional question, asking the people to approve that the appointed senate should also have

a say in voting for the prime minister in a joined session of parliament, instead of just only the House of Representatives.[65] Ultimately, roughly three-fifths of voters approved both the constitution and the additional question enfranchising appointed senators to elect the prime minister.[66] Instead of a simple majority of 500 elected representatives, a successful prime minister candidate now needed to win a majority of 500 representatives plus 250 appointed senators. In this combined 750-member assembly, Prayuth therefore already had one-third in his pocket.

Even with his appointed senators, Prayuth still had to win at least 125 representatives to retain power and preferably a majority in the house for his legislative agenda. A few ministers formed the Palang Pracharat Party as his electoral arm. Because the new constitution allowed for an unelected prime minister, Prayuth did not have to officially stand for election for Palang Pracharat to nominate him as its prime minister candidate. The party comprised far more than just technocrats in the military government. It also attracted politicians from across the spectrum, including leaders of the PDRC protests that preceded the coup, former associates of the exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, as well as local strongmen.[67] This broad range enabled Prayuth to assemble an electoral coalition that could appeal to the entire nation beyond pro-military conservative areas.[68]

Still, the eclectic mix of personalities also resulted in a hodgepodge of policies rather than a coherent political platform. Palang Pracharat stood for the Junta's reforms and "national roadmap," but also populist economic policies not dissimilar from those of Thaksin's. After all, Prayuth's economic mind and Palang Pracharat co-founder, Somkid Jatusripitak, had served as deputy prime minister and minister of finance under the exiled former premier.[69] The only thing that was clear about the Palang Pracharat Party was that it supported Prayuth Chan-o-cha to remain in power after the election.

Conclusion

On March 24, 2019, Thailand finally returned to the ballot box. The Junta-backed Palang Pracharat Party received the most votes, though it received fewer seats than the Pheu Thai Party, due to the latter's strong performance in constituency races.[70] Claiming its popular vote mandate, Palang Pracharat began assembling a coalition to form a government that supported Prayuth Chan-o-cha to remain in office as prime minister. The opposition "democratic coalition" also attempted to form a government, but the parties fell just short of a majority.[71] In the end, Prayuth received the support of 19 parties to reach 254 votes out of 500 in the House of Representatives.[72] A joined session of parliament confirmed his continuation in power by a vote of 500 to 244 with three abstentions.[73] After five years of military dictatorship under Prayuth Chan-o-cha, Thailand once again nominally resembled a constitutional democratic country. Nevertheless, Prayuth remained the prime minister and his autocratic rule continued even with a newly elected parliament.

Prayuth's military and semi-democratic regimes from May 2014 to the present illustrate a conflicting image of dictatorship in the contemporary era. On the one

hand, a prolonged half-decade rule of a military Junta seemed extremely anachronistic. While contemporary autocrats rush to legitimize themselves as quickly as possible through sham elections, Prayuth felt no such urgency. The consolidation of power in both the palace and the military also contradicted the general global trend of democratization – or at least some pretense of civilian rule.

This chapter also argues that Prayuth did not simply run a carbon copy military dictatorship straight out of the playbook of his Cold War predecessors. While he mobilized the security apparatus under martial law to quell political dissent, he also used popular culture and political rhetoric to create consent and popularity for his rule – and his own personality too. Additionally, he pursued populist economic policies under both the Junta and the coalition government to incentivize the people to continue supporting him. Prayuth's role in managing the royal transition and an unprecedented expansion of royal powers also represented another bridge between the old and the new – literally, between the previous and current reigns, but also in an effort to prolong and defend the monarchy in a world with fewer and fewer kings and queens.

Prayuth's seven-year rule had also moved Thai politics into a post-Thaksin landscape. Ever since the telecommunications tycoon won his landslide election victory in 2001, Thailand became divided into two broad political camps – pro- or anti-Thaksin. The former consisted of Thaksin's own Thai Rak Thai Party and its successor proxy political parties along with its extra-parliamentary "Red Shirts" group. The latter was a broad patchwork united in opposition to Thaksin. This group included the Democrat Party as well as the PAD and PDRC protest groups with tacit support from the military and the palace. With his Junta and Palang Pracharat Party, Prayuth replaced the Democrat Party as the leader of this bloc. In the 2019 election, the Democrat Party suffered its worst results in almost three decades after losing conservative voters to Prayuth's party.

Prolonged military rule polarized Thailand into pro- and anti-Junta camps, or rather, pro- or anti-Prayuth. Though Prayuth might enjoy strong support from anti-Thaksin conservatives, his opponents are much more diverse than the old pro-Thaksin bloc. Although Thaksin's proxy party, Pheu Thai, remains the largest opposition party in parliament, the anti-Prayuth push has mostly come from political upstart Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit's Future Forward Party. Thanathorn enjoys support from younger voters, especially students, many of whom have little recollection of Thaksin's rule. Therefore, they are rather apathetic toward the old pro- or anti-Thaksin rift, instead focusing their energy to oppose Prayuth's regime.

While Thailand has not fully escaped Thaksin's shadow, Prayuth has replaced the ousted premier as the main political personality and transformed the political spectrum to revolve around him. To be pro-Prayuth means to be patriotic and royalist. Meanwhile, to be anti-Prayuth means to oppose the nation and the monarchy. In this sense, Prayuth resembles other autocratic leaders who have used their personalities to steer the political debate. However, Prayuth's reliance on the palace for his legitimacy – and the monarchy's dependence on Prayuth for its defense – means that he lacks the complete personal control over his country that other autocrats

enjoy. As his current governing coalition hinges on a dozen political parties in parliament, he also has to make compromises and policy concessions to his partners in government.

Still, the other side of the coin to Thailand's semi-democracy is its semi-dictatorship. Prayuth continues to rule in an authoritarian fashion not too different from his years leading a military Junta. The army and police persist in clamping down on political dissent through national security claims and charging opposition figures with lèse-majesté. While Prayuth might no longer fully resemble the autocrat who led a Junta, his grip on power remains just as strong. It is clear that the institutions of the monarchy and the military still hold the keys to political power in Thailand. Perhaps, the fact that these entrenched entities continuously drag the country back toward dictatorship makes this picture much gloomier for democracy hopefuls in Thailand than if there had ever only been one single autocrat. Instead, Prayuth is just one of many autocrats in recent Thai history.

After the Junta-appointed constitutional court dissolved the second-largest opposition party, spurring a wave of political defections from the opposition to the government, Prayuth's governing coalition has comfortably increased its majority. Meanwhile, outside of parliament, Prayuth has begun facing more pressure on the streets. Youth-led anti-government protests have urged the prime minister to resign, demanded various constitutional amendments, and called for a reform of the monarchy. Prayuth attempted to crack down on the demonstrations with force, but he only added fuel to the fire. Although in 2021 his position remained politically stable, he is facing his largest legitimacy crisis since he took power in 2014.

Notes

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19

MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN AL SAUD (A.K.A. "MBS")

King in all but name (born 1985)

Christopher M. Davidson

Described as "Mr. Everything,"[1] as "Gaddafi on steroids,"[2] and as having "concentrated power to an unprecedented degree,"[3] Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (a.k.a. "MBS") is now widely portrayed as Saudi Arabia's omnipotent strongman. Moreover, having clearly torn up the old rules of royal family governance, he is seen as having abruptly ended the kingdom's long established consensus-based political system in which kings and senior princes ostensibly drew on the principles of *Shura* and *Ijma*,[4] and – for better or worse – as having ushered in a new era of autocratic-authoritarianism. Indeed, as observers have noted, he has "side-lined other members of the ruling family. . . [and is] free of the constraints imposed by the collective leadership model that characterised the Saudi regime in the past."[5] Other analysts concluded that he has "systematically dismantled the system of consensus that kept the peace for decades"[6] and despite "his uncles ruling the kingdom through consultation and consensus [he] is determined to act unilaterally and with disregard for tradition."[7]

Drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources,[8] this chapter first seeks to explain MBS's dramatic rise to power over the past six years. In greater detail it then assesses his perceived loyalty-boosting measures, including promises of substantial economic reform and greater social liberalization. It also investigates his apparent support from both a powerful neighboring state (the United Arab Emirates) and the US's Donald Trump administration. MBS's seemingly ever more autocratic-authoritarian methods are then scrutinized, including his tightening of circles of patronage, his "anti-corruption" crackdowns, the centralization of command over military and security organizations, and the co-option or repression of all forms of local and social media. Finally, in the context of Saudi Arabia's relatively impressive socioeconomic indicators[9] and its status as one of the world's last surviving monarchies,[10] the chapter also considers the impact of MBS's important changes to Saudi statecraft and authority structures on several debates on the future of autocracy

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and authoritarianism. Notably, the long-running theorizations on the relationship between socioeconomic modernizing forces and political development and – on a more philosophical level – the roles and expectations for twenty-first-century kingdoms are discussed.

Rise to power: dynastic advantages, careful maneuvers

MBS's first major political appointments in early 2015 were undoubtedly facilitated by his father, the newly installed King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud. As a son of the de facto founding king of the modern Saudi state, Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Rahman or "Ibn Saud," Salman bin Abdul-Aziz was the highest profile surviving member of the so-called "Sudairi Seven." This was a block of seven full brothers[11] born to one of Ibn Saud's favorite wives, Hussa bint Ahmed Al-Sudairi.[12] Crucially, by the time of his succession in January 2015,[13] Salman bin Abdul-Aziz had already served as governor of Riyadh for 48 years,[14] as minister of defense[15] and then as crown prince.[16] Moreover, as head of the royal family's internal *Majlis al-Uthra* or "Descendants' Council,"[17] he had also gained a reputation as the "chief whip who kept the sprawling Al-Saud in line."[18] He was the "royal enforcer who punished princes"[19] and as the "disciplinarian of the royal family. . . [was] locking up egregious offenders in his own private jail."[20]

Entering his twenties in the mid-2000s, MBS had reportedly begun to work-shadow his father in the governor's office and, as the situation has since been described, "the attentive young MBS saw how Prince Salman settled disputes and forged compromises, effectively learning the art of Saudi statecraft."[21] After a brief stint working at the Council of Ministers' Bureau of Experts research unit,[22] by 2011 MBS was understood to have been formally installed as his father's "special advisor." He also served as the secretary-general of the investments-focused National Competitiveness Centre;[23] and – by all accounts – to have emerged as a key player in the running of the Riyadh Development Authority.[24] Significantly, less than a year after Salman bin Abdul-Aziz's appointment as crown prince, MBS was then given control over his father's court, was promoted to ministerial rank (at just 27 years old,[25] and was subsequently seen "sitting in on meetings with foreign officials and silently communicating with his father."[26]

Widely regarded as Salman bin Abdul-Aziz's favorite son and having already entered into a high-profile marriage with a daughter of one of Ibn Saud's other sons,[27] MBS was also perceived by many Saudis as being a loyal and traditional "son of the land" on the basis of his exclusively Saudi education.[28] In addition, according to those who knew MBS well at the time, he had already begun to acquire a reputation for being highly motivated and hardworking, if a little combative. At age 26, for example, despite being initially banned by King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud from entering the Ministry of Defense on the basis of being "disruptive" and "power-hungry," he was nonetheless soon asked to supervise and streamline the Ministry's spending, and then later given other "special assignments for the Royal Court that called for sharp elbows."[29] As former colleagues have further noted,

"MBS was regarded as particularly ambitious, with an eye on [his father's] governorship of Riyadh and control of other government entities."[30] He was known to be "working 16 hour days in a land with no shortages of sinecures" and sometimes even "working from morning until after midnight most days."[31]

In this context, MBS was rapidly and substantially elevated following his father's eventual succession as king, replacing him as the new Minister of Defense and being appointed secretary-general of the Royal Court[32] and named chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs within a week. This was intended as a dynamic new entity to replace the old Supreme Economic Commission, spearhead economic development planning and assume responsibility for the Public Investment Fund or "PIF."[33] Though ostensibly more controversial, given it involved the ousting of a sitting crown prince,[34] the dual announcement in April 2015 that Muhammad bin Nayef Al-Saud or "MBN" was to be the next crown prince while MBS was to be "deputy crown prince" was in some ways a logical development. After all, by this stage the "next generation" MBN, as one of King Salman's most prominent nephews, had already been holding the recently rejuvenated position of deputy crown prince for three months.[35] Moreover, beyond the 70-year-old Muqrin bin Abdul-Aziz, the ten other remaining sons of Ibn Saud were all even older men. There was therefore a practical need – sooner rather than later – to modernize Saudi Arabia's succession process from one based on straightforward agnatic seniority (with one brother replacing another) to one in which the most capable of the "third generation princes" would be able to take over.[36]

Far more contentious, however, were the circumstances surrounding MBN's own ousting in June 2017 and MBS's subsequent appointment as crown prince.[37] Officially at least, MBS's takeover was justified on the basis that the *Hayat al-Bay'ah* or "Allegiance Council" had decided to meet and had come to some sort of decision. Established in 2006 and comprising of Ibn Saud's remaining sons,[38] King Abdullah had intended for it to institutionalize the royal family's traditional *bay'ah* or "oath of allegiance" to new kings while also formalizing collective decision-making regarding the succession process.[39]

As further details emerged, however, it began to seem more plausible that MBS had managed to seize power following a de facto "soft coup." Appearing to confirm earlier suspicions that the Allegiance Council had been in a weakened state for several years and had not even played a role in MBN's appointment, several claims were made that the Council had never actually met to consider MBS's takeover, and that any votes cast had either been communicated by telephone or collected by "emissaries sent from the Royal Court."[40] Moreover, there were suggestions that everything had been planned well in advance. On top of the scrapping of MBN's court MBS had reportedly spent much of the previous two years "crowding out bin Nayef's daily duties" and having "eliminated a council of advisors who answered to bin Nayef, depriving him of most of his professional staff."[41] Indeed, notwithstanding official denials, ostensibly credible reports began to circulate in the international media indicating that MBN's pledge of allegiance had been far from

voluntary. He had effectively been placed under house arrest and his bank accounts had been frozen.[42]

Rise to power: sources of loyalty

Beyond the dynastic circumstances contributing to MBS's early career successes, several other determinants also appear to have helped smooth his path to the top. Among these perhaps the most discussed have been his promises of substantial economic reform. Indeed, the period between MBS's April 2015 and June 2017 appointments as deputy crown prince and then crown prince was a time of great alarm and uncertainty in Saudi Arabia. Not only had overall joblessness risen to 12%,[43] but youth unemployment was nearly 29% with little prospect of young Saudis finding jobs outside the bloated, oil revenue-financed public sector.[44]

Meanwhile, the "shale revolution" in the US and subsequent oil price plunge from June 2014 onward, juxtaposed with Saudi Arabia's fast-increasing (and export-limiting) domestic energy demands – and what seemed to be an unknown but indisputably high "breakeven price" – had led to Riyadh running a unprecedented budget deficit in 2015. It was the equivalent to more than 15% of the country's GDP.[45] Moreover, amid OPEC predictions that oil would not reach $100 per barrel again until at least 2040, and ahead of reports that Saudi Arabia had withdrawn more than $115 billion from its reserves in order to cover the shortfall,[46] the IMF had already warned that the state had only five years of financial assets remaining.[47] Dramatically, CNBC's analysts had even predicted Riyadh would "go broke" by the summer of 2018.[48] The British *Telegraph* warned that "if the oil futures market is correct, Saudi Arabia will start running into trouble within two years. . . [and] will be in existential crisis by the end of the decade."[49]

In this context, the opportunity for MBS to present himself as something of a savior was undoubtedly enormous, especially given that the "old guard" appeared to have failed in steadying the ship. After all, rather than any attempt to drastically overhaul the Saudi economy, the only real response to the post-2014 situation had simply been to increase oil supply unilaterally in order to gain market share (as it had done in the mid-1980s[50]). Riyadh was working on the assumption that a short period of extremely low prices would be enough to "crush US oil frackers" and put out of business many of their new higher-cost competitors. As the chief executive officer of the Saudi Arabian National Oil Company had put it: "Supply and demand and the rules of economics will govern . . . it will take time for the current glut to be removed."[51]

Fast responding to the perceived crisis, in April 2016 members of MBS's team admitted to the international media that the Saudi government spending had previously gone "berserk" under King Abdullah's reign. "Roughly between $80 to $100 billion dollars [about a quarter of the entire budget] of inefficient spending every year" had occurred and with controls on major contracts having been effectively suspended. Going further than the IMF, CNBC, or the *Telegraph*'s predictions, they even claimed the country could have gone broke by early 2017 but

that MBS had immediately "cut the budget by 25%, reinstating strict spending controls."[52]

At the same time, but more ambitiously, a "Saudi Vision 2030" strategy was launched under the banner of "growing and diversifying the economy."[53] Closely mirroring the policy recommendations of a December 2014 IMF briefing note,[54] this strategy was reportedly the culmination of MBS's "quiet planning" for a "major restructuring of. . . [the] government and economy aiming to fulfil . . . his generation's 'different dreams' for a post carbon future."[55] Saudi Vision 2030 emphasized the need for rapid economic liberalization, greater global integration, and a fundamental "de-petrolization" of the Saudi economy.[56] It included specific proposals for a series of "Future Investment Initiative" conferences,[57] a new $500 billion "Neom" economic free zone on the Red Sea,[58] and a pioneering international tourism industry.[59] Its officially stated objectives consisted of the boosting of foreign direct investment, the generation of alternative private sector employment opportunities, a drastic reduction in the government's dependency on oil export revenue, and a significant diversification of the economic base.[60]

Though superficially similar to earlier and often stumbling schemes presented by other Gulf states, Saudi Vision 2030 and its offshoots (including a shorter term "National Transformation Programme"[61]) nonetheless appeared to be regarded by most citizens as something rather ground-breaking for Saudi Arabia and as an essential step in the right direction. Even though MBS's January 2016 announcement that Saudi Aramco would seek foreign investment via a public offering was soon undermined by data transparency issues, and despite the international media speculating that many Saudis would see it as "selling off the family silver,"[62] the radical nature of the proposal[63] seems to have had modest popular backing.

Concurrently, MBS's push for greater social liberalization also seems to have generated considerable support, especially from younger citizens keen to see their rulers challenge anachronistic practices and weaken the roles of ultraconservative and misogynistic religious establishments. In the overall Saudi context, for example, the *New York Times'* correspondents have described how there is "a dynamism on the ground in Riyadh." The paper reported that "young Saudis are thrilled that the country finally has a bold leader trying to modernize." "Public opinion is difficult to judge in any police state . . . but [a] best guess is that the support here for the prince is real."[64] Similarly, as a former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia has observed, "[the youth] are the ones to have benefited the most from [MBS's] liberalisation . . . MBS has a big constituency there."[65] Indeed, as a local commentator speaking to the BBC has explained, "talk to anyone aged 16–25. . . and they see [MBS] as a hero . . . they love the socio-cultural changes he's bringing, pushing back the power of the religious fundamentalists."[66] A female member of the Shura Council has put it,

> we are changing at the rate of a high-speed train, not of a rocket . . . young people, and 70 percent of the population is under 30, don't want to live as we lived . . . the prince understood we have to pull the tooth from the mouth![67]

With regard to the reforms themselves, in Saudi Arabia there seems little doubt that MBS has managed to go far further than any of his predecessors. Having quickly set up a "highly educated young team. . . [to] transform the country,"[68] by summer 2016 MBS appeared to have already succeeded in drastically curbing the powers of the *mutawa* or "religious police," operated by the infamously draconian Committee for Promoting Virtue and Prohibiting Vice. Described as having "all but vanished from Riyadh," having reportedly been barred from making arrests or questioning people,[69] and understood to have had its powers transferred to the regular police,[70] the Committee had become much less influential. What had previously been regarded as "the most distinctive element of the Saudi state" and "a modern bureaucratization of a medieval institution" seemed to have been effectively reined in.[71]

Also attracting considerable attention, MBS's team has been responsible for the removal of several of the significant restrictions on Saudi women previously upheld by senior clerics. As Ali Shihabi has noted, this has been "particularly empowering for women . . . bringing them fully into the workforce . . . something that was very unpopular with the reactionary right."[72] Likewise, in terms of entertainment and leisure for both genders, MBS's changes have also been regarded as groundbreaking and, as the BBC has put it, a key part of the "new Saudi Arabia as decreed by its modernising crown prince . . . entertainment is in, cultural austerity is out."[73] In early 2017, for example, large scale music concerts resumed[74] and in March 2018 cinemas were authorized to re-open.[75] Soon after that giant state-sponsored multicultural festivals began to be staged in some of Saudi Arabia's biggest cities.

Rise to power: external support

The crown prince of Abu Dhabi and the de facto strongman of the neighboring UAE federation – Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (a.k.a. "MBZ") – has clearly served as something of a role model for his younger counterpart and may at some stage have been counseling or even directly assisting him. After all, back in 2005 MBZ had already revealed to a senior US diplomat that he was "more worried about . . . the collapse of the House of Saud than anything else." He feared that Saudi Arabia could potentially be ruled by "someone like the one we are chasing in the mountains" (referring to Osama bin Laden) and that on this basis "we have to help [the Saudi royal family] help themselves."[76] Comparably, in 2009 US diplomats recorded that

> while publicly expressing close ties with Riyadh, the UAE privately regards the Kingdom as its second greatest security threat after Iran . . . this is based on historic enmity . . . as well as deep seated if rarely articulated anxiety about what might happen if Saudi Arabia came under a more fundamentalist regime.[77]

Certainly, following MBS's first key promotions – which MBZ appears to have predicted[78] – it was widely assumed that some sort of symbiotic mentor-mentee

relationship had developed between the two men based on shared interests, common enemies, and burgeoning opportunities. The *New York Times*, for example, maintained that "MBS . . . in many ways is MBZ's protégé."[79] The correspondents of the *Guardian* suggested that "MBZ . . . has acted as a mentor for Saudi Arabia's young and embattled crown prince . . . during his rapid ascent to be heir to the throne."[80] Similarly, Richard Sokolsky and Daniel DePetris styled MBZ as the "patron of Saudi Arabia's own crown prince."[81] Neil Quilliam observed how "MBZ was able to capitalize on the challenges that MBS faces within the kingdom and present him with a blueprint that appears to have appealed to his personality."[82] And Simon Henderson noted that "they appear to have a mentee/mentor relationship, with the older MBZ viewing MBS as the future king of Saudi Arabia, who needs to be tutored by an older brother type figure."[83]

Notably, with regard to international relations, it does seem MBS was at least initially operating under MBZ's direct tutelage. On Iran, for example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's joint intervention in Yemen against the putatively Tehran-linked Houthi forces ("Operation Decisive Storm") began within weeks of MBS's January 2015 appointment as minister of defense and just days before his April 2015 promotion to deputy crown prince.[84] Moreover, almost all of MBS's subsequent statements on Iran (and especially the international Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme or "JCPOA"[85]) appear to have tallied extremely closely with MBZ's earlier expressed opinions. A former US deputy national security advisor for strategic communications described how "MBS . . . came to echo MBZ . . . they hated the Iran nuclear deal because it took the United States off a collision course with the Iranian government."[86]

Similarly, just weeks before MBS's June 2017 installation as crown prince (and thus likely to be part of a transactional arrangement), MBZ appeared to have finally enlisted the support of Saudi Arabia (along with Egypt and Bahrain) in forming an international "Anti-Terror Quartet" to effectively challenge Qatar. Qatar stood accused of being the Muslim Brotherhood's chief sponsor and of reneging on earlier secret agreements signed with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait.[87] Going much further than MBZ's earlier efforts to push King Abdullah into action,[88] the new Quartet promptly severed ties with Qatar, launched a diplomatic and economic embargo, and soon issued a list of thirteen demands against the alleged extremist-enabling state.[89] In June 2018, Saudi Arabia then joined the UAE in staging the first ever meeting of the new bilateral "Saudi-Emirati Coordination Council."[90]

Importantly, as with his bellicose statements on Iran, MBS's public position on the Brotherhood (and by extension Qatar) again seems to have been very close to MBZ's known views. In his April 2018 media interviews, for example, MBS claimed that the Brotherhood was part of a "triangle of evil" (along with Iran and groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State). He insisted that the "Brotherhood is another extremist organization . . . they want to use the democratic system to rule countries and build shadow caliphates everywhere . . . then they would transform into a real Muslim empire." MBS explained that "one of the reasons we have a

problem with Qatar is that we are not allowing them to use the financial system . . . to collect money from Saudis and give it to extremist organizations."[91]

Meanwhile, and heavily intertwined with these Iran, Brotherhood, and Qatar-related dynamics, there are increasing indications that MBZ's team may have also been pushing successive US governments to accept MBS as their natural ally and as the man most capable of transforming Saudi Arabia into another US-friendly "UAE-like" state. For example, during the latter months of Barack Obama's presidency, a former US official has recalled how Emirati diplomats had "started praising MBS to visitors as a visionary, a reformer, a man of energy and action, someone to be trusted and supported." It seemed that "implicit in this campaign was the assurance that MBS was like-minded, an extension of MBZ in strategy and outlook."

> With MBZ's backing, the message seemed to be that the desert kingdom was soon going to look like Abu Dhabi, where the economy was about more than oil, women could drive, and the authoritarianism was kept conveniently out of the sight of Western visitors.[92]

Either way, even before Obama's departure, MBZ appeared to have begun making a far more determined effort to boost MBS's relationship with Donald Trump. Undoubtedly enamored with Trump's earlier campaign pledges to unilaterally withdraw the US from the JCPOA,[93] and having likely identified an opportunity to place the UAE and an MBS-led Saudi Arabia at the heart of a new US Middle East policy, a joint MBZ-MBS emissary had reportedly already met with members of Trump's team in August 2016.[94] Moreover, in mid-December 2016 it is now known that MBZ himself traveled to New York to meet with incoming officials, including Trump's senior adviser and chief strategist.[95] As US diplomats have since explained, by this stage MBZ was already "planning to use his strong relationship with the United States president to achieve his intentions," and soon began to sponsor public relations firms to promote MBS in Washington as his steadfast ally.[96]

The strategy appeared to pay off, for within a few months of Trump's victory it emerged that he was considering designating both the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Brotherhood as terrorist organizations.[97] Trump's May 2017 visit to Saudi Arabia focused heavily on supporting MBS's newly established "Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology."[98] A few weeks later he expressed strong public support for the embargo against Qatar. As such, he appeared to be allowing the UAE and Saudi Arabia much freer rein than they had experienced under the George W. Bush and Obama administrations.[99]

Since then, the White House has been willing to endorse the shifting Saudi narrative on the October 2018 assassination of the high profile dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which had quickly moved from complete denial to descriptions of a spontaneous "fistfight" that had gotten out of control.[100] Indeed, Trump first repeated suggestions that "rogue killers" were responsible for Khashoggi's death.[101] He then cast doubt on a "very premature" CIA assessment of the situation that

pointed to a premeditated operation involving MBS himself, while simultaneously reassuring Riyadh about the state of US-Saudi relations.[102]

In April 2019, Trump's press secretary confirmed that the US would begin moving ahead with the designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and would be seeking to impose sanctions on the organization in the near future.[103] In June 2019, it was revealed that the White House had earlier approved two nuclear technology transfer agreements with Saudi Arabia.[104] Over the course of the rest of the year, three of Trump's six presidential vetoes effectively protected the US's military relations with Saudi Arabia.[105]

The new Biden administration, which assumed office in Washington in January 2021, however, quickly adopted a more critical position to both Saudi Arabia and in particular to the unholy role of bin Salman in Saudi politics. Biden declared that he would only deal with his counterpart, King Salman, rather than with the crown prince, as Trump had done. The US stopped its military aid deliveries for the Saudi war in Yemen (which bin Salman soon intended to scale down and end) and even declassified a top secret CIA document on bin Salman's responsibility for the murder of *Washington Post* columnist and Saudi national Jamal Khashoggi, who as further detailed below had written some highly critical reports on bin Salman's activities.[106] Nevertheless, Biden and his Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, were well aware of the strategic and oil importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States and had no intention to break off Washington's long-standing close relations with the country.

Autocratic-authoritarian methods: circles of patronage

With regard to maintaining power, MBS appears to have relied on much tighter inner circles than those of his predecessors. Indeed, as the first and most obvious layer of his new network, MBS has elevated a handful of especially trusted relatives, rather than simply his most senior relatives in the traditional sense. Moreover, he has evidently had a strong preference for those he has grown up with, studied with, or worked alongside. So far these have most prominently included two of his younger full brothers, Khalid bin Salman Al-Saud and Bandar bin Salman Al-Saud.[107] After a brief career as an air force pilot, the former, now 32 years old, was appointed as ambassador to the US in April 2017,[108] then as deputy minister of defense in February 2019.[109] Khalid bin Salman has also been serving as MBS's de facto international envoy to the White House, having reportedly met personally with Donald Trump to discuss not only military and security issues, but also trade deals and oil prices.[110] Though Bandar bin Salman is not yet as prominent as his brother, in March 2019 he was given command of the Royal Bodyguard unit at just 24 years of age, and now appears to be responsible for MBS's personal safety.[111]

Beyond full brothers, MBS also seems to have built informal coalitions with several close friends within the royal family, all of whom have been substantially promoted in the past few years and have an average age of only 42. His older half-brother, Abdul-Aziz bin Salman Al-Saud, for example, was upgraded to minister of

energy in September 2019. As the first royal family member to have ever held the position,[112] MBS likely saw him as a loyal and safe pair of hands to oversee Saudi Aramco's impending public offering and the country's all-important oil policy.

MBS has also considerably advanced the careers of two children of the once influential Bandar bin Sultan Al-Saud – the long serving former ambassador to the US and former secretary general of the National Security Council.[113] Notably, in February 2019, former businesswoman and women's sports chief, Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud, was appointed as ambassador to the US,[114] while Khalid bin Bandar Al-Saud was re-assigned from being ambassador to Germany to become ambassador to Britain.[115]

Effectively forming the second layer of his elite political patronage networks, MBS appears to have rapidly promoted a small number of non-royal cronies. Perhaps the best known of these has been Saud Al-Qahtani, recently described by Ben Hubbard as "the crown prince's secret weapon" and "digital henchman,"[116] and by Andrew Leber and Alexei Abrahams as the Saudi "Minister of Hacking."[117] Having read law at King Saud University before embarking on a brief career in the air force, Al-Qahtani then worked as a journalist and as a royal media expert.[118] Reportedly after first meeting MBS in early 2015, the following December he was already appointed as a communications advisor with ministerial rank.[119] He was effectively put in charge of the newly created Centre for Studies and Media Affairs, whose objective was to focus on shaping the domestic media agenda and arranging for foreign journalists to interview MBS.[120] Beyond his official role, however, Al-Qahtani is understood to have been "the crown prince's unofficial gatekeeper in the all-powerful royal court."[121] He also seems to have become "senior to [experts], particularly in decisions that had political dimensions and affected the public, such as cutting subsidies or restoring benefits and allowances."[122] Al-Qahtani used his widely followed Twitter account "to marshal the kingdom's online defenders against enemies including Qatar, Iran . . . as well as dissident Saudi voices"[123] and also appeared to have been at the forefront of developing Saudi Arabia's cyber espionage capabilities.

Similarly prominent have been Turki Al-Sheikh and Yasir Al-Rumayyan. The former was originally a security services officer who had worked in the Ministry of the Interior and then the Ministry of Defense before then being installed as an advisor to the Royal Court in early 2015 and then promoted to the rank of minister in June 2017.[124] Soon shifted beyond his security experience and expertise, he was subsequently chosen by MBS to oversee some of the most important entities tasked with delivering Saudi Vision 2030, including the General Sports Authority and the newly launched General Authority for Entertainment.[125]

Al-Rumayyan, meanwhile, was previously the chief executive officer of a Saudi bank affiliated with France's Credit Agricola, before beginning to appear as part of MBS's personal entourage in early 2015. In September 2015 he was installed as managing director of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), which was nominally chaired by MBS, and in September 2019 he was made chairman of both Saudi Aramco and the state-backed mining company, Ma'aden.[126] Significantly,

in December 2018 a photograph of him hiking with MBS in baseball caps in the northwestern part of the country went viral, with them being labeled "hiking bros." As Bloomberg's correspondents noted at the time, "the key thing Yasir offers MBS is trust . . . in countries like Saudi Arabia and for the ruling family, trust is the key; capability, not always."[127]

Autocratic-authoritarian methods: "anti-corruption" crackdowns

In tandem with building his new patronage network, MBS appears to have been significantly reinforcing his authority over Saudi Arabia's most prominent private sector businessmen. In particular, a mass anti-corruption campaign that began in November 2017 has arguably become one of MBS's centerpiece domestic policies. Evidently planned well in advance, it was reported on November 4, 2017, that a new committee – the National Anti-Corruption Commission – had been established under MBS's chairmanship and that it was to have the power to investigate and issue arrest warrants, impose travel bans, disclose and freeze accounts and portfolios. He also was involved in the "tracking of funds, assets and preventing their remittance or transfer by persons and entities, whatever they might be."[128] Moreover, it was claimed that the committee would enjoy "exemption from laws, regulations, instructions, orders and decisions." Although "competent authorities would be informed," the committee would nonetheless be free to

> take whatever measures deemed necessary to deal with those involved in public corruption cases and take what it considers to be the right of persons, entities, funds, fixed and movable assets, at home and abroad, return funds to the state treasury and register property and assets in the name of state property.[129]

Within hours of the first press release, it transpired that the committee had already identified instances of "money laundering, bribery, extorting officials, and taking advantage of public office for personal gain." King Salman issued a statement maintaining that the committee was needed to "identify offences, crimes and persons and entities involved in cases of public corruption," and that there had been "exploitation by some of the weak souls who have put their own interests above the public interest, in order to illicitly accrue money."[130] With the speed and scale of the operation surprising many analysts, it soon emerged that hundreds of Saudi citizens had been arrested, with most being held in the luxurious Ritz-Carlton hotel. Indeed, reports soon emerged that the hotel's staff had been told to ask regular guests to leave, that private jets in Riyadh were being grounded to prevent targets from trying to escape,[131] and that names were being "put out there [on social media] to send a message."[132] Within a week, it was also claimed there were so many prisoners that an additional hotel was being commandeered to hold them.[133]

Though the exact number of detainees is still unknown, US officials initially suggested as many as 500 were being held,[134] while Saudi officials have recently admitted to 381 or "about 400."[135] On top of high-profile detentions such as top tycoon Alwaleed bin Talal Al-Saud and four prominent sons of the late King Abdullah, there were thought to be 30 or more other princes arrested.[136] Beyond such wealthy royals hundreds of others were also rounded up, including Waleed bin Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim (the chairman and co-owner of the vast Middle East Broadcasting Company), Saleh Abdullah Kamel (the chairman and founder of the Dallah Al-Baraka investments conglomerate),[137] and at least three members of the Bin Laden family. Among them was the eminent Bakr bin Laden, the chairman of the Jeddah-based Saudi Bin Laden Group, which has worked on many of the country's largest construction projects.[138]

Apart from a small number of detainees who were formally declared innocent and released,[139] the majority appear to have had to negotiate their freedom by coming to some sort of financial arrangement. Indeed, the BBC and Reuters claimed that between 1900 and 2000 bank accounts associated with the detainees had been frozen, while the *Wall Street Journal* alleged that MBS's committee was targeting up to $800 billion in cash and assets.[140] More realistically perhaps, a BBC correspondent later allowed inside the Ritz-Carlton quoted a committee member as saying that "even if we get back $100 billion, that would be good."[141] In January 2018 it was noted that about 90 of the detainees had already reached preliminary agreements to "pay substantial sums in return for their release."[142] Regarding the mechanisms for such wealth transfers, it was reported that Saudi banks had received confidential memoranda ordering cash from the frozen accounts to be moved to Ministry of Finance accounts.[143] Real estate and shareholdings had also been seized and a ministry-owned company had been set up "to park the proceeds of settlements agreed between the government and individuals detained in the corruption purge."[144]

MBS has personally defended the conduct and severity of the anti-corruption campaign as being essential "shock therapy."[145] Other Saudi officials have since argued that "[the] night time swoop was necessary to ensure suspects were not tipped off." They claimed that "a protracted legal process would have been inefficient"[146] and that it was "a necessarily harsh means of returning ill-gotten gains to the treasury while sending a clear message that the old, corrupt ways of doing business are over."[147] Despite these defenses, much of the international media coverage has been negative, frequently referring to the episode as Saudi Arabia's "night of the long knives" and focusing heavily on alleged human rights abuses and the apparent lack of due process.[148]

Overall, however, the anti-corruption campaign appears to have succeeded in its objectives. It underlined MBS's supremacy over Saudi Arabia's business community while also generating extra resources for Saudi Vision 2030 projects and, perhaps most importantly, having enjoyed considerable popular support. As Daniel Brumberg has noted, "The roundup yielded some billions of dollars, and even more importantly, telegraphed who was the new and unrivalled purveyor of both goods

and power."[149] Andrew Leber pointed out that the seized assets "ultimately helped pay for a new round of subsidies to citizens in the public sector."[150] Likewise, Bloomberg's correspondents have described the campaign as a "sensational show of power upending decades of unwritten rules." BBC's analysts have described how "among a great many Saudis the move was applauded . . . the sight of so many previously untouchable merchants and princes being 'shaken down' earned MBS even more followers at home."[151] And Steffen Hertog has observed that "there used to be a fuzzy border between state finances and senior princes. . . [but after these events] there are only two people left who have that kind of direct access: the crown prince and the king."[152]

Autocratic-authoritarian methods: military and security centralizations

With regard to military and security organizations, MBS unsurprisingly also seems to have sought much greater personal and inner circle influence. For example, there is now no longer a sense that the Ministry of Defense is still a "veritable state within a state."[153] Certainly, in contrast to Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud's very lengthy tenure as an independently powerful minister of defense,[154] or even his father's subsequent four-year stint (serving under King Abdullah), MBS seems to have been able to swiftly and effectively merge the ministry's most important components into his broadening political patronage network. Notably, as well as MBS's own appointment as minister in January 2015 and then his brother Khalid bin Salman's eventual promotion to deputy minister, a series of further maneuvers in late 2017 and early 2018 – since described as a "military transformation"[155] – saw "[MBS] believers" and "high energy people who could achieve modernization targets" assuming most other senior roles.[156]

As with the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior is clearly also no longer semi-autonomous[157] or the "biggest dog" (as US diplomats referred to it in 2009).[158] Indeed, since his June 2017 appointment as crown prince, MBS appears to have been able to assert his full authority over the ministry and, where necessary, to limit its powers. After all, as well as promptly installing another apparent inner circle member (Abdul-Aziz bin Saud Al-Saud) as minister, and setting up his own Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology, within weeks MBS took another important decision. He transferred the ministry's secret police, domestic intelligence, and counter-terrorism functions to a new Presidency of State Security located in the Royal Court and ultimately answering to MBS's own overarching Council for Political and Security Affairs.[159]

Notwithstanding these extensive efforts to centralize control over Saudi Arabia's conventional military and security organizations, MBS seems to have preferred keeping his *cohors praetoria* or "praetorian guard" units separate from other command structures, while of course ensuring he has as much personal influence as possible. Notably, the Royal Bodyguard unit has, as discussed, since March 2019 been under the command of Bandar bin Salman. The Royal Guard (which answers

directly to the Royal Court and comprises of three infantry brigades) seems to have similarly fallen under MBS's sway, with its commander removed only weeks after MBS's succession as crown prince, being replaced by Suhail bin Saqr Al-Mutairi, who is known to enjoy MBS's support.[160] Meanwhile, the Ministry of the National Guard has been under the control of yet another apparent inner circle member (Abdullah bin Bandar Al-Saud) since December 2018.[161] With rapid reaction military capabilities including five infantry brigades, four mechanized brigades, three planned "aviation brigades," and a number of tribal militias known as the *fouj* or "legmen,"[162] the National Guard still seems intended to serve as the "de facto protector of the ruling family."[163] It is the main "bulwark against any possible military coup" and – for the country's tribes – "their main link to government."[164]

Autocratic-authoritarian methods: media control

With regard to the local media, MBS's regime appears to have adopted and maintained most of the Saudi state's tried and tested controls. First and foremost, beyond the official Saudi Press Agency, most of the kingdom's media organizations remain either de facto state owned or owned by the ruling family or are very heavily supervised by specific government authorities. As the US Department of State notes of the situation in Saudi Arabia:

> all newspapers . . . must be government-licensed . . . the Ministry of Information must approve the appointment of all senior editors and has authority to remove them . . . the government provided guidelines to newspapers regarding controversial issues.[165]

Meanwhile, despite frequent statements from senior Saudi spokesmen on the need for improved media freedom and more critical journalism,[166] MBS's regime has clearly sought to uphold systems based on some degree of anticipated or actual repression. In most cases existing or revised legislation seems to have been a sufficient deterrent, with self-censorship described as "pervasive" in Saudi Arabia and with the authorities seen as "taking advantage of legal controls to impede the free expression of opinion and restrict individuals from engaging in public criticism of the political sphere." For those instances in which the laws themselves have not been enough of a deterrent, there is of course considerable evidence that MBS's regime has continued to use more straightforward coercive tactics. In February 2018, for example, Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court was used to sentence a prominent newspaper columnist to five years imprisonment after being accused of insulting the Royal Court and its employees.[167] In November 2019, at least eight controversial writers were seized, including a well-known journalist, a political analyst, and even a "self-taught philosophy analyst."[168] A month later, another journalist claimed his citizenship had been revoked due to his writings on Saudi Arabia's foreign relations.[169]

Though undoubtedly much more serious and going far beyond mere imprisonments or publication bans, the October 2018 Khashoggi assassination also appears to have been a part of an explicit media-related coercive strategy. After all, shortly before his death, Khashoggi had authored several of the most widely read criticisms of MBS in the international media.[170] In this context, US officials with access to classified intelligence assessments have indicated that Khashoggi's murder was likely the work of a new "Saudi Rapid Intervention Group" which was established at some point in 2017 with the express aim of launching missions against influential critics. Though there is little further information available on the group, its members are understood to have included some of MBS's key aides, senior intelligence officers, and members of the Royal Guard. It is also believed to have targeted several activists in addition to Khashoggi, and to have been "forcibly repatriating Saudis from other Arab countries and detaining [them] in palaces belonging to the crown prince and his father."[171] As noted, in February 2021 the new Biden administration in the United States declassified a top secret CIA document, which stated that bin Salman personally had ordered Khashoggi's murder.

With regard to social media, the co-option and control of such new technologies has unsurprisingly also been taken very seriously by MBS's regime, with evidence that it has gone to considerable lengths to try to keep at least one step ahead of any organized cyber dissent. Most obviously, existing or revised legislation has been deployed to encourage online self-censorship and, where necessary, to justify actual censorship. In particular, Saudi Arabia's 2007 Anti-Cyber Crime Law – which remains in place – expressly prohibits the "production, preparation, transmission, or storage of material impinging on public order, religious values, public morals . . . through the information network or computers";[172] while a new 2017 Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing has effectively tied cyber dissent to the crime of *lèse-majesté* by stating there will be severe penalties for "any conduct . . . intended to disturb public order . . . or destabilize the state or endanger its national unity" and for

> anyone who challenges, either directly or indirectly, the religion or justice of the king or crown prince . . . or anyone who establishes or uses a website or computer program . . . to commit any of the offenses set out in the law.[173]

As with its control over local media outputs, there is extensive evidence that the MBS regime has also engaged in more straightforward coercive tactics. In 2017, for example, a journalist who had been using Twitter to criticise Al-Qahtani was forced to resign from his online news site.[174] In January 2018, a prominent student activist who had been posting YouTube videos critical of Saudi Arabia's foreign relations was detained. And in May 2018, the Specialized Criminal Court was used to sentence an academic and media professional to five years of imprisonment followed by a five year travel ban after being accused of "insulting neighbouring states" and "destroying national cohesion. . . [as well as] publishing writings hostile to state policy."[175]

Accompanying such conventional legislation based and "offline" coercive strategies, there are now strong indications that MBS's regime has also sought and developed more direct and powerful means to censor, survey, and even manipulate social media and other cyberspace communication platforms. Indeed, as a particularly wealthy state with access to considerable resources and the ability to hire specialist personnel, Saudi Arabia seems to have been able to successfully harness some of the very latest technologies and methods, and for the time being at least, to have kept the upper hand.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia appears to have been purchasing and deploying some of the most sophisticated cyber-surveillance software packages in the world. This and other resources have contributed to the much-discussed blocking of critical or potentially controversial websites and platform content.[176] Part of this extensive "deep packet" inspection of personal emails and other Internet data carried by state-owned servers,[177] the monitoring of citizens' whereabouts when traveling abroad using secret tracking requests,[178] and alleged attempts to groom informants within major social media companies.[179]

In 2017, for example, Al-Qahtani was reported to have been communicating with an Israeli cyber security company and to have "spoken of grand plans to use its surveillance tools throughout the Middle East and Europe, like Turkey and Qatar or France and Britain."[180] Meanwhile, following a series of negotiations it was reported that Saudi Arabia had signed an agreement with a major US consulting company which would "help train the kingdom's growing ranks of cyberfighters" and – as Al-Qahtani put it – "open great horizons."[181] Moreover, it is now thought that Al-Qahtani's team had begun using "intrusive software programmes" capable of turning mobile phones into bugging devices as part of "an aggressive cyber surveillance strategy that monitored Saudis both at home and abroad."[182] As the BBC's correspondents observed, "Anyone critical of MBS or his policies [also] found themselves trolled with abusive and threatening messages on social media, with an online 'army of flies' to harass and shame perceived enemies."[183]

Conclusion

Clearly buttressed by greater social liberalization and promises of economic reform, MBS's rule over Saudi Arabia seems to represent a potent contemporary blend of traditional autocratic methods. These have included the tightening of circles of patronage, "anti-corruption" crackdowns, the centralization of command over military and security organizations, and the co-option or repression of all forms of local and social media.

Much, of course, could still go wrong for MBS. His foreign policy track record appears poor, with the Yemen war largely unsuccessful and drawing widespread international condemnation. To please US President Biden and to extract himself from an unwinnable quagmire, Bin Salman wants to end the war. In March 2021 he offered a ceasefire to Saudi Arabia's opponents in Yemen, the Iran-supported

Houthis, a Shia militant organization, which seized control of much of Yemen in 2015.

Bin Salman's ability to challenge or contain Iran is being questioned (especially following a series of Iran-linked missile attacks on vital Saudi oil infrastructure[184]), and the embargo on Qatar proved inconclusive. In early January 2021 Saudi Arabia and four other Arab states thus restored formal diplomatic relations with Qatar. MBS may also soon be seen as failing on key economic objectives, with Saudi Vision 2030 now ostensibly stalling, and with the Neom economic free zone still far from completion. The COVID-19 crisis in 2020 also greatly depressed global oil prices though they are expected to largely recover in the course of 2021.[185]

Nonetheless, as well as contributing to the rise of his increasing autocratic-authoritarian regime, MBS's significant changes to statecraft and authority structures will undoubtedly have an impact on several higher debates on the future of autocracy and authoritarianism. Notably, with regard to theorizations on the relationship between socioeconomic modernizing forces and political development, the juxtaposition of MBS's regime building with Saudi Arabia's relative prosperity evidently undermines the long-held notion that prosperity and economic progress will lead to liberal political reforms and perhaps even to the demise of more "traditional" ruling systems.[186]

Likewise, what seems to be Saudi Arabia's current capitalist development trajectory appears to contradict even the most recent waves of "modernization theory" which, as Eva Bellin notes, has still failed to account for those relatively well-developed states that somehow continue to be ruled by authoritarian regimes.[187] Writing in 1992, for example, Larry Diamond observed what he felt to be a positive relationship between economic development and democratization, noting it was "one of the most powerful and robust relationships in the study of comparative national development."[188] That same year, Dietrich Rueschmeyer et al.'s influential book *Capitalist Development and Democracy* contended there was an explicit link between international capital and political modernization on the basis that capitalism increases urbanization, thus bringing people together and creating better conditions for civil society to form.[189]

Furthermore, MBS's effective supplanting of consensus-based rule with autocratic authoritarianism in perhaps the most influential of the world's remaining monarchies may well end up influencing overall perceptions of royal inviolability and potential monarchical progressiveness. After all, intellectual monarchists often still draw on the canon of Charles-Louis Montesquieu and other eighteenth-century "Age of Enlightenment" thinkers,[190] such as the early nineteenth-century works of Georg Wilhelm Hegel,[191] and – in the context of rule of law systems – Walter Bagehot's popular late nineteenth-century text.[192] Likewise, in recent years royalists have also commonly referred to Peter Berger's "sacred canopy" thesis, which suggests benevolent and respected monarchies can prosper under something of a protective halo. And of course there is Frederick Beiser's particularly promising

proposition that kingdoms have the potential to become the "highest realization of the idea of the state."[193]

Thus, even if MBS's seemingly strong and stable regime can in some ways be seen as a contemporary embodiment of Thomas Hobbes' mid-seventeenth-century vision of necessarily omnipotent and "Leviathan-like" monarchies,[194] when compared with these broader monarchical fortifications. many of the most significant changes to Saudi Arabia's statecraft and authority structures appear to be openly defying (or perhaps redefining) the best known liberal, legal-rational, and religiously defined royalist ideals. Including those most frequently used to legitimate or defend other modern-day monarchical polities.

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20

VIKTOR ORBÁN AND JÁNOS KÁDÁR

A post-Communist and a Communist autocrat in Hungary: A comparative analysis (Kádár: 1912–1989; Orbán: born 1963)

András Bozóki

Looking at the past 75 years of Hungarian politics since World War II, we realize that during most of this time, Hungary was ruled by just two politicians: János Kádár and Viktor Orbán. Together, the two leaders were almost half a century in power. János Kádár ruled Hungary from 1956 to 1988, while Orbán first emerged as a liberal democrat (from 1998 to 2002) and later in 2010 turned into a populist autocrat. Both leaders have had a significant impact on Hungarian politics. What connects these leaders, what are the differences between them, and how did they manage to come to power and stay in power?

János Kádár

János Kádár (1912–1989) was born in Fiume (today Rijeka) as János Csermanek during the monarchic era. He was raised in difficult circumstances, first by foster parents and then by his mother. He met the illegal activists of the Communist movement when he worked as a mechanic at the age of 17, and his deep concerns regarding social inequalities and injustice led him to join the movement.

The young Communist activist, who later changed his name to Kádár, was not a well-educated ideologue. He held only an elementary school education and preferred practical matters over theories. He once claimed that the only piece from the oeuvre of Marx and Engels that truly appealed to him and which he read all the way through was *Anti-Dühring*. This was Friedrich Engels' relatively down-to-earth survey and exposition of the main ideas of Marxist theory.[1] Kádár was jailed in 1933, due to his membership in the party, and spent the next three years in prison.[2] He later joined the Social Democratic Party in order to act publicly while hiding his ongoing Communist Party membership. He was a simple, socially conservative man who found joy in the simple life of a proletariat. He met his wife through the party apparatus, and the couple remained together for the rest of their life.

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After World War II, Kádár grew suspicious toward Mátyás Rákosi,[3] Hungary's de facto leader from 1947 to 1956, as well as the other new Communist leaders in Hungary. Kádár was not part of the group of Communists who returned from Moscow after the end of the war. He was one of those who had stayed in the homeland – comrades, in other words, whom Stalin did not consider reliable. In 1943, Kádár and his peers had changed the name of the party to Peace Party to avoid detention and recruit more supporters. The name change was not viewed favorably by Moscow.

Still, at the beginning of the Rákosi era, Kádár belonged to the wider circle of the party's leadership and even served as the Minister of Interior from 1948 to 1950. In this position he contributed to the imprisonment and execution of László Rajk,[4] the former foreign minister who lost out in a power battle with Rákosi and was accused of espionage for the West. He also helped to persecute some of Rajk's Communist comrades. In 1951, however, Kádár himself fell out with Rákosi and was arrested. He was tortured and sentenced to life imprisonment after a show trial but spent only two years in prison.

Released from prison in 1954 after Stalin's death, Kádár was officially rehabilitated but he became extremely cautious: he not only distanced himself from the pro-Rákosi hard-liners but also did not join the emerging reformist wing within the party, led by Imre Nagy, though it had been Nagy who had given order to free him from prison.[5] Kádár was a disciplined party soldier who stayed in the middle of the political road and managed to hide his own ambitions. That cautious attitude, which served him well, became the most characteristic feature of his leadership style.

At the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, Kádár saw the uprising as a counterrevolutionary attack against the rule of the working class.[6] Nevertheless, he realized that he could not turn to the Communist hard-liners who had imprisoned him five years before; he would always be seen as a traitor in their eyes. In parallel with the radicalization of the country, he moved closer to the reformist group and finally became a member of Imre Nagy's cabinet during the revolution from October to November 1956. But he never fully belonged to the Nagy camp.

Kádár's treasonous behavior took shape during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution after he declared as then minister of state in the Nagy cabinet that he would fight the incoming Soviet tanks with his bare hands, if needed. Instead, he disappeared the day after; the Soviets flew him to Moscow. Arriving in the Soviet capital he did not know whether he would be executed by his Soviet comrades or given another political task to prove himself. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev[7] opted for the latter option, and following the advice of Yugoslav president Josip Tito, he made Kádár the new leader of the Hungarian Communist regime and thus Rákosi's successor. Kádár returned to Budapest as the representative of the postrevolutionary retaliation policy while the city was still in flames. He was given the title of First Secretary of the reestablished Communist Party. The military clashes between the Soviet Red Army, which had invaded the Hungarian capital, and the scattered Hungarian military forces supported by young, civilian freedom fighters were ongoing.

As the new leader of Hungary, handpicked by the Soviet general secretary Nikita Khrushchev, Kádár was at an advantage for not being a Muscovite and, despite his imprisonment and having served in Nagy's cabinet, having no track record of being a particularly loyal supporter of revolutionary leader Imre Nagy.[8]

Still, one could hardly find a man more hated in the country at the turn of 1956–1957. Originally, Kádár promised impunity to those who had participated in the revolution, but within a few months, large-scale arrests commenced. A year and half later, Imre Nagy, the prime minister of the revolution, was hanged. Kádár had not been ordered to do so by Moscow; Nagy's execution was entirely on Kádár's own initiative. This terrible and treasonous legacy accompanied him throughout his life.

Kádár was an effective local dictator, but his powers were always strictly controlled from Moscow. His local adversaries therefore understood that they could only hope to remove Kádár if they found new supporters among the Soviet leaders and more reliable communication channels to the Soviet party elite. As long as Kádár maintained political stability in Hungary, however, Moscow backed him. Thus, the contradictory goals of maintaining political stability while pushing through reforms deeply shaped Kádár's strategies. While he moved away from the legacy of Communist totalitarianism of the 1950s, he did it incrementally and with great caution.[9]

Kádár walked his own path, even though it wasn't always obvious. He remained loyal to the successive Soviet leaders, but in exchange for that loyalty, he attempted to leverage increased autonomy for economic reforms. By the 1970s he had created a nondemocratic yet liveable system of "goulash communism" in an attempt to make Hungarians forget his political treason of 1956/57.[10] Hungarians' forgiveness lasted as long as Kádár managed to deliver economic and political stability. But it soon became clear that his regime suffered from a terminal illness and had outlived itself.

The nature of Kádár's regime

The Communist era provided different legacies for the countries of Central Europe. The era proved to be most damaging for those countries that had inherited democratic traditions and well-developed social structures from pre-Communist times. This damage could be most clearly seen in the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia and also in East Germany and other relatively developed parts of the European periphery. Here, the subsequent Communist policies systematically destroyed the functions of civil society and possibilities of a market economy. In other countries of East Central Europe, the damage was less wide-ranging and severe. In these nations, totalitarianism did away with social solidarity and civil society, but it also destroyed the semi-feudal structures of the pre-Communist regimes.

In the relatively modernized countries of Central Europe, on the other hand, state socialism led to a sort of re-feudalization: the Communist Party hierarchy eliminated horizontal social relations with vertical and politically dominated ones.

The regimes also prevented the people of Central Europe from experiencing the impact of the Western cultural revolution of 1968, which transformed in particular how youth thought about social relationships in Western Europe.[11]

State socialism was not the result of an endogenous political development in Hungary: it was forced on these societies from the outside, implemented by the Moscow-trained party apparatchiks who copied the Stalinist model.[12] With the partial exception of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, Communist movements never obtained a mass following in Central European societies.[13]

However, in many ways, state socialism still led to modernizing regimes, especially in the Soviet republics, but also, to some degree, in Central Europe. In the 1950s, it fostered urbanization and an outdated model of industrialization by forcing millions of people from the countryside to urban centers. By opening up the labor market for women on both economic and ideological grounds, state socialism officially pushed society toward the acknowledgment of some sort of female emancipation. The positive side of the Communist legacy thus includes social and geographical mobility, urbanization, stress on equality, available health care and housing, as well as free, though restricted, access to higher education. The great emphasis on elementary through high school education went far to eradicate remaining pockets of illiteracy throughout Communist-ruled regions.

Despite these homogenizing educational effects, Communist policies did not have the same impact on countries in Central Europe. Instead, those same policies actually harmed the most developed countries and regions. Here, the deficiencies of the respective regimes left long-lasting legacies of damage during the post-Communist era.[14] Most notably were the erosion of every-day liberties, trust, and civic virtues within Central European societies; the growth of a culture of corruption and fear; the existence of both formal and informal rules, which often contradicted each other; and the increased dependence on the omnipotent party-state. Restrictions against Western influence and foreign travel turned these countries into satellite states of the Soviet Union. These states in turn formed closed societies, breeding cynicism surrounding the public good and forming new hierarchies based on loyalty and party membership.[15] Women were emancipated in the workforce only, while still expected to perform their traditional role at home. Female suffrage was granted, but in the face of minimal political freedom and genuinely free elections, these women's newly gained power to vote carried little meaning.

Kádár learned from the Rákosi regime and the 1956 revolution that political oppression can only be sustained if the leader provides material compensation to his people in exchange for their liberty. Kádár's postrevolutionary retaliation had ended by the early 1960s. In 1963, he declared amnesty for political prisoners, ushering in the "real Kádár era," which lasted until the late 1970s. This era was characterized by a rise in the quality of life for the people and their concomitant pacification. There existed a conscious relativization of national identity in the name of internationalism, but there also was only moderate political indoctrination in exchange for pragmatism.

"Whoever is not against us is with us," Kádár declared in the early 1960s and ensured economic reforms and a higher level of cultural openness from then onward.[16] Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian citizens bought their first apartments, cars, and television sets, along with weekend houses near Lake Balaton. Citizens could even travel to Western countries every third year. People realized that the regime would provide them with relative security as long as they did not demand political freedom. Thus, Hungary became the "happiest barrack in the camp", a prime example of state socialist consumerism.

The original sin – the revolution of 1956 – had yet to be forgotten by the Hungarian people, however. Kádár, a pragmatist, did not want to force another ideology upon society. As he knew that Communist propaganda irritated people, he left it alone and concentrated on preserving his power. Although 1956 was officially regarded as a "counterrevolution," the regime chose not to speak about it. As the good chess player he was, Kádár managed to avoid being replaced like other leaders in the Eastern bloc, such as Dubcek,[17] Ulbricht,[18] and Gomulka.[19] He was open to cautious economic reforms but rejected political ones. He had always denied that his politics resulted in the creation of a "Hungarian model," as he did not want to provoke Moscow's anger. Nevertheless, the mixture of economic decentralization and political monopoly made the Hungarian system rather special within the Soviet bloc.

This unique Kádárian compromise could only be sustained as long as the economy grew. When the economic recession of 1978 hit, Kádár tried to counter it with the help of foreign loans. The borrowed sums were spent on sustaining consumption. However, when it turned out that reforms were needed, it also became apparent that the indebted state socialist system could not be reformed. Even full employment was not properly achieved. Although it was a key tenet of state socialism, often employment was in fact "invisible unemployment" within factories, which employed many more people than needed.

The aging Kádár was not capable, nor did he desire to follow the model of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms.[20] Eventually, Gorbachev allowed the Hungarian party elite to deprive Kádár of power. He was removed from office through the quick rebellion of the intraparty apparatus in May 1988. The following year his mental and physical health deteriorated rapidly.[21] It was symbolic that he died a year later on July 6, 1989, the day when the country's highest court ruled in favor of the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy and his peers, whose execution Kádár had orchestrated in 1958.

Kádár's legacy is ambivalent for many. On the one hand, Hungarians refer with nostalgia to the period in which relative social equality was coupled with economic growth, when even manual workers could afford a two-week holiday at Lake Balaton. On the other hand, the Kádár regime was a soft but clear dictatorship, where "elections" were organized as mere formalities and did not provide alternative political choices. While Kádár is credited for creating better living circumstances in Hungary than existed in the other countries behind the Iron Curtain, it

nevertheless remains that his downfall in 1989 was due to a popular demand. No one wanted the continuation of the regime, not even most members of the party.

Viktor Orbán and his party

Viktor Orbán was born in Székesfehérvár in 1963, was raised in a nearby village, and aspired to become a football player. He was brought up in a family dominated by a violent father, while his mother remained in the background. Orbán entered politics during the international fall of the Communist regime and as a dedicated supporter of liberal democracy. He was highly ambitious, and it became obvious within a few short years that he was a man mesmerized by power.[22] In this essay I largely focus on his early years in politics and on the development of his Fidesz party before analyzing his increasingly autocratic regime in the years since 2010.

The young Orbán played a leading role from the beginning of his political career. The Fidesz party (*Federation of Young Democrats*) was founded with his active participation on March 30, 1988, as an independent youth and political organization. The young men[23] who convened the first party conference initially wanted to issue a memorandum of understanding about launching the organization. They planned to go ahead with creating the association only after enough people had indicated their interest to join. However, the then 24-year-old Orbán opposed this principle of gradualism and pushed for the immediate formation of the organization. He also insisted that the word "socialist" should not be included in the name of the new organization. His arguments convinced the majority, and Fidesz was founded that evening as a youth organization.[24]

Although the police summoned and threatened them, the government did not take any particular measure to undermine the new organization, although it issued arrest warrants for some of the founders. Despite widespread knowledge of the arrest warrants, hundreds joined Fidesz in a matter of weeks. In its founding declaration, Fidesz did not only lay down overarching liberal principles but also identified itself as an opponent of the regime with the objective of breaking up the power monopoly of the Young Communist League (KISZ).

The young people who founded Fidesz had first met in the advanced college movement of the 1980s. This peculiar, semi-intellectual group was the first to transform into an openly political organization during the democratic transition period. Most members were jurists, economists, scholars, and tutors at the start of their careers. However, their professional training was gradually overshadowed by the opportunity to become involved in politics. Most thus entered politics straight from the university lecture halls. Orbán finished his legal studies and wrote his thesis on the Polish solidarity movement. Then, thanks to the Soros Foundation, he joined the Central Europe Research Group and was even able to attend the University of Oxford for a year as a visiting fellow. However, he returned in January 1989 after only four months in England to immerse himself in Hungary's rapidly changing political developments.

The collectivist world of university dorms favored future politicians who had strong verbal skills, the determination and readiness to act, and the ability to make a significant impression on one's peers. As they received no significant opposition from the Communist bureaucracy, the group's criticism of the regime was dominated by pragmatic behavior from the outset. Fidesz opted for quick hit-and-run-style type of actions that found their political opponents unprepared and left them reeling. The enemy was initially just the KISZ, but eventually the whole regime became the enemy.

The new Fidesz group had not had time to put down roots in the Kádár regime during its last years in power. The most influential figures of Fidesz were first-generation intellectuals born in the countryside who studied at Budapest universities and developed ties with the nascent democratic opposition during their student years. In an interview Viktor Orbán stated:

> From 1983 on, I saw that this political regime was constantly retreating. I never saw the communist regime in its full power, in its sheer brutality. Not even when I was beaten and detained for twelve hours on the 16th June 1988, because the interesting thing was not that I was detained, but that they had to release me.[25]

Fidesz mostly attracted young people who had a strong desire to move up in the social hierarchy. They put all their eggs in one basket – that of political success. Many of them climbed the social ladder within a span of ten years, which for those before them had often taken many decades. They viewed not only the Communist party-state establishment but also the university leadership with suspicion, and after a while they also lost all trust in the opposition elites. They did not want to assimilate into the Budapest elite; instead, they wanted to surpass and defeat it. In the ranks of Fidesz, the strongest aspirations for power could be found in those who came from the countryside.

Transition to democracy occurred in a peaceful and negotiated way at the Hungarian national roundtable talks in 1989.[26] Fidesz was one of the most active organizations of the opposition. Men were extremely overrepresented within the Fidesz delegation at the roundtable negotiations: out of the 28 members, only two were women. Of the 26 men, 22 had done their military service before attending university, and 14 attended colleges for advanced studies during their university years. Seven stayed in the colleges as tutors after their graduation. Two-thirds of the negotiators of Fidesz were made up of the cohort born between 1959 and 1964. This indicates a very strong cohesion within the party leadership. While the informal network of Fidesz has been replaced almost entirely within the past 32 years, the inner core of the party has surprisingly remained intact.[27]

This core was cemented by the Fidesz leadership's common origins from rural towns, shared masculinity, and ambition to scale the social ladder, as well as by the years spent together in the military and college dorms. The social conservatism they brought from their rural home towns, however, was temporarily replaced by

the liberal *Zeitgeist* at the dawn of their careers. Still, due to their successful rise, the party leadership quickly became part of the new political elite, though after 1994 they had no problem abandoning Fidesz' founding principles and returning to their traditional rural roots.

From the 28-strong Fidesz delegation that attended the 1989 negotiations, only seven have remained members of the party, six of whom came from rural towns. To this day, they have remained influential politicians within Fidesz. They include Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, President János Áder, and Speaker of the House László Kövér. The leaders of Fidesz did not use ideological references to draw a contrast with the state ideology that was on the brink of collapse in any case. Rather, they made use of the existing legislation. They were radical and anti-ideological at the same time. This seems like a paradox, as radical movements are usually ideologically based, but in the Hungarian case, radicalism meant merely the radicalism of action, not of ideas. Fidesz supported the unity of the various opposition forces but was against premature talks with the regime and did not like the politics of "national reconciliation" proposed by the state party. The Fidesz leadership believed that there was no reconciliation without a breakup. That's why Viktor Orbán said at the 1989 reburial of Imre Nagy that the young respected Imre Nagy for having broken up with his Communist commitments for the sake of the Hungarian people.[28]

From time to time, Fidesz played the role of a "battering ram" at the 1989 talks. First, it was the least convinced of all opposition parties that negotiations were necessary and perhaps inevitable. Fidesz's radicalism was shaped not only by its demand for an immediate transition to democracy but also by its demand for elite replacement. As one of the Fidesz negotiators explained in 1997: "I believe that a total generational change is needed in the Hungarian elite. Fidesz was the start of this generational change, they were the ones who radically claimed that the past needed to be left behind."[29] This generational angst was shared by many in this circle.

During the roundtable talks of 1989, Fidesz allied itself with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), a liberal party that grew out of dissident intellectual movements. The representatives of the two parties agreed on the most important questions. The principal role of Fidesz during these talks was to speed up the transition process. As one of their leaders said in an interview, "Fidesz was the light cavalry of the opposition. We always took the most radical position, which then served as a basis for compromises."[30] This behavior was not only tactical; it was also driven by Fidesz's deep-seated anti-Communist attitude.

In what way was Orbán's approach different from that of the dominant politicians of the era, such as the conservative József Antall[31] or the liberal Péter Tölgyessy?[32] According to Orbán himself, it was he who could best translate opposition ideas into specific political measures.

> There is a good idea, but what derives from it? Recognizing the position of our opponent, how can we use this argument? If the argument is excellent, how should it be used in a way to get what we want as an outcome? So, I could see immediately that no one else there possessed this skill but me.[33]

The year 1998 saw Orbán's rise to power as prime minister of a center-right coalition government, which he then led for the next four years. What the Fidesz elite experienced during their careers also permeated Orbán's first term in government: the unlimited scope of opportunities. For them, the road from rural working class to the world of metropolitan bourgeoisie was a road of double mobility. It was not only cultural elevation as first-generation intellectuals but also adaptation to a metropolitan lifestyle as former students of the universities of Budapest who came from the countryside. At the same time, they picked up the language of the era (the discourse of democracy), enjoyed the fraternal college milieu, and adopted a "new elite" mindset, which contributed actively to the quick dissolution of the Communist dictatorship. All of these factors reinforced Orbán's conviction that any obstacle on the way to success and power can be surmounted by team spirit and generational solidarity.

However, the obstacles in their way stemmed precisely from Fidesz's speedy mobility. Orbán and his followers acted as if every day brought a new challenge, which needed to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. Since his youth, fighting had been a zero-sum game for Orbán, where compromise was interpreted as a sign of weakness. Understanding this phenomenon requires not only a political and sociological approach to the regime but also the use of social psychology. The latter approach suggests that a person who ventures out of his community of origin, culture, or even mother tongue suffers trauma, which may repeat itself every time he needs to adapt to a new group.

> "Emotionally and psychologically," it seems, "these people experience a lifelong process of social learning, often unconsciously. This often manifests itself in the operation of the psychic system as overload. The lack of security and safety calls for the search for a sanctuary. . . . Often a lifetime is too short for the development of an intra-psychic asylum. Locomotion and projection tend to become fixated."[34]

Social climbers are often motivated by the urge to prove themselves to others and, scholars have concluded, develop a

> very strong new personal identity, which paradoxically covers their weakness: it is indeed a self-armour. It is characterized by self-restraint and the hetero- and auto-aggressive qualities of influencing their environment. Achievement itself is a narcissistic shell. It is difficult to be in contact with these people. They are smart, precise, arbitrary, irritable and irritating. This is how they are able to carry on amidst constant resistance. They live in a fever of ruthlessness, outwardly as well as inwardly.[35]

These lines describe the founding members of Fidesz (and Orbán himself) almost exactly. In view of this social psychological approach, college dorms were nothing but sanctuaries for the elite. They believed that success alone would justify their actions.

Contrary to the positive myths about these colleges, they were not schools of liberal democracy. Living under the same roof, roommates knew all about each other. There was no private sphere, and there were only limited opportunities for free, uncontrolled individual action. Charismatic leadership was appreciated; a man was worth only as much as the recognition he managed to obtain. Thus, the life experience of the participants was limited to living and operating within a small and closed community. This was important because this set of similar – individual and collective – past experiences was preserved in the collective memory of this subculture. They were thus built into the culture of the new political elite and the behavior of its followers. Later, these elements were inherited as part of the party's identity, even by those who had not originally lived through this experience. But the ritual identification with the now canonized form of this political culture became a condition for their later group membership and prospects for career advancement.

The problem of the first Orbán government (1998–2002) arose from its desire to achieve a different kind of regime change than circumstances allowed. They could not be too radical in reforming the already developed democratic institutions when the country was on the verge of entering the European Union (EU). No "second revolution" can be easily started in a consolidated postrevolutionary society. Therefore, Fidesz focused on maintaining the support of its heterogenous voting groups. Its radicalism only manifested itself in the practice of power politics, the disregarding of established norms and unwritten rules, as well as the creation of new procedural frameworks. Truly changing the regime, however, could only take place after 2010, when Orbán formed his second government.

Fidesz has continued to function as a parliamentary party since 1990. It spent 15 years in government and is still in power at the time these lines are being written. The first Orbán government lasted four years before being voted out in 2002. After spending the subsequent eight years opposing the regime in power, Orbán's Fidesz party managed a comeback in 2010. The first five years of Fidesz were characterized by collective leadership, but in 1993, Orbán became the party leader and has remained so for a quarter of a century.[36] During the past decade, the party has played a subordinate role in shaping politics, however, and currently only serves as one of the many vehicles that support Orbán.

During the past three decades, Viktor Orbán has made three major political turns. The first turn was of an ideological nature and occurred in 1993–1994 when he reoriented his party from a liberal to a more conservative direction. Once this was achieved, however, the party soon left its conservatism behind and embarked on yet another departure. It began to pursue a nationalist, ethno-populist course. This ideological turn was only surprising initially as it became quickly obvious that Orbán was an opportunistic politician who was driven not by ideology but by his ambition for power. Fidesz has therefore traveled the ideological spectrum and always acted in response to political necessity.[37]

The second organizational turn occurred in 2003, when Orbán monopolized authority in his party through changing its bylaws. The new regulations gave veto

power to the party's president at every point of decision-making when building up the party hierarchy. Members of the Fidesz party had thus experienced Orbán's arbitrary rule well before 2010.

The third turn came in 2010 when Orbán abandoned his views that he had articulated between 2002 and 2010 and instead started to dismantle the liberal-democratic system in Hungary, ultimately creating the first nondemocratic regime of the EU. It is thus important to distinguish between the still democratic Orbán government of the years 1998–2002 and the current autocratic Orbán regime that has governed Hungary since 2010.

The nature of Orbán's regime

Between 1990 and 2010, Hungary was considered a liberal democracy. By the mid-1990s the country's democratic system had been widely regarded as stable and secure. The turmoil that accompanied the years of political and economic transformation after the fall of Communism had also given rise to steady economic growth. Foreign investment in Hungary was the highest among the countries of Central Europe. Economic development, however, did not quite reach all segments of Hungarian society. The post-Communist state created opportunities for the younger, educated, and most competitive elements of society while proving to be much less concerned about the rural inhabitants, the lower middle classes, and the poor. Hundreds of thousands lost their jobs within a few years. Most of them requested early retirement when they saw the writing on the wall.

Between 1994 and 1998, the coalition of socialists and liberals[38] in Hungary followed Third Way economic policies. As a result, left-leaning voters struggled to find a political party with whom they felt at home and gradually drifted to the radical right. Since the turn of the millennium, and due to the lack of a genuinely left-wing party, Hungarian politics have become increasingly polarized between left-liberalism, which was losing ground, and the rising populist and radical right.[39] Despite the successful accession of Hungary to the EU in 2004, by the second part of the decade it became clear that the rise of the populist radical right was unstoppable.[40] The transfer of power occurred parallel to the disintegration of the left-liberal coalition government just after the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2008–2009. The general election of 2010 was the decisive turning point, with Viktor Orbán's party winning 53% of the vote, which led to a qualified majority of parliamentary seats for Fidesz.

The Orbán regime can be described as a "postmodern tyranny," to use the term coined by Ágnes Heller.[41] It does not follow the recipe of twentieth-century authoritarian regimes but relies upon selective, socially targeted, initially soft, but gradually intensifying forms of oppression. This brand of pragmatic oppression can be sustained through powerful propaganda to create social support for discrimination against carefully selected target groups. This process might seem haphazard at first, but at the end of each action, its systemic nature always becomes apparent.

In Hungary, the process of undermining the democratic system, which was widely perceived as elitist, started in late 2006. The opposition Fidesz party, led by Orbán, behaved not so much as a rival but as a definitive enemy of the coalition government. An already polarized political discourse became increasingly driven by hatred. The economic crisis of 2008 led to the 2010 election results when Fidesz received a qualified majority in Parliament. Since that time, the quality of democracy in Hungary has steadily deteriorated and a definite trend of autocratization has taken shape.

At the beginning, supporters of the regime talked about "majoritarian democracy," as if liberal democracy had survived unharmed. Retrospectively, one can conclude that Hungary must be characterized as a damaged, broken, or illiberal democracy between 2011 and 2015. Democratic institutions were gradually less respected by the government, but important democratic principles were still in place. These included open political debates, freedom of speech, freedom of association, legal equality, egalitarian conceptions of citizenship, and gender-neutral civic status, though all of them were already somewhat distorted. Eventually, however, the regime left "illiberal democracy" behind and began relying on increasingly authoritarian measures.[42]

In 2016, Hungarian citizens were prevented by paramilitary forces and with the government's tacit consent from initiating a domestic referendum. They were thus barred from exercising their constitutional right to vote, and it was questionable whether at this stage Hungary still qualified as a democratic state in any sense. With the help of its outsourced violence and amendments to the Constitution on the basis that there existed a "state of terrorist threat," the Orbán regime took several steps on the road to establishing a power monopoly. For reasons of political propaganda, the regime proudly claimed that its enforcement agencies did not use direct force. Instead, it had come to rely on threats and intimidation, outsourced to paramilitary groups and football clubs.[43]

The policy perfectly fits the Orbán regime's governance strategy, which has always been characterized by deliberate efforts to blur the differences between official and unofficial, responsible and unaccountable, agents. Decisions are made outside the established institutions, behind their back, in an invisible gray zone of a world of shady organizations bearing no political responsibility or liability. In this context, acts of violence that may embarrass those in power are performed by paid hitmen, from whom Fidesz can easily distance itself.

Similarly, the budget was drafted not necessarily by the minister in charge but by private firms acting as money-laundering operations, with no legal ties to the government and whose members may also have been granted access to classified information.[44]

There is a point when even a broken democracy comes to an end: it is where the line between private and public interest is swallowed up, when the difference between nationalization and privatization disappears, when public interest becomes indistinguishable from the interests of political and economic actors capturing the

state, and when *mutatis mutandis*, the system ends up defending these entrepreneurs. Corruption in Hungary has been legalized. It is no longer seen as deviant behavior but as an integral part of the system. Breaking the law has become the new normal.

What was once described as the abuse of power has today become a defining feature of the regime. As Bálint Magyar put it: "The mafia state is a privatized form of the parasitic state," where the patron–client relationship no longer refers to the patronage system also seen in democracies; essentially, it is the "eradication of the foundation of individual autonomy and the shoehorning of all existential issues into a system of dependencies."[45] This already comes dangerously close to the definition of an authoritarian regime.

The concept of the "mafia state" is one of the most consistent theoretical arguments to describe the Orbán regime. The regime's Orwellian communication mode can be used not only as opposition criticism of the regime but also for an academically sound analysis of Hungary's political system. It is no wonder that several authors have made attempts to understand and describe the fundamental components of the Orbán regime over the past decade.[46]

The following are the main building blocks of Orbán's current regime: the centralization and personalization of power, the propaganda of "national unification" coupled with the discrimination against and marginalization of underclass elements and different minorities of the society, the forced replacement of the old elites by the predatory (or mafia) state, and the practice of power politics. The regime is rooted in the prime minister's conviction that "revolutionary circumstances" give him the right to embark on exceptional policies.

The Orbán regime of today is largely different from its early days of 2010–2011, although one can trace the origins of its authoritarianism to that period. The regime has experienced a gradual process of transformation since 2010. Excessive majoritarian arguments dominated the early stage of its development. The first step toward a hybrid regime was the unilateral writing and approval of a new constitution, the Fundamental Law, by the governing party. Abusing its democratically legitimized power, the government has done away with the rule of law step by step. The best example of this is the fourth modification of the Fundamental Law in the spring of 2013. This modification enabled the Constitutional Court to legally disregard its decisions from before 2010.

Up until the 2014 general elections, there existed free and fair elections in post-Communist Hungary. The 2014 elections, however, failed to meet the minimal requirements of the democratic process, due to the creation of an uneven playing field of the parties and candidates who stood for office. Orbán's statement of July 2014 about his creation of an illiberal state did not indicate the launch date of a new order but simply promised further measures aimed at entrenching his semi-authoritarian system. By that time the regime had managed to put the unfair elections of 2014 safely in the past and was already planning to change the rules for the municipal election in Budapest only a few months before the ballot was to take place. Thus, by 2014, the Orbán government had already moved beyond the era of illiberal democracy.

Since then, the regime's move toward authoritarianism has continued, best demonstrated by actions such as the hiring of enforcers to violently block the opposition's attempt at initiating a referendum and the public prosecutor's failure to press charges. Controlling oligarchs in a neo-patrimonialist or neo-prebendalist way[47] and outsourcing violence to paramilitary groups conjure up the image of the early years of Putin's rule in Russia. Moreover, the regime's vehement anti-immigrant campaign during the government-initiated referendum in 2016, as well as in the electoral campaign of 2018, contradicted the basic norms of democratic procedures.

By using its overwhelming political and economic power, the government closed the biggest 60-year-old left-liberal daily newspaper *Népszabadság* in October 2016.[48] It also took over the largest internet portals.[49] Beyond the recurring attacks on freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the regime has also campaigned against nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). As an official of the governing party declared, independent NGOs "must be swept out of Hungarian public life" because they interfere with politics.[50] This statement was followed by discriminatory legislation against NGOs, which receive foreign funds.

The Orbán regime has also carried out strong attacks on academic freedom. Between 2017 and 2019, it forced the Budapest-based Hungarian-American private university, the Central European University (CEU), out of the country.[51] In 2020, the European Court of Justice's verdict annulled this legislation, but it came too late, as the university had already moved to Vienna. The government changed the legal status of several state universities by making them "foundations," that is, privatizing their control by political loyalists.

The language used by the regime serves to hide reality. Propagandistic mass communication such as a questionnaire sent to all citizens with a set of manipulative questions is called "national consultation," used by Fidesz to refresh the list of its supporters. "Protection" stands for the collection of protection money. In reality, the "defense" of retirement benefits meant the requisitioning of private pension funds by the State in 2011. "Utility-cost cuts" have led to higher prices and deteriorating services. "The protection of the Hungarian people" has resulted in the impoverishment of large segments of the population. With corruption normalized, it has become invisible to the public. Except for the public works programs, changes in public services have only benefited the wealthy. For instance, utility cost cuts as well as the introduction of a flat tax have only benefited the well-off. At the same time, the system attempts to gain legitimacy through the demonstration of the symbolic power of the ruling elite (e.g., with the prime minister's new office, which is a palace on the Castle Hill in Buda, and by means of nationalist campaigns and government-generated xenophobia).

The Orbán regime has gradually evolved from its original nebulous shape and stands today fully formed. This is not to suggest that the leader of the regime followed a pre-calculated blueprint. The authoritarian direction was clear, but there were many incidental events, spontaneous reactions, contradictory policies, and periods of slower or faster speed of change, as the political situation allowed and

required. By the second half of the 2010s, the regime had become not simply illiberal or "leader-democratic" but actively antidemocratic.

Due to the constraining power of the EU, the Orbán regime appears to be more liberal than democratic. The EU is better equipped, after all, to sanction deviations in human rights than to counter the deconstruction of democracy. In this regime, a few fundamental rights (freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, right to privacy, freedom of movement) remain somewhat protected, despite the autocratic monopolization of politics. In essence, it is an emerging authoritarian setup, which was moderately tamed by the EU with regard to basic human rights and civil liberties.[52] In other words, the international embeddedness of the Orbán regime hinders its slide toward complete authoritarianism.

Because of this external constraint, the leaders of the Orbán regime have been forced to engage in Janus-faced methods, employing double talk and double standards to ensure that, at the very least, lip service is paid to democratic values. The government also tries to justify its antidemocratic policies by appealing to democratic norms. The regime uses a rhetoric that exploits xenophobia and facilitates a nationalist interpretation of Christianity in order to reject the EU's liberal-democratic rule of law, albeit with limited success so far. Lately, in view of antidemocratic developments abroad, particularly in Turkey and Russia, the opponents of pluralist democracy have felt further emboldened to weaken the liberal elements of the regime.

Orbán created a fluid, electorally authoritarian, hybrid regime type, which is relatively free of violence, though not entirely. The contradictory character of the regime can also be explained by the real tension between internal and external forces within the EU. This regime can be described as consisting of the temporary coexistence of overlapping political structures that often contradict each other.

The regime is led by an authoritarian leader who came to power through elections and is supported by similarly authoritarian-minded leaders internationally. Orbán has created a highly personal, informal, centralized, system of rule in which loyalty overrides expertise and where social autonomies (like independent media and independent groups of civil society) are considered dangerous.

The political clique that occupies the state from the inside behaves like a political family, which includes formal party members and selected loyal clienteles. The regime is in constant flux, a "moving target" for observers, where consolidation is improbable. Orbán, who claims to speak in the name of the Hungarian people, condemns international elites (the United Nations, EU politicians, multinational business circles, etc.) and foreign migrants and considers them enemies. However, he prefers "clean," non-violent methods, as well as regular (but unfair) elections, to secure his long-term rule and to legitimize himself internationally as a "democrat."

The regime originally promised to re-politicize the public sphere and to mobilize the political community, but instead, there is nothing but propaganda and a rather chaotic public administration system. The so-called strong state is a particular site of political relations where corruption is not external but an embedded, legislated, and networked phenomenon. In the post-Communist context, hybrid

regimes often include a rough redistribution of property among the old and new elites. Members of the new power elite use legislation to renationalize private property temporarily in order to reprivatize it for themselves and their clients afterward.

The regime is based on fear and the traditional social-conservative thinking of most of Hungary's citizens rather than any coherent ideology. Leaders of such semi-authoritarian regimes learn from each other; similar autocratic methods and narratives circulate among them, which can be labeled as autocracy promotion. Yet there are many spontaneous actions and accidental and unpredictable events that occur in such regimes. Although authoritarian leaders learn from each other, they do not necessarily implement the same models or follow a premeditated political project.

Politics is more complicated for authoritarian leaders if their country belongs to a community of democratic states. As mentioned earlier, this is the case with Orbán's Hungary.[53] The principle of subsidiarity, formal commitment to basic democratic values, multilevel governance, institutional cooperation, and other factors all exist in the EU and condition the behavior of individual national leaders. At this point, the leader of an illiberal, competitive authoritarian regime has no option but to enter into a cynical and hypocritical game with representatives of the international community by taking the available material benefits from the common basket while disrespecting the common democratic norms.

While opposition forces may win by-elections, their hope for victory in the general elections is limited. The ruling political clique combines political and economic tools to maintain its power, yet it lacks the intellectual and moral support of the largest part of society. The regime relies on its political loyalists while dividing and neutralizing potential opponents, whether they are passive or active. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–2021 was used by Orbán to strengthen the regime's grip over Hungarian society, and by introducing extraordinary security measures, moving the country toward an authoritarian governance.[54]

Since 2010, Orbán has used his qualified majority to write a new constitution and define himself as opposed to what he once stood for in the years of transition to democracy in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. He has set out to destroy what he contributed to building three decades ago.

In sum, the Orbán regime can be described as a competitive authoritarian regime that has the following features: personalist rule, predatory state, patron–client relationships, economic policies that serve social inequality, ethno-populist propaganda, an uneven electoral playing field, dishonest elections, and re-feudalized society.

Conclusion

Having looked at the political careers of two Hungarian leaders, Kádár and Orbán, there are some fundamental similarities as well as a host of differences. What points do they have in common?

Neither leader was driven by ideas or ideologies. As part of the Soviet bloc, the Kádár regime could not deviate from Communist ideology in principle, but in

practice it did. Kádár was able to deviate from the totalitarian ideology of the 1950s through securing a stable every-day life for the Hungarian people. The Orbán regime does not have a coherent ideology either, yet it relies on aggressive propaganda: the regime's pompous ethno-nationalism sounds unusual in the EU, whose basic values the prime minister now blatantly ignores.

Both leaders have shown an inclination for a pragmatic approach toward politics. Neither held a solid set of values. Kádár was a smart player as a politician who followed the clichés of a puritan lifestyle. For Orbán, the only goal has been to achieve success defined by gaining both political and economic power. Out of the two, it was Orbán who used his power to enrich himself and his family. It was also he who has built his image on the folkloristic figure of the "ordinary boy from the countryside."

Both Hungarian leaders betrayed their past commitments: Kádár betrayed the ideals of the 1956 revolution, while Orbán betrayed the democratic transition of 1989. By turning against their old selves, however, both politicians ensured themselves a long tenure in politics.

Both leaders spent their youths in communities built on solidarity, and none of them held a single a civic position. Kádár spent his youth in the illegal Communist movement, while Orbán was in the army and attended a college of advanced studies. Orbán was socialized in a macho environment, while this was not the case for Kádár. Still, both of them had to first demonstrate their rigor and aptitude in a narrow and closed community before obtaining power nationally.

Kádár came to power as a mature man, Orbán as a much younger adult. But both entered politics at a very young age. However, Kádár had to walk a much tougher road to come to power among extreme circumstances. His rise to power was decided in Moscow, not in Budapest. Paradoxically, Kádár's room for maneuvering within the socialist bloc had been expanded by the failed revolution of 1956. Orbán's scope for movement has been much wider from the outset, as he started his second term in government in 2010 from the position of a winner, with a parliamentary majority qualified to amend the constitution within democratic boundaries. And by then Hungary had already been a long-standing member of NATO. Orbán, moreover, could assume the position of head of government as the leader of an EU member state that received significant financial support from the EU. Orbán has spent the period from 2010 to the present on further expanding his power. The dismantling of the rule of law and democracy in domestic politics (and also with respect to foreign policy his focus on the politics of "Eastern opening") served this goal.

The hands of Kádár were stained with blood, while those of Orbán are stained with money. Surveillance has become more useful to him than open sanctions. Intimidation of a preventative, invisible kind is proving more effective than bloody encounters that could be easily broadcast for the world to see.

To a certain extent, both of these leaders were "peacock dancers," or to use an old expression, "swing politicians." Orbán has pursued a flexible foreign policy on a large scale. Kádár followed this strategy at times ruthlessly, at other times

with moderation. Kádár left a crumbling dictatorship and a (still) occupied country behind. He died in Budapest in a mentally disrupted state – "in a bed, among pillows," to use one of Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi's famous lines.

Throughout the Kádár and Orbán eras, the nature of the political establishment was in constant flux. During Kádár's time, the regime was a one-party, late totalitarian dictatorship, which started with retaliation and intimidation and pursued the neutralization and atomization of society only to give in without a fight at the end. Orbán's period is characterized by permanent backsliding from an early democratic peak: the reestablishment of democracy in Hungary in 1989 was followed by the creation of an illiberal regime, which in turn was succeeded by an electoral authoritarian system. So far, the downward spiral has proven unstoppable. Only in 2019 did the anti-Orbán opposition parties realize the need to unite their forces. It took them almost ten years to arrive at such an agreement. But none of the previous regimes have been toppled through parliamentary means, and it remains to be seen whether this will be Orbán's fate.

Kádár could not fully distance himself from daily political battles, although he wished to do so. There were prime ministers in his era, but the important decisions were all made by Kádár himself as the country was controlled by the party-state. Compared to this Orbán's rule is personal.

Kádár ruled and partially governed, while Orbán rules and governs. As prime minister, Orbán has always stood at the frontline and holds almost all power.

Politicians in liberal democracies lose elections from time to time, but that does not surprise anyone: it is considered to be part and parcel of the normal routine operation of a parliamentary democracy. Hungary has not been fortunate enough to have the leaders of its political eras reelected at free and fair elections. The experience of the past 75 years demonstrates that the failures and flaws of those who launch a new era can also ruin the regimes that bear their names.

Notes

1 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (London: Routledge, 1907).
2 Kádár was jailed in two installments: A year in detention between 1933 and 1934 and for two more years after the trial as a convicted political criminal in 1937–38. In the meantime he was excluded from the Communist Youth League of Hungary. Cf. Tibor Huszár, *Kádár politikai életrajza*, vol. 1 [*Kádár's Political Biography*, Vol. 1] (Budapest: Szabad Tér and Kossuth, 2003).
3 Mátyás Rákosi was communist party leader after World War II until 1956. He was a Stalinist and followed direct orders from Moscow during his rule. As he was less autonomous than his successors, I decided not to discuss his leadership in this study.
4 László Rajk was a communist leader and the Interior Minister in the early Rakosi era. He was executed by his own comrades after a fake trial in 1949.
5 Imre Nagy was a communist leader and Minister of Agriculture who was marginalized during the Rakosi era, but returned to power after the death of Stalin in 1953 to correct Rákosi's "mistakes." Nagy became the Prime Minister during the 1956 revolution and declared the neutrality of Hungary. He was executed in 1958.
6 Radio speech of János Kádár on October 24, 1956.
7 Nikita Sergeievich Khrushchev, communist leader of the Soviet Union between 1955 and 1964, initiated the destalinization in the Soviet Bloc.

8 János M. Rainer, *Imre Nagy: A Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).
9 Tibor Huszár, *Kádár politikai életrajza*, vol. 2 (*Kádár's Political Biography*, vol. 2) (Budapest: Szabad Tér and Kossuth, 2003).
10 Paul Ignotus, "János Kádár, Hungary's Quisling Redeemed," in *Leaders of the Communist World* (London: Routledge, 1971), 317–329.
11 Mihály Vajda, *Orosz szocializmus Közép-Európában* [*Russian Socialism in Central Europe*] (Budapest: Századvég, 1989).
12 Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986).
13 Joseph Held (ed.), *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
14 András Bozóki, "The Deficit of Legitimacy: Theorising East Central European Communism," in Rüdiger Frank and Sabine Burghart (eds.), *Driving Forces of Socialist Transformation* (Vienna: Praesens, 2009), 113–139.
15 Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
16 Charles Fenyvesi, "Hungary 20 Years Later," *New York Times* (October 17, 1976): www.nytimes.com/1976/10/17/archives/hungary-20-years-later-a-veteran-of-the-1956-uprising-finds-the.html.
17 Alexander Dubcek (1921–1992) was a reformist leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party who promoted the 'Prague Spring', a move towards democratic socialism in 1968. This provoked the Soviet military intervention, which resulted in Dubcek's removal from power and re-Stalinization of the country. Cf. William Shawcross, *Dubcek and Czechoslovakia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1990).
18 Hardline Stalinist communist leader of East Germany, Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973), spent twenty years in power and was forced to leave office in 1971. Cf. Carola Stern, *Ulbricht, A Political Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1965).
19 Wladyslaw Gomulka (1905–1982), a national communist leader of Poland, came to power as response to the pro-reform and pro-independence mood of society in October 1956, but eventually lost his popularity and was responsible for the killings of protesters in December 1970. He was forced to resign immediately after the clash. On postwar Poland see Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
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21

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN

From "illiberal democracy" to electoral authoritarianism (born 1953)

Howard Eissenstat

Since the death of its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1938, no politician has more fully shaped the direction of the Republic of Turkey than its current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan has bent Turkey's political institutions to his will and cowed the once powerful military. Under his leadership, Turkey, once a marginal player in world affairs, has become a major regional power and Erdoğan has made clear that his ambitions for Turkey's political reach are global, not local. Under his leadership, Turkey has moved away from its traditional reticence to act outside of its own "near abroad," increasing its role on every continent and using military force to leverage influence in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2002, Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP, or *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) first came to power promising to end, finally, the military tutelage that had marked Turkish politics since its first free elections in 1946. The AKP presented itself as reinforcing and expanding Turkish democracy and the country's place in the West. Indeed, it is a reflection of just how undemocratic Turkey still was that Erdoğan himself was initially banned from holding office in the first AKP government, only stepping in as Prime Minister in 2003.

Nonetheless, Erdoğan's rule has become ever more repressive and the control he enjoys over the system is now based at least as much on coercion as on elections. At the beginning of the AKP era, flaws in Turkish democracy were clear, but many hoped that the lure of accession to the European Union and an increasingly sophisticated population, Turkey might finally be ridding itself of a repressive past.[1] Their hopes did not last long. According to Freedom House, Turkey's decline has been among the steepest of any country in the world.[2] Under Erdoğan's rule, Turkey has moved from a flawed, but promising democracy to outright authoritarianism with shocking speed. Elections clearly still matter in Turkey; it is less clear that they can result in a peaceful transfer of power.

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How did this all come to pass? First, one must credit Erdoğan's own political talents and his genius in channeling the hopes and aspirations of so many Turkish citizens. Second, Erdoğan capitalized on pre-existing structures and practices within Turkish political culture, bending them to his own needs and, eventually, co-opting them entirely. Finally, his government's struggles with other power centers within Turkey, often equally antidemocratic. This strengthened Erdoğan's capacity to engage in antidemocratic actions of his own. His victory over them only intensified his dominance over the country.

The father figure

As egregious as Turkey's authoritarian slide has been, Erdoğan portrays himself – and likely sees himself as – a democrat. This image is central to his legitimacy. He is also a man of considerable political skills and his capacity to crystalize and channel Turkish nationalist traditions and ambitions has been central to his success. If, as I will discuss later in this chapter, Erdoğan is effective at the art of political division and polarization, his success is also based on the extent to which he operates and crystalizes so much that is core to Turkish political culture.

Erdoğan is, first and foremost, a child of the "new Turkey" that developed in the Cold War era. He was born in the working class Istanbul neighborhood of Kasımpaşa and divided his childhood between there and Rize, a town on Turkey's Eastern Black Sea Coast. In his youth, he worked as a street vendor and enjoyed a brief stint as a semi-professional soccer player. His secondary education was at a state-run religious high school (*İmam-Hatip*). It is a matter of some controversy as to whether he completed a university degree, but, in any case, his entire adult career has been in politics.[3]

This biography makes Erdoğan distinctive. Turkey's political leaders historically have come from one of several different routes. Many were former military leaders who parlayed (sometimes by force) their role in the military into a political career. Of the civilians, the most prominent were scions of Turkey's new provincial centers who had managed to make their way into one of Turkey's elite engineering or managerial schools, cutting their teeth as technocrats before entering politics. A smaller number came up through academia.

Erdoğan's personal biography is steeped in the history of urban migration that has shaped Turkey's recent past.[4] His childhood, split between the provinces and the working class city of Istanbul, his language, his personal bearing all make him utterly distinctive from his predecessors (and virtually all other political leaders in the Middle East). He is the embodiment of the *kabadayı*, or neighborhood tough guy, the man's man, the domineering father, but on a national stage.

Tall, imperious, and imposing, Erdoğan is comfortable playing the patriarch in a society in which patriarchal families are still the norm. Not incidentally, it gives

him a connection with his electoral base that is palpable. As the anthropologist, Jenny White, writes:

> President Erdoğan positions himself as the patriarch of the national family – the strong, protective leader who cannot be questioned. He claims to be the embodiment of the *milli irade* (national will) and expects model citizens to obey the state that he represents and the values he espouses.[5]

Erdoğan is tough talking and adept at using the parlance of the street to make his point. He is not above threatening to slap a protestor who gets too close or indeed to threaten the United States with an "Ottoman Slap," if it does not respect Turkey's strategic concerns.[6] A secretly recorded tape, released in 2014, has him reducing a corporate mogul to tears for allowing critical coverage on one of his television channels.[7] His volcanic anger is legendary. When the occasion calls for it – and this is not infrequent – Erdoğan weeps publicly. He is an expert in picking fights for political advantage and vilifying his political enemies. His oratory is hard hitting and plain.

The power – and cultural resonance of these skills, of his emotive breadth – should not be underestimated. For many in the opposition, Erdoğan's theatrics may ring false or, perhaps more often, simply seem crass, but for his own base, they are a clear demonstration of his authenticity. He was born in the same kind of neighborhood as they were. He went to the same sort of schools. He worked the same kind of jobs. He preaches the same values. He speaks the same language. He is one of them.

But it is not merely the style of his speech that is important, but its content. Erdoğan has a talent for crystalizing the key obsessions of Turkish nationalism and it is his nationalism, far more than his Islamism per se that defines his success.

Many scholars have focused on Erdoğan's roots in Turkish Islamism, and particularly, his role in the *Milli Görüş*, or National Vision, movement to explain his ideological universe.[8] There is little question that such an approach is valuable. Its imprint on Erdoğan, from his favorite poetry to his bouts of anti-Semitic fantasy, is clear.[9] It is important for understanding some of Erdoğan's foreign policy choices, in particular his focus on Palestine and his support for the Muslim Brotherhood. At home, it can be seen in the expansion of Islam in the public sphere. Mosques are built everywhere. The Directorate of Religious Affairs, first created by Atatürk in 1924 to help manage and control Islam, is now used as a means to burnish Islam's prominence as a state project.

Nonetheless, the secret to Erdoğan's success in channeling Turkish aspirations is less his Islamism than his nationalism. Turkish nationalism and Turkish Islamism were already merging by the time Erdoğan came of political age in the early 1980s. While journalists and even some scholars often talk easily about "Secular Nationalists" and "Islamists," the line between the two is not always clear-cut.

The secularism of the Turkish Republic has several important nuances. First, at its core, Turkish nationalism was always sectarian in nature. That the early republic

was antagonistic to actual religiosity did not make this less so. Just as early Zionists hoped to create a new, secular Jew, early Turkish nationalists assumed a common religious identity – Islam – even if they were anxious to wean their population from what they commonly viewed as outdated forms of religious practice. Non-Muslims have consistently been seen as "native foreigners" – at best tolerated, but largely distrusted. Successive waves of popular and state repression have made the non-Muslims populations politically marginal and, with the exception of the Armenians, unlikely to survive as functioning communities beyond this century. In all, non-Muslim communities constitute about 0.1% of the total population.

Second, Turkey has consistently attempted to nationalize Islam, primarily through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Mosques in Turkey are state-owned, their imams are state functionaries, and the Friday sermons are written by a state bureaucracy based in Ankara. Although this has often been orchestrated by state officials to domesticate and peripheralize Islam, it has also meant that the institutions of Islam have been an important component of state power for successive governments. Further, it has made divergent forms of Islam subject to varying forms of discrimination and repression.

Third, the Turkish state has always been happy to utilize Islamic imagery as part of its nationalist symbolism. It is evident in the crescent and star that adorn Turkey's flag and in the language of service. Those slain in the service of the state are "martyrs," while those fighting in foreign wars are "gazis." This has been particularly true since 1980, when the Turkish military embraced a "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" as a bulwark against the twin threats of Marxism and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. It became significantly blurrier as the state began to reformulate the relationship between religion and Turkish nationalism following the 1980 coup d'état.

In a regional context, Turkey's Islamism can seem quite secular. Calls to "restore Islamic Law," common for Islamists in many places, remain extremely marginal in Turkey. The AKP has worked to push bars to the margins of society, been active, if not always very effective in attempting to police media, and made a bottle of the national drink, rakı, absurdly expensive for most working class Turkish citizens, but they have generally been reticent to impose outright bans.[10] As much as Erdoğan has spoken of his ambition to create a "a pious generation," he hasn't actually made a lot of progress on this front, and, in any case, has always sought to portray piety as an individual choice rather than a matter for state mandate.

The culture wars in Turkey are palpable and, as is highlighted below, Erdoğan has capitalized and sharpened these for political gain. It is certainly true that many secularists in Turkey were – and are – deadly afraid of Erdoğan's Islamist ambitions. Yet, for all the social engineering that the AKP has attempted to implement, and all the limits on the representations of "sin" that Turkish censors have attempted to strike from public media, the actual effects on the lifestyles and values of Turks appears extremely limited.[11]

As much as Erdoğan proposes to transform his country, he remains well within the broad contours of Turkish nationalism's core hopes and assumptions. This is his limitation, but it is also key to his success.

Harnessing the tools of power

One could imagine a counter-factual history in which Erdoğan would have capitalized on the AKP dominating the "sweet spot" of Turkish electoral politics on the center right by building a broad coalition and enjoying the political fruits for many years. Such a "road not taken" might well have brought Turkey full democracy and a place within the European Union.

Erdoğan's choice, however, was to govern narrowly, making alliances where needed (particularly with the right-wing Nationalist Action Party, or MHP) and marginalizing the opposition as much as possible. He has been able to leverage often extremely narrow majorities into electoral dominance by capitalizing on structural weaknesses of the Turkish political system and co-option of core institutions.

One important way that the AKP benefited from extant Turkish political traditions was in its amplification of an old party patronage system, *kadrolaşma* – literally, the making of cadres or providing jobs for political loyalists.[12] The tradition is rooted in the early Republic, when serving the state and serving the party were one and the same. Even after Turkey's transition to electoral democracy after World War II, the inclination of political leaders to reward loyalists with jobs remained a core element of Turkish politics.

The dangers of this tradition, however, were somewhat mitigated by the fact that Turkish governments were typically comprised of weak coalitions and thus were often short-lived. The bureaucracy was politicized, but unstable coalition governments, along with frequent elections, helped ensure that many parties had "a piece of the pie."

The AKP's has now been in power since 2002 and that long political dominance has transformed *kadrolaşma*, and with it, the nature of the state bureaucracy. The merging of the bureaucracy and government became different not just in scale but in kind. AKP membership is not a formal requirement for state positions, but party loyalists clearly receive preference in hiring and promotion. It is widely believed, if not easily demonstrated, that those who most obviously fit the profile of the AKP's electoral base have the easiest time finding a job, both within government offices and with those companies that regularly do business with the government.[13]

The creation of hundreds of new university positions was an especially visible example of this phenomenon. A departing AKP official complained, "Necmettin Erbakan University [a new state university founded in 2010 and named after one of the Islamist forbearers of the AKP] is being used like [the AKP's] backyard."[14] At Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University (founded in 2006) job advertisements were accidentally published with the names of individuals to be hired already listed.[15]

The massive growth of the public sector under the AKP with, of course, the lion's share of new positions going to AKP loyalists accelerated this process. Selim Koru, relying heavily on the work of Bahadır Özgür, notes that "between 2001 and 2020, the number of public sector employees has increased by 119%, constituting a

jump from 2.1 million to 4.6 million (excluding military and intelligence personnel)."[16] He continues:

> Between 2007 and 2020, personnel attached to municipal governments increased by 205 percent. In addition to these jobs, there are firms that municipal governments set up to perform specific functions, called Municipal Economic Enterprises (*Belediye İktisadi Teşebbüsleri*). These have steadily employed between about 260,000–300,000 people between 2007 and 2017. By 2020, that number has reached more than 700,000. While there is no way of knowing for sure how these jobs are distributed, it is highly likely that they are divided among the various regional and religious networks attached to the AK Party government.[17]

While the overall effects of this process can hardly be understated, its importance is particularly acute with regard to the security services and judiciary. In this the AKP benefited greatly from their relationship with the Gülen Movement, at least until the two broke in 2013.

Followers of the Muslim cleric, Fethullah Gülen, the movement, referred to by its adherents as *Hizmet* (Service) is multi-faceted and the scholarship on it is uneven.[18] At its core, it is a religious movement, but, within Turkey, its primarily known for its dabbling in politics and, particularly, its efforts to place adherents in key positions of power. While most of its adherents doubtlessly are focused on the movement as an avenue for practicing and obtaining a better understanding of their faith, the organization's political – and sometimes criminal – activities are harder to track and yet vital for understanding the group's import. *Hizmet* is mostly known in the West for its advocacy of a forward-looking and modernist Islam and is known for its advocacy of interfaith dialogue, its successes in education, and its wealth. In Turkey, however, the group's religious activities have been eclipsed by their political manipulations and corruption. Turkish security services began to see the Gülenists as a threat to Turkish secularism. Security services began a sporadic program of harassment and arrest. By 1999, Gülen himself relocated to the United States, where he lives on a large compound in rural Pennsylvania.

Since at least the 1980s, it is clear that the Gülenist leadership had also developed a long-term strategy of state capture by recruiting and promoting members of the sect within the state bureaucracy and, especially, within the key areas of education, security, and the judiciary. When the AKP came to power, in 2002, they found in the Gülen Movement a ready ally within the security services and judiciary.

Judicial independence has never been particularly strong in Turkey and AKP control has made it far weaker. The government has reorganized the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (which oversees judicial appointments) to ensure that they are controlled by allies. The effect of this sustained support for political loyalists has been striking as government ministries have become extensions of the party. Since the Supreme Election Council, is chosen from the judiciary, this has meant that elections too are overseen largely by AKP

appointees. The net effect is pronounced. Prosecution and jailing of critics are undertaken on a massive scale. As Human Rights Watch summarizes in its 2021 report,

> Executive interference in the judiciary and in prosecutorial decisions are entrenched problems, reflected in the authorities' systematic practice of detaining, prosecuting, and convicting on bogus and overbroad terrorism and other charges, individuals the Erdoğan government regards as critics or political opponents. Among those targeted are journalists, opposition politicians, and activists – in particular members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The largest targeted group consists of those alleged to have links with the movement headed by US-based Sunni cleric Fethullah Gülen which Turkey deems a terrorist organization and calls FETÖ and holds responsible for the July 2016 coup attempt.[19]

This expansion of party influence over institutions is not limited to the state bureaucracy, however. The tradition of large holding companies making alliances with the state dates back to the beginnings of the Republic. The AKP did not necessarily end all of these relationships, but it did shift contracts over time to a new set of businesses, resulting in the creation of a new business elite and, in many cases, creating opportunities for considerable family enrichment. As Esra Çeviker Gürakar concludes:

> Establishing, preserving, and developing a set of extensive networks of privileges and dependency networks have become AKPs [sic] main channels through which the party has both built a new "loyal" business class and maintained its ties with the voters using new methods of redistribution.[20]

Perhaps the most obvious and immediately tangible aspect of this process is the AKP's expanding control of Turkey's media industry. Turkey's media industry was particularly susceptible to state pressure because most of the most important outlets were controlled by large holding companies, making them dependent on staying in the AKP's good graces precisely because of the pressures outlined above. As elsewhere the structural fragility was already in place when the AKP came to power. The AKP's expanding control of state structures then resulted in a broader dominance. As Bilge Yeşil concludes:

> The contours of Turkey's commercial media system were defined by the political-economic dislocations of the early 1980s, which were embodied by the transition to a liberalised market economy and the perpetuation of a statist, authoritarian order. In the media field, the rapid process of liberalisation, coupled with the military Junta's heavy censorship, culminated in a system that was commercially owned yet state-dependent. During the 1990s, patron-client relationships, instrumentalisation of reporting and partisanship

> continued to shape the media system. As AKP consolidated its power in the 2000s, certain media outlets began to see their already limited autonomy erode as a result of the selective application of legal and financial sanctions. From 2015 onwards, and especially after the coup attempt in 2016, several commercial outlets were shut down, their assets confiscated and transferred to the Treasury.[21]

The results of this are profound. The vast majority of Turkey's print and, especially, broadcast media is government controlled. According to the free press watchdog, Reporters Without Borders, 90% of Turkey's media outlets are now controlled by government-friendly businesses (this in addition to state-owned outlets).[22] In part as a response, Turkish citizens have increasingly relied on social media and on-line sources for news. Not surprisingly, the Turkish government has responded with an array of strategies, from strict censorship to mass arrests, which are aimed at stifling on-line dissent.

"A Gift from God"

Over the years, forces both democratic and antidemocratic have challenged Erdoğan's power. With remarkable consistency, he has, in his turn, managed to tarnish the former as tools of the latter and exploited his conflicts with both to mobilize his own base and rationalize successive waves of repression.

The earliest challenge was from the military, which viewed the rise of the AKP with horror. The military has long seen itself as the final guarantor of Turkey's political system and, particularly, its secularist traditions. If it had, since 1980, accepted Islam as part of Turkey's public life, this was always to better constrain religious impulses and bend them to nationalist aims. The generals were leery of the growing power of Islam in Turkey's public sphere and, as recently as 1997, had intervened directly to oust a coalition government with the Islamist Necmettin Erbakan at its head.

Following a fiery 1997 speech, Erdoğan himself, then the mayor of Istanbul and a rising star on the religious right was himself prosecuted for inciting religious hatred. He was found guilty, and in 1999 paid a fine, served a four-month sentence and was banned from holding political office (losing his post as mayor in the process). Although he was a founder and the clear leader of the new AKP, he couldn't immediately take office after the party's shock victory in 2002 either. He was only able to take office the following year, when his party removed the political ban on him. Erdoğan took from this experience a powerful belief that the secularists commitment to democracy did not extend to his followers and a determination not to allow the experience of 1997 be repeated.

Indeed Erdoğan's whole sense of Turkish history – and a key driver of his political actions – derives from a narrative that portrays the country's past century as the story of "a nation denied."[23] This narrative holds that the Turkish nation is at its core a devout Islamic polity and that a secularist elite, often acting through

the military, has sought to constrain or deny its fundamentally Muslim character. It is through this frame that Erdoğan sees pivotal events such as the 1908 Young Turk Revolution against Sultan Abdülhamit II. As if the revolution itself was not insult enough to the sultan, Erdoğan embellishes that history by asserting, wrongly, that the sultan was executed.[24] His narrative continues through the 1960 coup d'état against the freely elected Prime Minister Adnan Menderes (he served from 1950 to 1960), whom the military actually did execute, to President Turgut Őzal, who served as Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989 and as President from 1989 to 1993. The Turkish government exhumed Őzal's body in 2012 to investigate the possibility that he had been poisoned to death but no conclusive evidence was found.[25] Erdoğan sees, in his own leadership, the final victory of the true national will, and in Turkish history a clear demonstration that this national will can be maintained only with constant vigilance against enemies within the state itself.

In 2007, the AKP nominated the mild-mannered Abdullah Gül, who had briefly served as prime minister and was a founding member of the party, to the presidency. The military made clear its opposition through a public statement on its website. In the past, this might have been enough to cow civilian leadership. Erdoğan, however, refused to back down and called for new elections instead, which the AKP won in a landslide.

In June 2007 an anonymous tip led police to a cache of hand-grenades. From this inauspicious beginning, prosecutors initiated massive show trials, which purported to uncover a large scale attempt to overthrow the military.[26] These deeply flawed trials sent thousands to prison, including leading members of the military, based on incomplete or nonexistent evidence. The effect was to sideline many traditional Kemalists in the officer corps and to increase the influence of Erdoğan's political allies, including Gülenists. The trials inaugurated a strategy that would dramatically expand the politicization of key state institutions and set the basic formulae for the purges that would mark Turkey thereafter.

The military had few defenders. While the case was based largely on fabricated evidence, the basic premise that the military and its allies were aiming to engineer the overthrow of the AKP government seemed plausible. The military, after all, had intervened repeatedly in the past and made no secret of its displeasure with the new government. Its allies had been vociferous in challenging AKP reforms, from loosening a ban on the headscarf, to softening restrictions on the expression of Kurdish identity, to discussions of the Armenian Genocide. By positioning itself as the pro-Europe, liberalizing party, the AKP won leeway to attack its enemies. The military – and many of its civilian allies – opposed all of these reforms; it found itself with few defenders.

The process effectively ended the military as a political force in the country. But the use of large-scale prosecutions, often based on fabricated evidence, became an important component of the AKP's toolbox from then on. Starting in 2009, for example, the government targeted pro-Kurdish activists and politicians in mass trials.

In 2013, Erdoğan redoubled efforts to exert control over security institutions in the face of two key challenges. In May of that year, millions of Turks nationwide joined the Gezi Park protests against Erdoğan and the AKP. Erdoğan was convinced that the protestors were part of a plot to oust him from power in a Turkish "color revolution," and he ordered a massive crackdown. After the protests, Erdoğan militarized the police force, which primarily became tasked with suppressing dissent instead of fighting crime.[27] Empowered by new laws passed after the Gezi protests, Turkish police have become far more effective at dispersing protests and at deploying overwhelming force to suppress peaceful protests and control urban spaces.[28]

Starting in the summer of 2013, what had become an increasingly distrustful relationship between Erdoğan and the Gülen movement, broke into open conflict.[29] As the crisis escalated, Gülenist prosecutors and police launched an anti-corruption campaign against the AKP that featured leaks exposing staggering malfeasance at the highest levels of government, including Erdoğan and his immediate family. In response, Erdoğan launched a broad purge of the Gülen movement. In May, 2016, the Turkish government formally declared the Gülen Movement a terrorist organization.

In the meantime, attempts to broker an end to the conflict with the militant Kurdish Workers' Party, or PKK, broke down in 2015. There were a number of reasons for this breakdown, but one was, quite simply, that in the June 2015 elections the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) enjoyed an unexpectedly good election, clearing the electoral threshold and helping to deny the AKP a majority in Parliament. Within a month, open conflict between Turkish forces and the PKK reignited. New elections in November resulted in a significant rise in the AKP's nationalist vote and the party regained its parliamentary majority. Within the year, the leader of the HDP, the charismatic young progressive, Selahattin Demirtaş, was in jail on trumped-up terror charges. The HDP leadership has been targeted ever since.

Erdoğan's rule, already authoritarian, entered a new Jacobin phase in 2016. In July of that year, elements of the military, with Gülenists playing a leading role, attempted a traditional coup d'état. The plotters apparently had been forced to move their timetable forward unexpectedly and, in any case, bungled its implementation. It resulted in 265 people dead, thousands injured, and the national parliament bombed. For his part, Erdoğan emerged stronger than ever, his democratic legitimacy cemented by the attempt to overthrow him.

He soon capitalized on this with a referendum in 2017, which provided for a new presidential system. He won the referendum only narrowly and with the apparent help of some electoral irregularities. The result, nonetheless, helped further cement and extend his power and potentially allowed him to govern until 2029, or, according to some accounting, until 2034.[30]

When Erdoğan emerged victorious the day after the coup in July 2016, he had declared the bloody events of the previous night "a gift from God," a clarifying moment for the nation that would allow it to shed itself, finally, of a history in which the nation – his people – had repeatedly been denied their true voice.

It would also provide him the opportunity to rid Turkey of its "enemies within" once and for all.

Freed from previous constraints, Erdoğan tightened AKP control through the indiscriminate use of Emergency Decree Laws that have enabled the purge of more than 160,000 people from the judiciary, universities, and other state institutions. New arrests occur monthly. New public enemies are repeatedly foisted on the public by a compliant press. Erdoğan's personal control over the tools of state power has increased dramatically. Governing over an economy that has been weakened by mismanagement and corruption, Erdoğan has come to rely more and more on the politics of polarization to mobilize his base and on repression to limit the field of action for the opposition. Successive waves of the purge have been marked by a growing record of arbitrary arrest, abuse, torture, and enforced disappearances at the hands of the state or non-state actors.

Foreign adventures

In a sense, Erdoğan's foreign policy choices have mirrored this process. After the collapse of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's 2004 Plan for the unification of Cyprus and the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the European Union (EU) that same year, Turkey's own EU accession aspirations became increasingly remote. Nevertheless, until the military was effectively cowed, good relations with the European Union and the United States were a key check on direct military intervention. After 2007, Erdoğan was ready to chart for his country a different course.

The energetic and voluble Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served first as Erdoğan's chief foreign policy advisor, then later as foreign minister, and finally as prime minister, is often credited with shaping Erdoğan's thinking. The reality is that Davutoğlu's arguments only gave an intellectual pastiche to long-standing assumptions of a great many Turkish thinkers: namely that, in the long run. Turkey needed to develop a more multivalent foreign policy that treated its geographical location as a strategic strength rather than a liability. They believed, moreover, that Turkey's growing economic strength, its human capital, and its historical legacy as a former imperial state all made it a "natural leader" in world affairs. These assumptions fit easily into Erdoğan's perception of both himself and his country's historical role. They were, not incidentally, extremely popular ideas that had long held sway on Turkey's center-right.[31]

In its initial phases, this policy was framed as a "zero problems" strategy, in which Turkey developed good relations with all of Turkey's neighbors.[32] It included outreach to the wider Middle East, but also to the Balkans. Turkey, in part supported by Gülenist schools, also dramatically increased its outreach to the wider world, especially Central Asia and the Caucasus but also South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Muslim majority countries were a particular but not exclusive focus of this outreach.[33] In its early years in power, the AKP's warm support for the 2004 Annan Process in Cyprus, a brief effort at rapprochement with Armenia in 2007–2008, and good relations with Israel up through 2009, all helped the AKP

deflect concerns about any Islamist ambitions and helped to win Western support against the military.

As Erdoğan became more confident in his position and took a stronger personal role in shaping Turkish foreign policy, the tone of Turkey's foreign policy shifted. In part, this was the result of the reduced threat of military intervention and in part, especially after 2011, it was a response to rapidly changing regional dynamics. Mostly, however, it was the result of Erdoğan's own personal concerns and ideological assumptions, Turkish foreign policy would become *Erdoğan's* foreign policy. Erdoğan soon marginalized Turkey's professional diplomats as he took personal charge of foreign policy decision-making. The result was a far more ambitious – and far less risk averse – foreign policy.

The most obvious initial example of this is Turkey's relations with Israel, which quickly deteriorated after 2009. Erdoğan was both personally offended by what he saw as a personal betrayal of his efforts at diplomacy and morally outraged by the violence of Israel's operations against Hamas in 2008–2009. In 2009, at the Davos Conference, Erdoğan publicly berated as a killer Israeli President Shimon Peres during a public event before storming out. It was clearly a planned and rehearsed outburst and very publicly demonstrated Turkey's new assertiveness. The following year, an Islamist organization with close ties to the AKP organized an effort to break Israel's blockade of Gaza. In a messy raid, Israeli commandos killed ten activists, all Turkish citizens, and detained others. Although there have been occasional efforts at reconciliation and trade and tourism have continued apace, Turkish–Israeli relations have been tense ever since.

The spat with Israel had some important benefits for Erdoğan. First, it reflected Erdoğan's own core sense of justice and of Turkey's potential for playing a leadership role in an emerging multi-polar world system. Second, it was popular domestically, where sympathy for the plight of Palestinians is widespread across the political spectrum. Third, it helped to burnish Erdoğan's credibility as a leader in the region: Erdoğan's reputation as an "Islamist" and his willingness to "stand up to the West," coupled with Turkey's then booming economy and technological know-how, proved a winning combination.

When a wave of popular uprisings shook the Middle East in 2011 (the "Arab Spring"), the Erdoğan government believed that they had found "their moment," a chance for Turkey to forcefully take a leading role in the region and the world. The repercussion of its choices had profound effects for the region and for Turkey itself. In particular, Erdoğan, who had previously vacationed with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and his family, was shocked when his well-intended advice on reform were ignored and horrified by the regime's bloody repression of civilian protests. Turkey quickly took a leading role in supporting the Syrian resistance, raising concerns in the West about Ankara providing a safe haven for the growing number of Salafi-Jihadis who flocked to fight in Syria. For its part, the influx of millions of Syrian refugees into the country put tremendous pressure on the government and resulted in a powerful anti-refugee sentiment that was palpable across the political spectrum, including within Erdoğan's own political base. Erdoğan was

outraged by the failure of the West to help Turkey: he wanted more direct aid to the Syrian resistance, more military support on the Turkish-Syrian border, and, especially, more support in dealing with the refugee influx.

The decade that has followed the Arab uprisings of 2011 have seen a series of crises that have profoundly altered Turkey's position in the international system. The net result of this process has been that Turkey's relations with its Western allies have grown more bitter and distrustful. Erdoğan has no interest is "leaving the West," but he sees the relationship as being fundamentally transactional. Tensions with Russia came to a head in 2015, when Turkey downed a Russian warplane. Putin, however, was able to strong-arm the crisis and Erdoğan's own insecurity into warmer relations, particularly after the attempted coup in 2016, which Erdoğan believes the United States had at least tacitly condoned.

The result of all of this is a Turkey that is both more isolated and more assertive than it has ever been before. Erdoğan's new foreign policy is multi-layered and combines traditional concerns of Turkish foreign policy and ambitious new directions.

The first sphere relates to long-standing core issues in Turkey's near abroad. It involves support for Muslim populations whom Turkey has traditionally viewed as culturally or ethnically related, for instance in Northern Cyprus, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. To a lesser degree, it involves support for the Turkmen populations in Iraq and Syria. This sphere also includes efforts to block the emergence of any Kurdish political structures. Erdoğan's responses to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria or the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) independence referendum in Iraq in 2017 are both completely in keeping with Turkey's traditional aversion to a potential Kurdish state on its borders. In this sphere, Erdoğan is largely following fundamentals of traditional Turkish foreign policy.

The second sphere involves Turkey's expansive outreach to Africa and Asia. This, too, represents long-standing Turkish ambitions predating the end of the Cold War that became more evident after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. While the AKP has intensified such outreach across the board, its engagement with Africa has been particularly striking and represents one of the clearest successes of the AKP era. In the past five years or so, Turkey has established a military presence in Sudan, with the hope of constructing a naval base on Suakin Island. Turkey has increased its military presence in Libya and Somalia and has opened negotiations to do the same in Niger. This increasing focus on military cooperation and exports is not limited to Africa, however. Turkey has also established military bases in Northern Cyprus, Northern Iraq, Qatar, and Syria.

Such overseas military expansion represents a fairly radical shift for Turkey and highlights the third sphere of Erdoğan's foreign policy, namely his efforts to play a leading role in the Middle East and, by extension, the Muslim world. There is little doubt that these endeavors reflect something heartfelt in Erdoğan, who sees the rise of the AKP as representing a new wave within the Muslim world: fully modern, populist, and devout. Western analysts may have given up on the idea of Turkey as a "model for the Muslim world," but Erdoğan has not. This helps to explain Turkey's

forward-leaning response to the 2011 Arab Uprisings. The idea colors Turkey's intervention in Syria and its defense of Qatar in the latter's conflict with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Even more, it defines Turkey's antagonism toward Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's Egypt, its general sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood, and its focus on Palestine and support of Hamas – all are causes for which Erdoğan remains one of the few vocal champions among Muslim leaders in the region. The 2020 reconsecration of Hagia Sophia as a mosque and even Erdoğan's insertion of himself into the funeral of boxing great Muhammad Ali in 2016 are part of this as well.

There is little obvious near-term material benefit to Turkey in any of this. Erdoğan has pursued these policies because he sees himself – and by extension Turkey – as leading an Islamic, populist wave within the Muslim world that will make Muslim-majority countries more democratic (within Erdoğan's own sense of what democracy means) and more capable of asserting themselves against the "old powers" of the West.

The final sphere of Turkey's current foreign policy involves Erdoğan's attempt to position Turkey as the leader of a wave against American, and more broadly, Western, hegemony. This goes beyond Turkey's claims to leadership in the Muslim world. Turkey's defense of the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela is one example of this. Another is Turkey's recurring lobbying in favor of expanding the UN Security Council to dilute Western dominance of the body. At a basic level, Erdoğan views the West as fundamentally hypocritical and as declining in power. This view has shaped both the aggressive nature of Erdoğan's foreign policy and his ambitions for a new leadership role for Turkey in an emerging multipolar system.

Conclusion: Erdoğan as democrat and strongman

In 2019 municipal elections resulted in a stunning setback for Erdoğan as the AKP lost most major cities to opposition parties. After some dithering, Erdoğan strong-armed the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) to call new elections in Istanbul, only to see the opposition win the city with an even bigger margin in the rerun. The elections show that the AKP's brand has become shakier. The opposition's victory has renewed its sense that the game is not done, that the lurch toward authoritarianism can still be restrained. Elections are taken seriously in Turkey, and the popular commitment to them is both broad and deep.

The elections suggested there are limits to Erdoğan's authoritarianism. The AKP's record of economic success is now a distant memory. Corruption, cronyism, and incompetence have all taken their toll on what once was the shining center of the AKP's political brand. Erdoğan's rule seems increasingly sclerotic, his political skills less keen. Despite the overwhelming power that he enjoys, his control of state structures, his dominance over the media, and the array of formal and informal security structures he has created to defend his position, Erdoğan's hold on power seems surprisingly shaky.

Does that mean we are nearing the end of the Erdoğan era? The difficult balance that Erdoğan has maintained between contested elections and authoritarian rule

is likely to prove difficult to preserve. As it falters, Turkish democrats have some reason to hope for an end to their country's authoritarian slide – and perhaps even greater reason to fear an intensification of that descent. Would Erdoğan be willing to step down from office if the electorate truly rejected him? Would he accept the rejection of the narrative of the nation and himself that he has so fully invested in throughout his whole life? Would the institutions that he has worked for the better part of two decades to subvert stand up to him? There is little reason to feel confident about answers to these questions. The likelihood of perilous choices in Turkey's near future, however, seems high.

Notes

1 I was among the early optimists, but, by 2008, had concluded that "the AKP's record shows that its commitment to human rights, while real, is limited and contingent. They are not, to be sure, the secret Islamic revolutionaries envisioned by the Turkish military and some conservative commentators in the United States. But neither are they the shining model for Muslim liberalism that some have imagined them to be." See Howard Eissenstat, "Human Rights in the Era of the AKP," *The Immanent Frame* (October 23, 2008): https://tif.ssrc.org/2008/10/23/human-rights-in-the-era-of-the-apk/.

2 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World, 2021* (New York: Freedom House, March, 2021), 6: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf. In the interest of full disclosure, I have participated in the annual review of Turkey for Freedom House in the past few years. Final determination of rankings, however, is done by a large committee of professional staff and outside advisors.

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4 See, for example, Murat Öztürk, Beşir Topaloğlu, Andy Hilton and Joost Jongerden, "Rural Urban Mobilities in Turkey: Socio-Spatial Perspectives on Migration and Return Movements," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 20/5 (December 2017): 513–530. In 1960, 28% of Turkey's population lived in urban settings; by 2014, 78% did so.

5 Jenny White, "Spindle Autocracy in the New Turkey," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 24/1 (Fall–Winter 2017–2018): 25.

6 "İşte Başbakan'ın yumruk attığı en net görüntü," *Cumhuriyet* (May 16, 2014): www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/iste-basbakanin-yumruk-attigi-en-net-goruntu-72569; "Turkish President Erdoğan Offers US 'Ottoman Slap' Ahead of Rex Tillerson's Visit to Turkey," *The Independent* (February 15, 2018): www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-us-president-erdoğan-rex-tillerson-ottoman-slap-visit-secretary-state-a8212731.html. An "Ottoman slap" is a popular Turkish term, referencing an apocryphal martial technique that was supposed to strike so hard that it would knock down a charging horse in battle.

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8 See, for example, Soner Çağaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 37–48.

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17 Ibid., 40.
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22

RODRIGO DUTERTE

Macho populism and authoritarian practice (born 1945)

Nicole Curato and Yvan Ysmael Yonaha

The Philippines has a habit of putting macho populists in power. There was Joseph Estrada, a man who rose to prominence by playing gangster in blockbuster films and was president from 1998 to 2001 and then mayor of Manila from 2013 to 2019.

There was Estrada's best friend, Fernando Poe Jr., the "king" of Philippine cinema, known for his onscreen persona as the fast-punching defender of the downtrodden. With zero political experience, Poe nearly defeated the Georgetown-educated presidential incumbent in 2004 in an election mired with accusations of electoral fraud.

And then there is Rodrigo Duterte. He won the presidential election in June 2016. Duterte is not a movie star, but he is a celebrity in his own right. As the long-standing mayor of Davao city, he became a prominent character in many urban legends as a hero who threw criminals off helicopters and forced a disrespectful tourist to eat a cigarette.

There is a common trope in this list of politicians: they are all macho populists, men whose political style is marked by hyper masculine performances of toughness against "enemies" and benevolent paternalism toward their supporters.[1] They display larger than life personalities that command the loyalty of many. This hyper masculine figure is a recurring character in the Philippine democratic system; sometimes they operate in the margins, but they are most often in the center of the political stage.

What accounts for the rise of macho populists in the Philippines? How did they become the staple features of Philippine political life? How often do populist leaders deploy authoritarian practices to legitimize their rule?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions by characterizing the Philippines' "habit" of putting macho populists in power and how this habit can lead to authoritarian practices, as was the case with Rodrigo Duterte. Our approach is two-fold: first, we present a focused review of scholarly accounts on political economy and bossism that connects the rise of populism to authoritarian practice

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in contemporary Philippines; second, we extend these accounts by providing a grounded view of populism. We discuss how populism is constituted first by everyday demands of compassion over competence; second, the combination of entertainment with politics; and third, through the politicization of latent anxieties. We argue that micro politics may seem mundane, but they create durable patterns of behavior that legitimize populist rule and render Filipino democracy vulnerable to authoritarian practice. We conclude this chapter by taking stock of factors that prompt populist performances to slip into authoritarian practices and the ways in which democracy can be safeguarded from these tendencies.

The "populist habit"

The Philippines has a populist habit, and this habit functions like clockwork. After the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the Philippines voted to replace a technocratic president with a populist one, as if repudiating the "progress" technocratic presidents claim to have made in transforming the Philippines into a modern liberal democracy.[2] This was true in 2001, when action star Joseph Estrada replaced Fidel Ramos, a former general who insulated the Philippines from the economic shocks of the Asian Financial Crisis. This was true in 2004, when another action star, Fernando Poe Jr., nearly beat the Georgetown-educated incumbent president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in a presidential race mired by anomalies. And it was true in 2016, when Rodrigo Duterte – the man who campaigned on the promise to have all drug addicts killed – replaced Benigno Aquino III, the son of a martyred democracy icon and a champion of good governance.

Before we review scholarly accounts that explain this populist habit, we first need to clarify how we use the terms "populists" and "authoritarian" in this chapter. We take the view that populism is a "political style" which pits "the people" against "the other" by invoking crises or threats conveyed through controversial forms of speech, including "bad manners."[3] "The other" in these narratives are portrayed as causing the people's predicaments, be it an out-of-touch elite, undocumented immigrants, or, in the case of Duterte, drug users and pushers.[4] This definition emphasizes the logic (i.e., pitting people against the other) rather than the substance of populism (e.g., nationalism, socialism).

The concept of "political style" is particularly useful for our analysis because it underscores the performative, affective, and visual character of today's hyper mediated public sphere. Meanwhile, we use the term "authoritarian practice" to refer to "patterns of action that produce or further entrench unaccountable exercises of power."[5] We prefer to use the term authoritarian practice instead of authoritarianism or authoritarian leader as these categories obscure rather than elucidate the complex relationship between populism and authoritarian practice in the Philippines. The Philippines is a formally democratic state with periodic elections and institutions that scrutinize power. Nevertheless, we find patterns of authoritarian practice stemming from populist performances, particularly in the Duterte regime. Our analysis in the subsequent sections is guided by this definition.

There are various ways to make sense of the Philippines' populist habit.[6] For the purposes of this chapter, we only focus on two. One perspective foregrounds the *political economy* of populism. In this approach, the rise of populist leaders is considered a disruption of the Philippines' elite democracy. Philippine politics, the argument goes, has long been controlled by an "anarchy of families."[7] Instead of being a forum for political parties competing for power, elections in the Philippines are a mechanism for moderating intra-elite and inter-family competition. Philippine politics, therefore, is clan politics. It is a "cacique democracy," which blends the legacies of Spanish *caciquism* with American electoralism, and where elites have "considerable autonomy" to manipulate politics to secure their economic interests.[8] Today, political families compose over 70% of the Philippine congress.[9]

Populist leaders are often portrayed as *relative* outsiders to this system. It is important to underscore the term relative, for populists like Joseph Estrada and Rodrigo Duterte were not political outsiders when they ran for president. Both had had long careers as local chief executives. Both started their own political dynasties, with their children taking over the elected positions they vacated in local government. But these leaders disrupted the narrative of elite democracy by laying blame on the political establishment for their failure to uplift the lives of many. While Estrada appealed to the frustrations of low-income communities with the elite democracy, Duterte found the middle classes to be among his early supporters. As political scientist Julio Teehankee puts it:

> The Duterte phenomenon was not a revolt of the poor but was a protest of the new middle class who suffered from lack of public service, endured horrendous land and air traffic, feared the breakdown of peace and order, and silently witnessed their tax money siphoned by corruption despite [the Aquino administration's] promises of improved governance.[10]

This account speaks to explanations of populism as fueled by "left behind" communities. Left behind, in this context, does not refer to the most economically disadvantaged communities, but those who are offended by the disregard of out-of-touch political elites for their diminishing economic and social status.[11] Duterte's campaign promises included the breaking up of telecommunication monopolies and ending predatory employment practices. Neither promise materialized during his term, but they nevertheless demonstrated that Duterte had his finger on the pulse of public opinion during his campaign. Ethnographic accounts of Duterte's campaign provide some evidence for this observation: small business owners, shopkeepers, and migrant Filipino workers were widely documented to have contributed to his campaign.[12] It is, however, worth highlighting that the campaign also received substantial contributions from local oligarchs and businessmen based in Davao where Duterte was mayor for two decades.[13]

While the political economy approach lays bare the allure of populist leaders confronting the political establishment, it does not provide a sufficient account of the appeal of populists' "dark charisma" and authoritarian tendencies. This puzzle is

unique to Duterte, whose landmark policy is an openly violent anti-narcotics campaign which has reached genocidal proportions.[14] While Estrada's "other" were the oligarchs, Duterte's "other" are criminals, drug addicts and "bleeding heart liberals." Duterte threatens criminals and drug addicts during his presidential addresses. He has issued shoot-to-kill orders to the Philippine National Police to eliminate an many drug dealers as possible. His political allies have exerted pressure against public officials that speak up against the killings by putting them in jail, as in the case of Senator Leila de Lima, or removing them from office, as in the case of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno.[15]

Like dictators around the world, Duterte labels much of the media as "fake news" and banned a reporter from the palace's press briefings after she published pieces critical of the president. Duterte's allies denied the franchise application of ABS-CBN – the Philippines' largest news and entertainment network – after Duterte singled out the network for failing to air his campaign ads. All these authoritarian practices, among others, seem to leave Duterte's supporters unperturbed. His popularity is consistently "very good" or "excellent" based on surveys by credible polling agencies.[16]

The literature on *bossism* provides insight into this phenomenon. John Sidel describes bosses as "predatory power brokers who achieve monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks."[17] In the Philippines, bosses take the form of local warlords and patriarchs of political clans who run their bailiwicks as if they were autonomous fiefdoms. Duterte, like many local bosses, are familiar figures in Philippine politics. They are men surrounded by private armies enjoying both "political longevity" and "economic preeminence" through landownership, concessions in extractive industries like mining, or control of shadow economies like smuggling.[18] The arrangement is based on the promise of order and distribution of largesse to loyal constituencies and the threat of coercion to those who violate the terms of the boss's rule. Peter Kreuzer's research on Duterte's style as mayor of Davao City lends insight into this dynamic.

> Duterte makes abundantly clear that there can be security, but only he himself can provide it. Security is provided according to his personal ideas of justice and adequateness. In his political symbolism, Duterte clearly is above the law. It is him, [sic] who indicts, passes judgment and orders the executioners to do their job. It is a personalized fight between those who do not follow the rules and the rightful vigilante whose rules reign supreme.[19]

This approach to peace and order is legitimized by Duterte's narrative of benevolent paternalism, where he emphasizes his role as all-knowing father who demands the loyalty and obedience of his constituents. It is not an accident that his supporters fondly call Duterte "Tatay Digong," where Tatay means father and Digong refers to Duterte's nickname, which evokes a sense of social proximity to the national boss. How these narratives of care and coercion co-exist with the

logic of populism is indeed puzzling. A closer examination of the micropolitical foundations of these narratives is necessary to understand how such authoritarian practices can thrive.

Cultivating a populist habit

While the previous section explained the political conditions that allow populism to thrive, this section extends this analysis by focusing on the micropolitics of populism. We argue that populism cannot be reduced to an analysis of the populist leader's political style, but should also include an analysis of how this style is affirmed, negotiated, transformed, and co-created by "the people."[20] We focus our attention on the construction of the populist habit, as this lends insight into the storylines that legitimatize transgressions of populist leaders to engage in authoritarian practices. We identify three ways in which populist performances are co-constituted from a micropolitical perspective.

Demands for compassion over competence

When Filipinos are asked about the desirable characteristics of officials running for office, top of the list are politicians who are "not corrupt," "have concern for the poor," "possess good personal characteristics," are "trustworthy" and "helpful to those in need." One could argue that these responses demonstrate the importance of the personality and character of officials. Implicit in the responses is the recognition of asymmetrical power relations between the people and its leaders and the crucial importance of compassion for the less fortunate. Characteristics of officials that signal competence such as "hard worker/diligent," "has plans for the growth of the country," and "has done good things for the country" are at the bottom of the list.[21]

For some, these responses reveal the immaturity of the electorate for putting a greater emphasis on personality over policy and for prioritizing subjective views instead of observable track records. For others, however, these responses provide insight into the moral calculations of Filipinos experiencing the ill effects of elite democracy. Central to the desire of electing a compassionate leader is a desire for recognition. Marco Garrido's ethnographic work reveals how urban poor communities responded to Estrada's populism as he treated them "with consideration and respect."[22] Being treated with consideration and respect may seem unremarkable for middle class and elite voters, but for poor communities who have suffered from stigmatization as slum dwellers, Estrada's "acts of consideration" in touching and hugging the poor, eating with them, frequently visiting them, and knowing some of them by name carried great symbolic power.

Duterte's populism, we find, follows a similar logic, albeit with different empirical manifestations. Like Estrada, Duterte placed compassion in the foreground of his campaign with a slight but significant twist. His version of compassion was blended with courage, as expressed in his campaign slogan, "tapang at malasakit,"

or "courage and compassion." Duterte's populist performance uses the trope of a disciplinarian father – a culturally resonant figure in Philippine society – who shows care for his country by using violence to keep the peace. For Wataru Kusaka, Duterte's populism is anchored in a "social bandit-like morality" marked by "the coexistence of compassion and violence under a patriarchal boss who maintains justice outside of the law."[23] Like social bandits in folk stories who "obtained invincible power from amulets," which is often exhibited through virility, and fled to the mountains to live outside the law, Duterte is a product of urban legends, which spread through social networking sites. This helped to construct his image as someone who was unafraid to kill if it was for the well-being of the nation.[24]

Blurring of entertainment and politics

Politics today is highly mediated. We live in an era of "communicative abundance," where the wide availability of mobile phones, digital cameras, and internet data expands possibilities for different genres of programming and storytelling that are available to citizens. We witness an "endless procession of 'ordinary people' talking about their private fears, fantasies, hopes and expectations" in user-generated social networking sites, while mainstream media tries to find innovative ways to rebuild the trust of audiences with flickering attention spans.[25] We consider it critical to situate contemporary politics in this context, as it anchors our analysis of populism in a mutually constituted experience between the populist leader and the public mediated by digital technologies. In this view, audiences are not passive consumers of populist content, but active agents who co-construct, critically interpret, amplify, and personalize the populist experience and sometimes legitimize authoritarian practice.

There are two ways in which a hyper mediated public sphere constitutes the everyday constructions of populism. *First, populist performances can disrupt the paradigm of elite democracy by using the traditional genre of melodramatic storytelling*.[26] It is hardly surprising that personalities who successfully defeat political dynasties in local government or land a seat in the Senate are those who project celebrity power by virtue of being movie stars, journalists, and athletes. The convergence of entertainment and politics creates a space for political outsiders to disrupt the clan-based character of elite democracy. In a country where policy debates have done little to improve the lives of ordinary Filipinos, the affective and emotional dimensions of political dramas provide the connection between politicians and citizens.[27] In the Philippines, there is no line separating showbiz and politics.

Both Estrada and Duterte have mastered the performance of political drama to convey their populist storyline. They express their disdain for the political establishment by drawing attention to their "street credentials" as political outsiders in media events like press conferences, public addresses, and interviews. Estrada used his "broken English" as a marker of his status – that he too speaks like the poor who are disparaged for their poor grammar and accents. Duterte, meanwhile, uses vulgar language to lay bare the hypocrisies of Ivy League-educated politicians and the

Catholic Church for defending human rights while leaving many Filipinos hungry and unsafe. Estrada's gaffes and Duterte's outbursts do not diminish their authority but rather reinforce their outsider status, upon which their authority is built. Populist portrayals in the media subvert the idealized expectation of "proper" politicians who are eloquent, educated, put together, and have a respected family background.

Accompanying disruptive behavior are melodramatic performances of compassion. Estrada was often photographed embracing elderly residents in poor urban communities or eating with his hands in a shared feast with soldiers. Duterte, meanwhile, is skilled in shifting gears from a tough talking national boss to a compassionate commander in chief paying respects to casualties of terrorism. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Duterte personally visited a site of twin explosions in the southernmost island in the Philippines. He knelt and kissed the ground while wearing a face mask to express his respect and sorrow for the deaths of civilians and soldiers from suicide bombings.[28]

Why, one might wonder, do these melodramatic performances matter? For Anna Cristina Pertierra, these performances build upon "the longstanding traditions of chains of vertical loyalty between the rich and the poor."[29] These performances, she argues, establish a patron-client relationship which ultimately transforms viewers into voters. Melodrama blurs the line between public and private dialogue where citizens simultaneously engage in politics and entertainment. Engage is the operative term here. The President's actions resonate with the sentiments of ordinary people that in turn react and reinterpret his speeches in their own spheres with the help of social media or other platforms.

For some observers, forging political relationships based on sentiments compromises the formation of a modern democratic public sphere. This is reflected in how elites describe Estrada and Duterte supporters as ignorant, vulgar, and deluded. We do not deny the damage that melodrama creates in democratic life. It can inflame tensions, excuse cognitive shortcuts, and promote hyper-partisanship. However, we also caution against being dismissive about the deep cultural resonance of melodrama in political and social life. Media studies' scholars have long established the role of popular culture in constructing political communities.[30] Their storytelling power creates a shared vocabulary that citizens can use to take part in national or global conversations. The critique of "Imperial Manila" and the detachment of "bleeding heart liberals" from everyday life are some examples of how Duterte consolidated a story of grievance felt by his supporters for decades. Citizens, in turn, are also active storytellers on social media. Some expressed relief after hearing about the sacking of corrupt officials. There are others who cheered when the President called for the killing of drug addicts.

Thus far, we have discussed how populism is co-experienced through melodramatic storytelling that identifies the political establishment as the enemy. We would be remiss not to identify the second mechanism that sustains everyday constructions of populism today: *organized networks of disinformation*. This, we argue, is what sets apart a hyper-mediated public sphere where populist performances thrive, from a public sphere held hostage by authoritarian practice.

A Facebook executive declared the Philippines as "patient zero" of the disinformation epidemic.[31] Journalists and academics have documented the character and impact of Duterte's propaganda machine, which includes paid influencers who can translate propaganda into persuasive narratives that resonate with specific digital tribes. These activities also involve fake account operators who boost posts of the paid influencers. Perhaps most important are the architects of digital disinformation strategies situated in advertising and public relations firms.[32]

Consistent with the populist style, networks of disinformation operate by "conjuring an enemy, invoking a state of crisis, and deploying uncivil language for 'shock effect'."[33] Their skillfulness is visible in the way they maximize their reach: memes and fan pages to seed political content favorable to the President, or fake accounts which use seductive images as display pictures to attract a following. There are no boundaries between politics and entertainment in these networks. They distort the public sphere not only by providing incorrect information that prevent citizens from making informed political decisions, but also manufacture hyper-partisanship that portrays all of the President's critics as "yellows" – the color associated with the liberal opposition. In some cases, hyper-partisanship turns into intimidation. There have been various cases of fake and real accounts threatening to rape female celebrities who speak against the regime.[34] Some studies have also found connections between disinformation networks which promote Duterte and networks that engage in revisionist narratives of martial law. Pro-Marcos pages, including YouTube channels and Facebook groups, reminisce in stories of the "glorious days" of the Philippines under the Marcos dictatorship and link these positive storylines to the achievements of the Duterte regime.[35]

We spotlight disinformation networks to both underscore how populist performances are amplified by authoritarian practices and emphasize that disinformation, just like melodrama, is deeply embedded in stories that resonate with the wider public. Disinformation narratives flourish because they are rooted in cultural, emotional and narrative concepts.[36] For example, a viral image of a leading opposition figure drinking water from a plate was fact checked by the Agence France-Presse agency and found to have been doctored.[37] The picture nevertheless went viral and was shared by real accounts, for the image is consistent with the storyline of hypocritical elites who come across as fake when posing as ordinary people. Calls for accountability in addressing widespread disinformation campaigns are justified, but there is also a need to understand the underlying reasons for the thriving success of populist storylines.

Latent anxieties and co-construction of insecurities

Populists often gain attention for being strategic with their public statements, but little attention is paid to their capacity for being strategic with their listening skills. When Estrada used the language of class politics or when Duterte campaigned on the issue of illegal drugs, these are often dismissed as campaign tactics to manipulate gullible voters. We challenge this account of populism. Instead, we argue that

populist leaders gain power from their capacity to politicize ordinary citizens' latent anxieties.

Latent anxieties refer to people's everyday concerns that seem too mundane to be the subject of national conversations but also too pressing to be ignored in everyday life.[38] These anxieties are latent because they may have been the subject of discussion in the private sphere, but they have not been politicized to become the subject of national debate. In Duterte's case, he gave voice to latent anxieties on illegal drugs. Of course, using and selling illegal drugs is not a new issue in the Philippines. What was peculiar in Duterte's case was the transformation of the matter of illegal drugs into a national issue when he ran for president. Often, jobs, health, and wages are among the most important issues Filipinos identify in national polls. The government's own data from the Dangerous Drugs Board reveals that drug use in the country involves less than 2% of the population, and the US State Department has recognized the Philippines for its achievements in busting transnational drug trafficking organizations.[39] Did Duterte lie about the magnitude of illegal drugs in the Philippines? In part, yes. Duterte's description of the Philippines as a narco-state is far off the mark when using statistics from authoritative sources. But Duterte's mischaracterization of the numbers was not a mischaracterization of his supporters' experience. How then does Duterte's articulation of latent anxieties connect to his populist performance and authoritarian practice?

First, giving voice to latent anxieties simultaneously evokes emotions of anger and pride that combine to create the populist storyline of heroes and villains. Anger is directed toward the unscrupulous "other" – drug addicts – who deserve to be eradicated. One of the authors of this chapter conducted ethnographic work in low-income communities to understand how residents experience the issue of illegal drugs in their everyday lives.[40] Respondents characterized addicts as men who hang out on street corners late at night catcalling women coming home from their late-night shifts. They are irresponsible fathers and use their own young children as drug runners. They are troublesome neighbors and sell drugs to teenagers. They are husbands who break their wives' jaws after getting high. These people, often men, have been the topic of conversation at dinner tables and worried neighborly chit chats, but have not been named by a "national boss" as enemies of the people. This was the case until Duterte entered national politics. The President turned the hushed conversations in the nation's homes into a spectacular name-and-shame operation in presidential addresses. He identified individual drug dealers on national television and, without due process, declared them as enemies of the state. These pronouncements, however, not only used the language of threats and anger. Connected to Duterte's construction of the "unscrupulous other" is his concomitant construction of "virtuous citizens" – those who consider themselves to have played by the rules and worked hard to build a good life. In stigmatizing drug pushers, Duterte elevates the self-respect of virtuous citizens by constructing them as those deserving of his benevolent paternalism.[41]

Second, giving voice to latent anxieties goes beyond recognizing what was once a marginal issue. It also signals listening to voices that have long been devalued, if

not ignored, by once-dominant advocates of liberal democracy. Kusaka's ethnographic findings are helpful in explaining this point. He interviewed a respondent whose family member was murdered by a suspected drug pusher. "People in Manila talk about human rights to criticize Duterte but they never understand that it was him who gave us human rights," the person said. "Good citizens like us are not afraid of martial law. We support it."[42]

In this vignette, the respondent reveals a rejection of good governance narratives that were promoted by both Duterte's predecessor and Estrada's successors. Trust in the liberal order – the kind that places a premium on human rights, due process, and free speech – has declined since the extra-constitutional overthrow of Estrada in 2001 and the coming to power of technocratic leaders who were perceived to be incompetent.[43] Duterte's populist performance, therefore, created the space for ordinary citizens who have been suspicious of the "good governance agenda" to express their moral calculations (good citizens like us are not afraid of martial law) and to assert their political voice (we support martial law), even ones that support authoritarian practice.

The politicization of latent anxieties through populist performances provides a legitimizing storyline for authoritarian practices to unfold. Duterte's excessive use of force against suspected drug addicts and the disregard for due process and human rights are underpinned by the emotions and justifications of populist supporters and their hidden injuries, which Duterte's populism brought to light.

From populist performance to authoritarian practice

Thus far, we have discussed the micropolitical foundations of populism in the Philippines. We focused our analysis on Rodrigo Duterte with occasional comparisons to Joseph Estrada in order to illuminate the deeply entrenched narrative of populism in the country. In the final section of this chapter, we bring together three key observations on how populism, particularly in Duterte's case, devolves into authoritarian practice and conclude by offering lessons for safeguarding democracies from populism's antidemocratic vulnerabilities.

First, *Duterte attained power through a legitimizing storyline that blends compassion, melodrama, and latent anxieties*. These storylines, as the previous sections demonstrate, are co-created by citizens who have been frustrated by the failures of elite democracy and find resonance in Duterte's confrontational pronouncements against "unscrupulous others." What sets Duterte's populism apart from his predecessors is how quickly and blatantly his populist performance descended into authoritarian practices of mass killings, disregard for the rule of law and human rights, and the use of disinformation networks and intimidation of the mass media to exert control over the public sphere. We explain this peculiarity with Duterte's extension of bossism in the Philippines, where relationships of patronage and violence coexist to maintain order. Duterte elevated these long-standing local authoritarian practices onto the national stage. His landslide election victory and consistently high popularity ratings legitimized this cruel, autocratic strategy.

Second, *Duterte was able to maintain power through authoritarian practices that shrink spaces for voice and accountability*. Many observers are puzzled about Duterte's consistent popularity ratings despite the high death count from the drug war, corruption scandals faced by his favored officials, and the poor handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Some argue that his popularity might be exaggerated as citizens are now afraid to speak up against the government.[44] Others believe that Duterte's popularity is linked to the state's cash subsidy program that directly benefits low-income communities.[45] We build on these observations and suggest that one casualty of Duterte's authoritarian practices are opportunities for alternative storylines to emerge.

During the Marcos dictatorship, aspirations for democracy were crafted in underground movements, activist groups, and political opposition. It was possible to imagine a nation after the fall of the dictatorship. In Duterte's case, however, as jailed opposition Senator Leila de Lima put it, "[T]he alternative to Dutertismo is yet to be born."[46] The age of communicative abundance empowers citizens to create a multitude of narratives, but due to the character of digital communications, these narratives are fragmented and fleeting. Disinformation networks also increase the cost of speaking up against the regime. Critical voices are often subject to harassment and bullying. Meanwhile, the populist tropes of compassion, melodrama, and anxieties continue to thrive, as they are underpinned by narratives which are important for many. These factors, we suggest, explain the staying power of the Duterte regime. As elite democracy is discredited, there remains no alternative storyline that can meaningfully challenge populist rule, which grows more comfortable with using authoritarian practices.

Finally, Duterte's authoritarian practices are innovative, for they make full use of today's hyper-mediated public sphere. In this chapter, we purposefully situated our discussion in the context of communicative abundance to underscore the agility of populist performances and authoritarian practices in the digital public sphere. After all, the Filipino people are among the world's top social media users and the country has been an early adapter of digital communications due to its highly networked diaspora population.[47] In this essay we also drew attention to disinformation networks that follow the trend to hire influencers and make use of seductive images to seed political content in the digital public sphere. We also find Duterte's political style of inflaming emotions and evoking feelings of false intimacy as befitting of the digital culture, even though Duterte himself is not on social media. We learned that populism's ability to divide people by making use of the strategies outlined (which deeply resonate with many digital communities) and by making sure it controls the discourses in the public sphere provides the Duterte regime with a powerful tool for entrenching its authoritarian practice.

Conclusion

We conclude our chapter by considering the prospects for defending Philippine democracy amid the allure of macho populism. We find that the lessons learned

about the rise of Duterte's populism can be repurposed to reinvigorate democracy instead of allowing a further descent into authoritarian practice. The populist performance of compassion and listening to latent anxieties can be a powerful democratic force for inclusion. Finding mechanisms for tuning in rather than dismissing citizens' concerns can create a more responsive political system. We already see this in progressive mayors of cities and small towns who rely less on personal charisma and instead invest time in public consultation and multi-stakeholder deliberations to stay attuned to their constituents' voices.[48]

We also find value in blending politics and entertainment in co-creating democratic aspirations. Democracies have benefited from the performative labor of artists, poets, and other influencers who have the power to connect disparate narratives to shared political visions. Any attempt to revitalize democracy today cannot discount the power of emotions and digital technologies, especially in a country like the Philippines, where a majority of the population are digital natives – young people who have grown up in the digital age – and are thus familiar with digital technology from an early age.

Finally, we need to remain cautious about "authoritarian innovations."[49] Authoritarian practices are durable because they are transformative and "shapeshifting." Authoritarian practices are able to reshape themselves to accommodate new forms of technologies or even emulate the language of democracy in the process of centralizing power.[50] Apart from overt manifestations of authoritarian practices like shutting down media networks or militarizing civilian spaces, there are, however, more insidious and covert ways of shrinking spaces of participation and accountability. Disinformation networks are creative and subtle ways in which online conversations are distorted to favor the regime in power. Melodramatic narratives that confuse compassion with control are powerful ways to legitimize authoritarian practices. Defending democracy today demands not only vigilance but also creativity, for populist performances and authoritarian practices have proven to be good at outsmarting the promise of liberal democracy, no more so than in the Philippines under Duterte.

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23

JAIR BOLSONARO

Beyond the pale, above the fray (born 1955)

Andre Pagliarini

In October 1987, a leading Brazilian newsmagazine revealed that a pair of disgruntled soldiers was planning to bomb an army barracks in Rio de Janeiro. One plotter seemed eager to discuss the plan. "Without the slightest restraint," the journalist Cássia Maria noted, he "gave [me] a detailed explanation of how to build a time bomb. The explosive would be trinitrotoluene, TNT, popularly known as dynamite."[1] The soldier vented about poor remuneration and overly stringent work conditions for enlisted men. He insisted that his goal was not to injure anyone but to embarrass the unpopular army minister Leônidas Pires Gonçalves, a man who would be "overthrown by his own troops" if he ever became too ambitious.[2] The plotter invoked an aggrieved sense of personal and professional honor to justify extreme measures.

The article prompted an official investigation. The conspirator who had spoken openly with the reporter about his intentions denied ever meeting her. In response, she described two encounters with him at his home with several witnesses in attendance. Maria was eventually summoned to Brasília to testify about her allegations. Moments before she was to be deposed, sitting in the waiting room in a nondescript government building, Maria made eye contact with the soldier from her article, the one who had explained to her how to make a bomb. Through a pane of glass, the man raised his fingers at the 27-year-old journalist and pretended to pull a trigger, firing at her with an invisible gun. When asked if he was threatening the journalist, the soldier said no, but that "things could go bad for her" if she maintained her story.[3] The man was convicted but won on appeal. Under dubious circumstances, the charges against him were eventually dropped.[4]

That soldier is now president of Brazil. Jair Bolsonaro, then in his early thirties, had appeared in the pages of *Veja* magazine in 1986 decrying the poor salary of the army's rank and file. Even though news reports at the time pointed out that soldiers received higher salaries than most civilian state employees, Bolsonaro would use

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the issue of poor remuneration for enlisted men to launch a political career closely associated with the interests and perspectives of the military everyman.[5] Brazil has had several military figures occupy the country's highest office. After the armed forces intervened to abolish the monarchy in 1889, an army field marshal named Manoel Deodoro da Fonseca became the first president of the new republic. He was followed by Floriano Peixoto, another military leader. But Bolsonaro is unique in that he is the first president with a military background not drawn from the upper ranks of the armed forces.

The mixture of aggrievement, contempt, and insolence that first brought him national attention in the 1980s has defined his long political career, marked less by a sense of pluralism or equanimity than factional – and often personal – self-interest. He began his political career as a vocal advocate for soldiers, policemen, and other public security agents. Over time, his appeals assumed a more general right-wing tenor, embracing the conservative thrust if not the theology of evangelical Christianity. Bolsonaro's politics, which combine steadfast support for state violence with misogyny, homophobia, and thinly veiled racism, were long sidelined in the wake of military rule. Today, they are a dominant force in Latin America's largest nation.

Historical contingency placed this disgraced army captain and legislative backbencher into the center of political debate in recent years. The story of how that happened is the story of Brazil's civic erosion, unfolding gradually and then seemingly all at once. The case of Bolsonaro demonstrates the peril of someone being anointed a national leader despite a lack of personal or political aptitude. Bolsonaro does not have, for example, a political party with deep social roots, a set of coherent policy prescriptions, or a holistic vision of Brazil's place in the world. Rather, he defines himself by what he is not – a leftist. This makes for an illustrative comparison. The history of the center-left Workers' Party (PT), from its origin as the concerted effort of various progressive groups to its electoral growing pains in the 1980s and the 1990s, bestowed the party with the maturity necessary to handle the challenges and inevitable setbacks of national leadership. This kind of civic preparation is missing in Bolsonaro and the movement that supports him.

Imbued with enormous power almost overnight, the president lurches from crisis to crisis, expressing outrage when things do not go his way. He interprets the course of traditional politics as a series of personal slights. Frequently unable to negotiate with political actors less reactionary than him, Bolsonaro blames the system – formal checks and balances as well as the unwritten rules of informal politicking – for his shortcomings in office. This is an especially troubling tendency given Bolsonaro's history of decrying the post-dictatorial political consensus. Every day since his inauguration has been a stress test for Brazilian institutions, many of which were created only about 30 years ago after two decades of military rule.

The recent history of Brazilian democracy

Long defined by socioeconomic disparities, Brazilian society has had a troubled relationship with democracy.[6] Indeed, the most recent military coup still looms

large in the national consciousness. In 1964, driven by vague fears of populism and potential Communist insurrection, the armed forces, with ample support from the US government, deposed a democratically-elected president.[7] While the immediate justifications for the coup were quickly discredited – there were, in fact, no cadres of left-wing militants poised to seize power – the military installed a right-wing dictatorship that would govern the country until 1985.[8] Brazil in many ways served as a model for subsequent attacks on democracy in Latin America, most notably in Chile in 1973 and Argentina in 1976, setting the stage for transnational state terror.[9]

By the 1980s, the world had changed. Communism no longer seemed an imminent threat, at least not in South America.[10] Military governments that had overseen periods of astronomical economic growth, thus earning a measure of popular support, now faced recession and inflation, stubborn aftereffects of the 1973–1974 global oil shock. As Brazil's economic fortunes declined, so did the dictatorship's ability to present itself as the only reliable steward of national development. The end of the so-called economic miracle (1968–1973) shook the foundations of the regime's legitimacy. If the generals in power could no longer deliver material results, what good was the regime? Was living without democracy worth it if development stalled? These questions fueled an awakening in civil society. Labor unions and new activist organizations began openly contesting the dictatorship, helping turn public sentiment decisively against the regime. In 1985, the military stepped aside, allowing the first civilian head of state since 1964 to take office.

What followed was a moment of promise and peril as activists of all stripes wondered how far they could push the government in this new context. With the armed forces out of government, progressive forces previously shut out of the political process could influence the country's direction. As historian Jerry Dávila notes, "rebuilding democracy meant more than replacing generals with civilians" – it required a renewed social compact.[11] The result was a new national charter that emphasized the democratization of many aspects of Brazilian life. Health care, for example, was guaranteed to all. Housing was declared a right. These were landmark gains that committed the country, at least on paper, to a robust vision of social welfare. In other respects, however, the new Constitution represented continuity with the country's authoritarian past. As political scientist Jorge Zaverucha has pointed out, the charter did not significantly rework provisions related to the armed forces, public safety, and the police issued by the dictatorship in 1967. Article 142 of the 1988 Constitution preserved the military's role as defender of "the fatherland, the guarantor of constitutional powers and, at the initiative of any of these, law and order."[12] It was clear that the new democratic order would not seriously contest or reimagine the social role of the armed forces. Although in key respects a compromised document, the new Constitution set forth a transformative ideal in social policy.

But some disdained even gesturing toward a progressive future. Hardline segments of the armed forces believed that devolving power to the same putatively corrupt political class the military brought to heel in 1964 was a mistake. In their

view, leftists were still a threat. Bolsonaro, who joined the army in 1973, served as a junior officer when moderate officials were negotiating a return to civilian government.[13] Whether he thought at the time that the military should remain in power is unclear. His military record from the period faults him for "excessive financial and economic ambition" rather than any political opinion per se.[14] Later, however, Bolsonaro would enter politics touting his military service, which rubbed some in the military high command the wrong way. In the early 1990s, when former general-president Ernesto Geisel expressed his hope that soldiers would have less to do with political affairs going forward, he referred to then congressman Bolsonaro as an unfortunate anomaly.[15]

The return of civilian rule in 1985, ratification of a new Constitution in 1988, and direct presidential election in 1989 laid the foundation for the consolidation of democracy into the twenty-first century. Despite enormous structural challenges, the country seemed finally to be building durable institutions that benefited the entire country rather than concentrating on pockets of well-connected elites. Creative policymaking quashed rampant inflation and lifted millions out of poverty, a testament to the effectiveness of administrations of the center-right and center-left. Despite the stubborn endurance of poverty, corruption, and violence, life improved for most Brazilians. Pining for the days of military rule became a lonely prospect, but one from which Bolsonaro never shied away. Over the course of the 1990s, he emerged as a vocal defender of the dictatorship, a sentiment very few elected officials were willing to endorse. In 2016, he lamented that the regime erred by torturing and not killing.[16] While shouting into the wind for years about the virtues of the anti-Communist authoritarian regime that ruled the country for two decades, Bolsonaro established a reputation as an ultraconservative true believer. To an extent once unthinkable, this would redound to his benefit in 2018.

Far-right reaction

Until Bolsonaro's election, the history of twenty-first-century Brazil was shaped by the electoral successes of the PT. Beginning in 1989, former metalworker and union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva ran for president – and lost – every four years before finally succeeding in 2002. His victory marked the first time that a man born in poverty, with no ties to the country's elite, ascended to the highest office. Amid favorable international conditions, the PT oversaw a period of sharp economic growth and expanded government support for the poor and marginalized. Despite several corruption scandals unfolding over the course of his administration, Lula's charismatic leadership and ability to implement far-reaching social policies enabled him to secure reelection in 2006 and transfer power to his anointed successor Dilma Rousseff, who won the presidency in 2010 and 2014.

Political pragmatism was also key to the PT's successes. In 2009, laying the groundwork for Rousseff's candidacy, the PT negotiated an electoral alliance with the country's largest party, a staunchly nonideological agglomeration of political operators concerned above all with holding power, known as the Party of the

Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB). Led nationally by then speaker of the house Michel Temer, who would go on to join the presidential ticket as Rousseff's running mate, the PMDB tethered itself to the PT and Lula, who left office with an approval rating in the upper 80s.

Many on the left, within the PT and beyond, warned about an alliance with the PMDB, a particularly unscrupulous and unreliable ally. Lula and others, however, argued that such was the cost of progressive reforms since the PT and its left-wing allies did not have a working majority in Congress. In retrospect, the PT's alliance with the PMDB was the culmination of a tendency toward insularity within Brazil's political class. A focus on "governability" (*governabilidade*) outweighed ideological commitments. When crisis hit, millions of Brazilians rejected the traditional form of politics that had developed since the end of the dictatorship.

The year 2013 was decisive for the ascent of the far right in Brazil. Street demonstrations against a public transportation fare hike in the city of São Paulo assumed increasing proportions as police used heavy-handed tactics to disperse protestors. Over the month of June, massive protests overwhelmed the country's major cities. What began as a left-wing movement to de-commodify public transportation morphed into a widespread repudiation of the political status quo. While some in the streets called for increased public spending on social services and against special treatment for FIFA and the International Olympic Committee, both of which were gearing up to host major events in Brazil, the more salient feature of the 2013 protests was the deeply anti-political strain that rejected the political establishment as a whole and the left in particular. A diffuse sense of anti-PT sentiment (*anti-petismo*) had taken hold across broad swathes of the population. For the first time in decades, right-wing forces were in the streets in large numbers.

Rousseff would go on to eke out a reelection win in 2014, but the tide had turned against her and her party. Very soon after her victory, it became apparent how dire the country's economic state actually was. Although Brazil had weathered the early years of the global 2008 crash quite well, it was unable to sustain the policies that kept recession at bay. The government's ability to pay for stimulus spending eventually collapsed as the price of Brazilian commodities like soy and iron ore plummeted. A sense that the PT had broken the country's economy gradually set in.

Almost immediately, Rousseff's opponents in Congress began conspiring against her. Center-right forces began to wonder whether a more radical approach was needed to unseat the PT, which had now won four elections in a row. In the 2016 municipal elections, outsiders became political rock stars, many already jockeying for a shot at the presidency in 2018.[17]

None of the new suitors, however, could match the ideological purity of Bolsonaro, long a lonely voice for extremism in Brazilian government. The former army captain was increasingly being hailed as someone who had been right all along about the supposed dangers of the left. Even though he lacked the resources and solid institutional backing of a major party, he developed an impassioned following online and appeared frequently on radio programs and

late-night television comedy shows. He was widely expected to run in 2018, although few imagined he could overcome the hurdles that usually prevented gadflies from minor political parties from getting very far in a presidential race. But if there was a man who captured the zeitgeist of antiestablishment ire and anti-left zeal, it was Bolsonaro.

In 2016, facing feeble charges of budgetary manipulation, Rousseff was impeached in a highly contentious process that once again led millions of Brazilians to take to the streets to either support or oppose her removal. The argument against her removal was essentially that whatever mismanagement may have occurred under Rousseff's watch did not rise to the level of an impeachable offense. The accounting practice she committed, the crux of the case against her, had been carried out by every one of her male predecessors to absolutely no public outcry. Pointing to a lack of any legitimate grounds for her removal, critics of the impeachment process warned of a soft or parliamentary coup.

The administration's enemies, however, argued that Rousseff had lost the ability to govern. They blamed Rousseff and her party for recession, high unemployment, deindustrialization, corruption – and just about every other malady, real and imagined – that gripped the country in the wake of the 2008 global crash. When casting his vote in favor of Rousseff's ouster, Bolsonaro dedicated it to the memory of Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, a notorious torturer who died in 2015 without ever answering for crimes he committed as an agent of the dictatorship. Ultimately, Rousseff's impeachment did little to improve the country's economic fortunes or restore trust in public institutions. Instead, it emboldened a dark reactionary current of Brazilian society.

Bolsonaro's appeal

As Brazil's myriad political parties prepared for the 2018 electoral contest, it was clear that impeachment had borne bitter fruit: Michel Temer, Rousseff's former vice president who conspired against her and served out the rest of the term to which she had been elected, became the most unpopular president in Brazilian history, reducing parties that allied with him to electoral rubble. The Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB) – long the main agglomeration of the center-right – was one such casualty, reduced to a bit player in national affairs, largely due to its involvement in the Temer administration and corruption scandals of its own. The erosion of the PSDB's standing expanded the electoral horizons of right-wing politicians who no longer felt constrained by the size, relative moderation, and historical influence of the PSDB, which governed the country for two terms under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002).

The rise of Bolsonaro as a prominent voice exemplified this trend.[18] Indeed, according to noted political scientist Jairo Nicolau, Bolsonaro's victory is the most impressive feat in the history of Brazilian democracy in that he lacked virtually all the traits once deemed necessary to win a presidential election.[19] What then explains Bolsonaro's appeal?

Bolsonaro undoubtedly benefited from his long-standing status as a political outlier. He had vociferously opposed PT governments but did not participate in the unpopular administration of dubious legitimacy that followed Rousseff's ouster. He was beyond the pale and thus above the fray. In the run-up to the 2018 presidential election, conservative forces in Brazil found encouragement in the experiences of neighboring countries.

Mauricio Macri, a conservative multimillionaire, became president of Argentina in 2015. In 2017, Chileans elected Sebastian Piñera, who brought into his cabinet officials tied to the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.[20] But Bolsonaro stands apart for accomplishing something no politician had attempted since democracy was restored across the region with the end of the Cold War: winning a national election as an unabashed champion of military dictatorship. The political project that prevailed in 2018 – in a word, *bolsonarismo* – combines authoritarianism, religious moralism, neoliberalism, and freewheeling conspiracy theorization. Together, these currents have reshaped Brazilian politics.

In his presidential campaign, Bolsonaro selected a general as his vice president and promised to name other military men to key posts in government. He promised to militarize Brazil's borders and described the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), an organization that occupies large, unproductive estates in the countryside to advocate for land reform and denounce rural inequality, as a terrorist organization. His belligerent rhetoric contained an implicit pledge to revive, in spirit if not necessarily by law, the authoritarian thrust of the military regime. His campaign also encouraged a wave of former soldiers, policemen, and public security agents to enter politics as well, dispersing hard-line anti-left appeals in elections at every level across the country. Nearly 100 military veterans ran for public office in 2018 hoping to capitalize on the radical shift in the nation's political climate. One of them explained his appeal to *VICE News* at the time: "If you let the armed forces really get to work, they will completely eliminate the crime that has taken over the country."[21] Aligning with the armed forces follows a clear political logic. The military is the most trusted public institution in Brazil, polling much higher than Congress, which Brazilians see as hopelessly corrupt, or the judiciary, which is viewed as an insular cabal more interested in preserving its own privileges than in administering justice.

It makes sense that Bolsonaro's militaristic rhetoric endeared him to the armed forces and those inclined to embrace a more aggressive approach to law and order, but it is not immediately clear why the rest of Brazil was taken in by it. What else explains his victory? One simple answer is the recession. Brazil has been mired in deep economic trouble since 2014, and the COVID-19 pandemic has since made matters worse. To the poorest Brazilians, Bolsonaro promised gainful employment and the preservation of important government benefits; to the middle class, a return of the status they lost under PT administrations; and to the wealthiest Brazilians and investors, open markets, less stringent labor laws, and lower taxes. This proved an attractive agenda for those who believed the economy would only truly bounce back with the government out of the way.

Another major reason for Bolsonaro's victory is his overwhelming support among evangelical Christians, a growing segment of Brazilian society. In the 2018 election, Bolsonaro won 11 million more votes among self-declared evangelicals of different denominations than Fernando Haddad of the PT, while Haddad prevailed among followers of Afro-Brazilian religions, atheists, and agnostics. In a survey released days before Bolsonaro and Haddad faced each other at the polls, 59% of evangelicals favored Bolsonaro against 26% for Haddad. Among Catholics, who still constitute the largest religious group in Brazil, they practically tied. Thus, Bolsonaro owed his victory to a decisive advantage among evangelicals.

The association of evangelical Christianity with right-wing politics may seem natural, but it was not always a given in Brazil. In fact, Brazilian evangelicals did not abandon nominally progressive politicians en masse until relatively recently. Just over a decade ago, Alexandre Brasil Fonseca wrote at length about the political prominence of evangelicals "on the left or center-left" at the dawn of the twentieth century rather than on the right.[22] On the eve of the 2006 election, for example, polls showed then president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was favored by 59% of self-declared evangelicals against 41% for São Paulo governor Geraldo Alckmin of the center-right PSDB. Four years later, the PT remained ahead among these voters, albeit by a smaller margin, with 51% for Dilma Rousseff and 49% for José Serra of the PSDB.

The PT's first defeat among evangelicals came in the 2014 elections, with Senator Aécio Neves garnering 53% of evangelical voting intentions against 47% for Dilma.[23] This decline makes clear that the outcome for Haddad in 2018 was not an anomaly but the predictable conclusion of a slow-motion collapse in evangelical support for center-left candidates. Bolsonaro benefited from the evangelical slide to the right, but he also accelerated it with his cultivation of prominent pastors like Silas Malafaia, linked to the World Assemblies of God Fellowship through his Victory in Christ Ministry in Rio de Janeiro. Indeed, the signal development of Bolsonaro's career is his evolution from being a spokesman for the lower ranks of the army to an avatar of generalized social reaction.

Finally, understanding the fervor of *bolsonarismo* means grappling with the influence of a man named Olavo de Carvalho. Carvalho is the pseudo-intellectual guru of Brazil's far right who has trafficked for decades in the anti-left conspiracy theories that helped fuel Bolsonaro's rise. Indeed, in his first official speech, Bolsonaro's foreign minister, a Carvalho acolyte, gushed that, "after President Jair Bolsonaro, [Carvalho] is perhaps the man most responsible for the immense transformation that Brazil is experiencing."[24] Carvalho readily agrees with accounts of his own importance: "This has never happened in the history of the world – a writer who had this kind of influence on the people," he told Brian Winter, the editor of *America's Quarterly*. "It could only happen in Brazil."[25] Carvalho also had a hand in approving or vetoing names for other appointments in Bolsonaro's cabinet.

A self-described philosopher, Carvalho has expounded on so many disparate topics that it is hard to come up with a unifying theory of his worldview. But two interrelated Carvalho tropes in particular have become commonplace with the

Brazilian right in recent years: (1) an unreasonably elastic definition of communism combined with an insistence on that ideology's continued relevance as a sociopolitical menace; (2) a simmering panic over "cultural Marxism," a hazy conspiracy theory positing that insidious leftist puppet masters exert near total control over almost every aspect of thought in modern society. It is not entirely clear exactly why Carvalho's ideas have become so popular among Brazilian conservatives, but there are a few elements to consider.

The first and arguably most decisive factor is the gradual right-wing radicalization that took place over the course of the PT's 13 years in power. After Lula's party won four presidential elections in a row, millions of Brazilians came to openly distrust democratic processes, whether because they thought the elections were being rigged or that populist demagogues had effectively purchased the loyalty of dim-witted voters through government handouts. As social psychologist Sander van der Linden has noted, "a number of studies have shown that belief in conspiracy theories is associated with feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty and a general lack of agency and control."[26] Such feelings were certainly experienced by sizable numbers of anti-PT voters and conservative elites since at least 2010. By the start of Rousseff's second term, this crowd lost whatever qualms it once had about openly contesting the results of free and fair elections.

An explosion in internet access is another factor explaining the proliferation of Carvalho's conspiracy theories. Carvalho is an avid YouTuber, posting frequent diatribes on the platform that sociologist Zeynep Tufekci has called "one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century."[27]

Finally, increasing rates of higher education under PT governments may also have produced a larger audience for pseudo-intellectual historical and sociological arguments. There is much more to be said on how Carvalho has attained the reach that he has, but his influence is now a reality that progressives in Brazil must confront head-on. The argument that progressive forces exert decisive influence over every-day norms and customs has thrived despite, or perhaps because of, the actual retreat of the left since at least the end of the Cold War. While the PT openly moved to the center to secure a historic win in 2002, its inveterate foes claimed it had simply devised more effective camouflage for its subversive agenda. More recently, the notion that Marxists have stealthily won the culture war has become a unifying article of faith for right-wing movements around the globe.

Bolsonaro's campaign also benefited enormously from the dissemination of conspiratorial misinformation via social media. Supporters stoked rabid anti-PT sentiment through Facebook, Twitter, and, most prominently, WhatsApp, the free messaging service owned by Facebook. Images that a sophisticated eye might clearly identify as having been doctored circulated freely among Bolsonaro supporters, reinforcing a visceral hatred of the PT and underscoring Bolsonaro's image as a stern but honest alternative. One crude photoshop job showed the cover of an academic book written by Haddad, followed by pages wherein he appears to defend incest and call for murdering opponents. Aspects of the social media campaign may in fact have been illegal, according to journalist Patrícia Campos Mello,

with private companies reportedly spending $12 million reais ($3.2 million dollars) to spread hundreds of millions of anti-PT messages through WhatsApp.[28] Amounting to an undisclosed donation to Bolsonaro's campaign, such spending would have violated Brazilian electoral law. Bolsonaro did not deny the allegations but described them as entirely voluntary and unconnected to his campaign, although one witness described Bolsonaro asking explicitly for such support at a dinner with wealthy followers.

Meanwhile, Mello, the journalist who broke the story, became the subject of coordinated attacks on social media from Bolsonaro followers. The president himself insinuated that Mello, who won the International Press Freedom Award for her coverage of Bolsonaro's campaign, had traded sexual favors for information.[29] In a recent book describing her experience at the receiving end of right-wing vitriol, Mello writes that Bolsonaro, like other "technopopulists," uses "armies of trolls and bots to construct narratives that suit them." She concludes that "this is the world we are living in now: facts are malleable."[30]

The harassment of journalists who inconvenience or embarrass the president and his family is a central feature of *bolsonarismo*, a trait by no means exclusive to the Brazilian far right. The term *fake news*, which Bolsonaro and his supporters deploy assiduously to dismiss the press, is imported, after all.

Actually existing bolsonarismo

Bolsonaro struggled early in his presidency to find his footing. His decades in Congress had seemingly done little to prepare him for the spotlight of national office. He appeared timid in public, speaking very little and in simple terms. His first international appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, for example, was widely panned at home and abroad for its terse and awkward superficiality. On Twitter, Heather Long, a *Washington Post* correspondent at Davos, referred to Bolsonaro's performance as a "big fail." She observed that "he had the entire world watching and his best line was to tell people to come vacation in Brazil."[31] Investors eager to capitalize on Brazil's new business climate had hoped for a firm commitment to reforming the country's pension system, among other regressive measures, but were disappointed by the president's amateurish presentation. Bolsonaro, instead of attempting to fix the damage, took to Twitter to celebrate news of the openly gay leftist congressman Jean Wyllys, who was forced to flee the country out of fear for his life after receiving multiple death threats in the wake of Bolsonaro's election. Even though he has struggled to accomplish much of what he set out to do, Bolsonaro's administration stands out for its reactionary fervor.

There are basically four components to his government. The first is the military, which tacitly signaled its support for the retired army captain throughout the campaign. Perhaps surprisingly, the armed forces have reportedly restrained many of Bolsonaro's authoritarian impulses since his inauguration. For example, when the highly respected *Piauí* magazine broke a story in May 2020 that Bolsonaro was set on sending troops to shut down the Supreme Court, expel its 11 members, and

name his own, military advisors supposedly talked him down.[32] When the Trump administration was courting Latin American allies for potential military action in Venezuela, the military wing of the government, led most prominently by Vice President Hamilton Mourão, an army general, answered with a decisive no. Moved by strategic interest rather than necessarily a concern for democratic processes, the military seems to have exerted a moderating power over Bolsonaro.

The second faction of the Bolsonaro government, as mentioned earlier, is made up of far-right ideologues inspired by Olavo de Carvalho. Carvalho's Rasputin-like influence was felt throughout the government, from foreign policy to public education, spreading paranoid delusions about the subversive intentions of progressives, international institutions, and the "globalist" agenda into the heart of government.

The third pillar of the Bolsonaro government is composed of free-market, small-government types, intent on taking all measures possible to bolster the private sector. Finance Minister Paulo Guedes and Environment Minister Ricardo Salles are illustrative of this trend. Both are driven by the demands of the market – the former in curbing government expenditures, pushing the privatization of state assets, and designing a regressive pension reform, and the latter by greatly scaling back the enforcement of environmental protections. Their successes can be seen in the relative strength of the Brazilian stock market and the unprecedented deforestation of the Amazon, which big ranchers and private landowners covet for its potential to serve as pasture for cattle and soil for soy and other valuable commodities. Robust environmental laws are only as good as their enforcement, and enforcement is seemingly nowhere on the agenda of Bolsonaro and his minister of the environment, Ricardo Salles, who posited that the best way to protect the rainforest is to "monetize" it.[33] Salles, who was found guilty of administrative impropriety favoring the powerful Federation of Industries of São Paulo (FIESP) during his time as environment minister for Brazil's wealthiest state, is reportedly deeply suspicious of his own staff, fostering a climate of surveillance and distrust of longtime professionals.

Finally, large segments of evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics support Bolsonaro's government for its vocal rejection of the significant social changes that have taken place in Brazil since the return to democracy in the 1980s. They enthusiastically support Bolsonaro because of his outspoken opposition to abortion, LGBTQI+ rights, feminism, the Black movement, environmental protection, and indigenous rights. It remains to be seen how far the Bolsonaro administration will be able to roll back decades of social progress. So far, the very worst fears of an authoritarian reaction have not panned out in large part because of Bolsonaro's own ineptitude.

Political scientist Aníbal Pérez-Liñán posits that the structure of Brazilian government itself has played a role in constraining the president, noting that

> the main threat to democracy in the twenty-first century will not result from weak presidents undermined by the legislature, but from hegemonic presidents who undermine the separation of powers. Although commonly seen

> as a source of institutional dysfunction, the Brazilian system may have the advantage of preventing such an outcome.[34]

Furthermore, Bolsonaro's great incompetence and unwillingness to rely on scientific evidence, including the wearing of masks, to successfully deal with the COVID-19 crisis in 2020–2021 undermined his popularity. Infection and mortality rates in Brazil were among the highest in the world, and the country's health system became severely overstretched. The election defeat of his close political ally, US President Trump, who consequently had to leave the White House in January 2021, also weakened Bolsonaro's unique brand of populism.

Conclusion

Bolsonaro's political career was born of his dissatisfaction with his military superiors. Frustrated by the salary and working conditions of rank-and-file soldiers, he resorted to extreme measures to display his resentment. As an elected official, he combined a sense of aggrievement with contempt for the norms and limits of democracy. It is unlikely that voters would have taken Bolsonaro's extremism seriously – certainly in a race for the presidency – were it not for the gradual rehabilitation of the dictatorship in the public consciousness. Three decades have now passed since military rule ended in Brazil. As painful memories of that period recede into the past, the regime's hard edges have softened, helped along by a new wave of politicians, economists, movements, pundits, and intellectuals who have sought to counter what they see as the leftist stranglehold on Brazilian political life over the last decade and a half.[35] Under the dictatorship that Bolsonaro celebrates, election rules were flagrantly manipulated by the generals in power; dissidents were arrested, tortured, and killed; and the press was censored. Bolsonaro denies most of these historical facts, which suggests not that he will revive these measures necessarily but that he is likely to overlook eventual excesses by his most aggressive right-wing supporters. Every day since Bolsonaro's inauguration has been a stress test for Brazilian institutions, many of which were created only about 30 years ago after two decades of military rule.

Bolsonaro's election was an anomaly, the product of a series of unfortunate events for Brazilian democracy. He and his movement thus lack the kind of civic preparation needed to handle the inevitable setbacks and challenges of electoral politics. Vested with considerable discretionary power, the president lurches from crisis to crisis, expressing outrage when things do not go his way. He interprets the course of traditional politics as a series of personal slights against him or his sons, all of whom have ridden his coattails to political office. Frequently unable to negotiate with political actors less reactionary than him, Bolsonaro blames the system – formal checks and balances as well as the unwritten rules of informal politicking – for his shortcomings in office. This is an especially troubling tendency given Bolsonaro's history of decrying the post-dictatorial political consensus. Ahead of the 2022 presidential campaign, he insists with increasing fervor that the only way for him to

lose is if his opponent's steal the election, an attitude that has raised alarm across the political spectrum. Polls point to a collapse in Bolsonaro's public support beyond a hard core of adorers, yet it is not at all clear that he will willingly relinquish power if he goes down in defeat. The stakes are high as Bolsonaro's electoral prospects dim.

Many years after his aborted scheme to plant explosives in a military barracks, Bolsonaro had a run-in with the journalist who broke the story. According to the president, she approached him at the airport once during his time in Congress. When Bolsonaro couldn't place her, she said, "I'm Cassia, that *Veja* reporter who denounced you." Bolsonaro, his memory sparked, replied: "You didn't denounce me at all! You're the one who launched me into politics."[36] What end will come of that inauspicious beginning remains to be seen.

Notes

1 Cássia Maria, "Pôr bombas nos quartéis, um plano na Esao," *Veja* (October 28, 1987): 40.
2 Ibid.
3 "Repórter depõe no Exército e relata ameaças," *Jornal do Brasil* (December 29, 1987): 4.
4 For a deep account of Bolsonaro's controversial military career, see Luiz Maklouf Carvalho, *O Cadete e o Capitão – A Vida de Jair Bolsonaro no Quartel* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2019).
5 João Alberto Ferreira, "Militar reclama, mas ganha mais do que servidor civil," *Jornal do Brasil* (September 14, 1986): 24.
6 According to Human Development Reports by the United Nations Development Program, Brazil has the second-worst income distribution in the world. See Renato Grandelle, "Brasil tem segunda maior desigualdade de renda e só fica à frente de Botsuana, aponta estudo," *O Globo* (September 29, 2020): https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/brasil-tem-segunda-maior-desigualdade-de-renda-so-fica-frente-de-botsuana-aponta-estudo-24665884?GLBID. For official UN data, see http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BRA.
7 On the United States' role in the 1964 coup, see Phyllis R. Parker, *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention, 1964* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Ruth Leacock, *Requiem for Revolution: The United States and Brazil, 1961–1969* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990); Carlos Fico, *O Grande Irmão – Da Operação Brother Sam aos Anos de Chumbo – O Governo dos Estados Unidos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2008).
8 See the classic histories of democracy and dictatorship in twentieth-century Brazil by Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964: An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964–1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
9 See J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005).
10 Central America would emerge in the 1980s as a focus of U.S. Cold War anxieties. See, for example, Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).
11 Jerry Dávila, *Dictatorship in South America* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 153.
12 Jorge Zaverucha, "Relações civil-militares: O legado autoritário da Constituição brasileira de 1988," in Edson Teles and Vladimir Safatle (eds.), *O que resta da ditadura: A exceção brasileira* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2010), 41–76.
13 The internal politics of the armed forces during the dictatorship were exceedingly complex and have been simplified here. For a fuller account, see Maud Chirio, *Politics in Uniform Military: Officers and Dictatorship in Brazil, 1960–80* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

14 Cited in Rubens Valente, "Bolsonaro era agressivo e tinha 'excessiva ambição', diz ficha militar," *Folha de S. Paulo* (May 16, 2017): https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2017/05/1884332-bolsonaro-era-agressivo-e-tinha-excessiva-ambicao-diz-ficha-militar.shtml#_=_.
15 Maria Celina D'Araujo and Celso Castro (eds.), *Ernesto Geisel* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1997), 113.
16 "Defensor da Ditadura, Jair Bolsonaro reforça frase polêmica: O erro foi torturar e não matar," *Jovem Pan* (July 8, 2016): https://jovempan.com.br/programas/panico/defensor-da-ditadura-jair-bolsonaro-reforca-frase-polemica-o-erro-foi-torturar-e-nao-matar.html.
17 The most emblematic of this trend was millionaire businessman João Doria, who defeated the incumbent Fernando Haddad of the PT to become mayor of São Paulo. Waging an unsubtle shadow campaign since the moment of his inauguration, Doria seemed on track to secure his party's nomination for the presidency in 2018, but ultimately had to settle for the governorship of his state.
18 Felipe Nunes, "Impeachment, Political Crisis and Democracy in Brazil," *Revista de Ciencia Política*, vol. 37/2 (2017): 299.
19 The traits previously considered indispensable for a successful presidential run were: (1) a strong political party, (2) vast sums of campaign cash, (3) ample time during the *horário eleitoral,* the free seventy minutes of airtime each day of the campaign split among the parties based on how many seats they hold in Congress, (4) support across Brazil's 26 states and federal districts. See Jairo Nicolau, *O Brasil dobrou à direita: Uma radiografia da eleição de Bolsonaro em 2018* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2020).
20 In May 2020, for example, Piñera named Macarena Santelices, Pinochet's great-niece, as the country's new minister for women's rights and gender equality. See John Bartlett and Charis McGowan, "Naming of Pinochet's Great-Niece as Chile Women's Minister Sparks Outrage," *The Guardian* (May 8, 2020): www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/pinochet-great-niece-chile-womens-minister.
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24 Brian Winter, "Jair Bolsonaro's Guru," *Americas Quarterly* (December 17, 2018): www.americasquarterly.org/article/jair-bolsonaros-guru/.
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26 Sander van der Linden, "Moon Landing Faked!!! – Why People Believe in Conspiracy Theories," *Scientific American* (April 30, 2013): www.scientificamerican.com/article/moon-landing-faked-why-people-believe-conspiracy-theories/.
27 Zeynep Tufekci, "You Tube, the Great Radicalizer," *New York Times* (March 10, 2018): www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html.
28 See Patrícia Campos Mello, "Empresários bancam campanha contra o PT pelo WhatsApp," *Folha de S. Paulo* (October 18, 2018): A4: https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/empresarios-bancam-campanha-contra-o-pt-pelo-whatsapp.shtml.
29 See David Biller and Mauricio Savarese, "Bolsonaro Repeats Debunked Sexual Comments About Journalist," *Associated Press, AP* (February 18, 2020): https://apnews.com/article/6489b8efc9e69622caf00a2af82bd4e7.
30 Patrícia Campos Mello, *A Maquina do Ódio: Notas de uma Reporter sobre Fake News e Violência Digital* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020).

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32 Monica Gugliano, "Vou Intervir! O dia em que Bolsonaro decidiu mandar tropas para o Supremo," *Piauí*, vol. 167 (August 2020): https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/vou-intervir/.
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34 Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Impeachment or Backsliding? Threats to Democracy in the Twenty-First Century," *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, vol. 33/98 (2018): 2.
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36 Recounted in Carvalho, *O Cadete e o Capitão*.

Further reading

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