

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Authoritarian Institutions

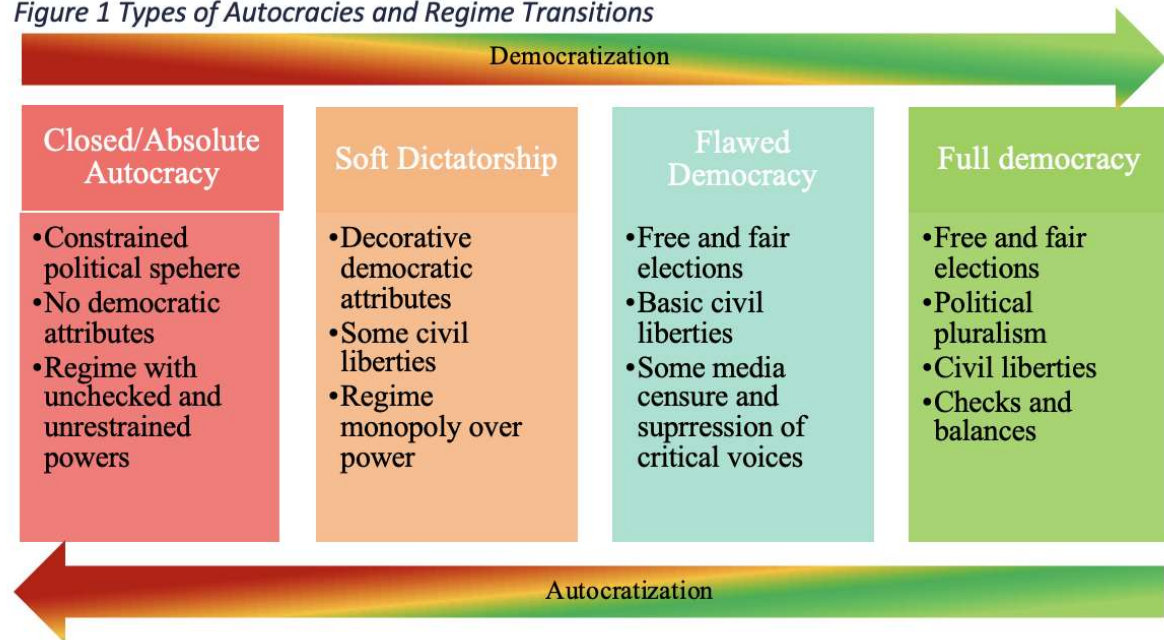
The logo for the Department of Political Science features a blue rectangular background. On the left side, there is a diagonal split between an orange triangle pointing downwards and a teal triangle pointing upwards. The text "DEPARTMENT OF" is in a smaller, dark blue font, and "POLITICAL SCIENCE" is in a larger, bold, dark blue font, both positioned to the right of the geometric shapes.

DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS AND KEY QUESTIONS

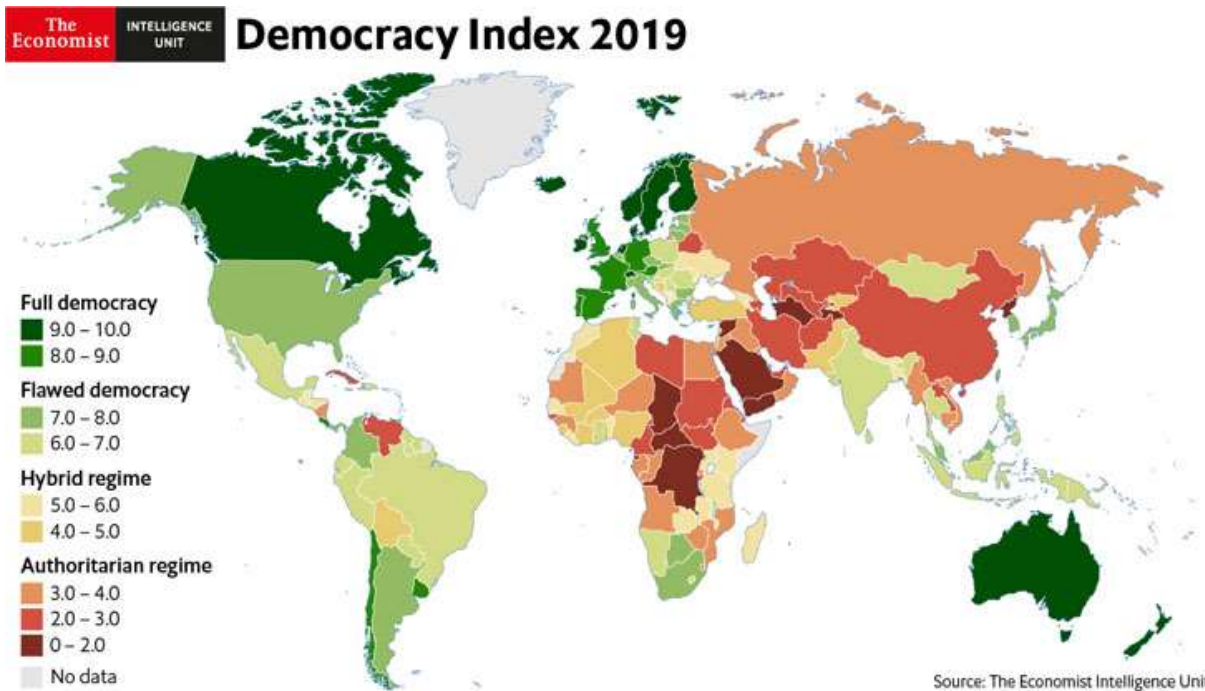
Orvis and Drogus note that the spread of democracy in the aftermath of the Cold War led some to believe that democratic rule was irreversible; dictators were historical relics, soon to be relegated to the “dustbin of history.”

Figure 1 Types of Autocracies and Regime Transitions



Author's figure based on Economic Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index and political science literature on regime type.³

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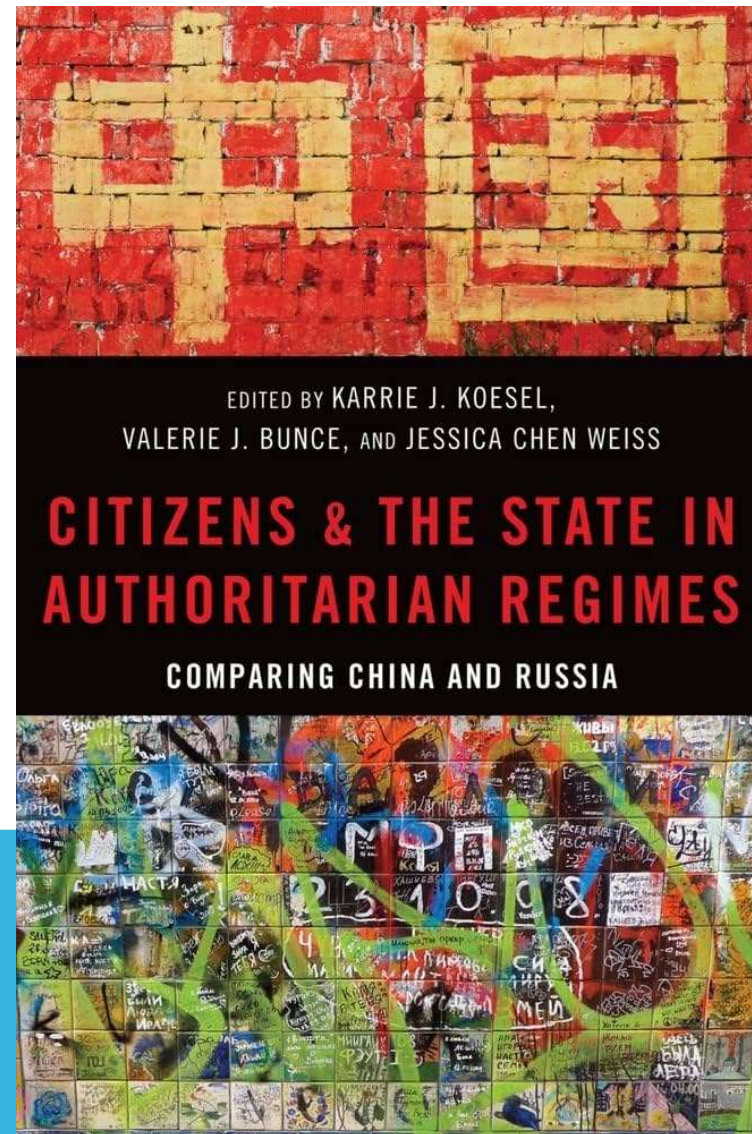


Now, electoral authoritarian regimes, in which some opposition and participation were allowed but a key ruler or party firmly held onto power, are more common.

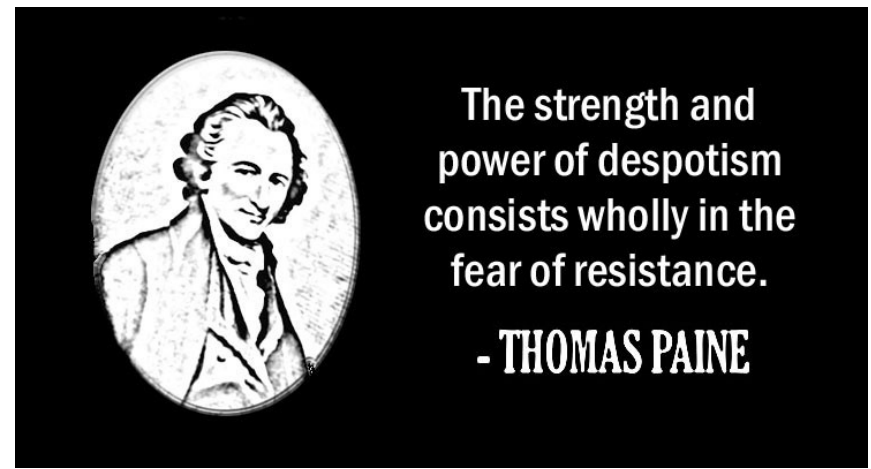
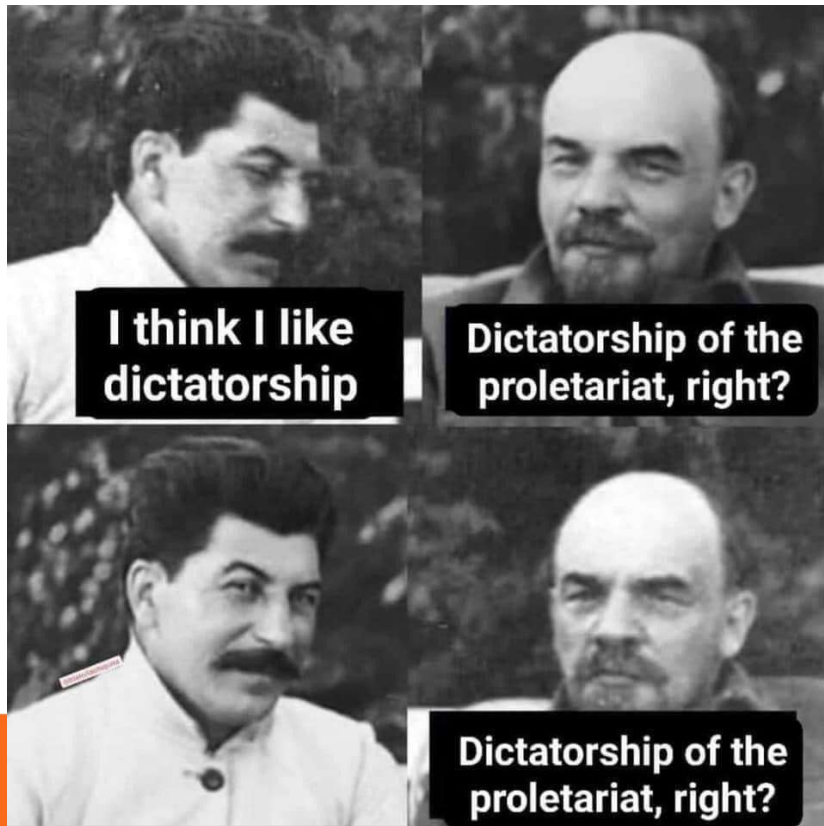


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The choice to abandon the study of authoritarian regimes at the end of the Cold War was clearly premature, and in the new millennium comparativists have taken renewed interest in the subject.



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“Who rules?” seems like it ought to be obvious in authoritarian regimes: the dictator does!

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But discerning who really has power and how much power they have is not always obvious.

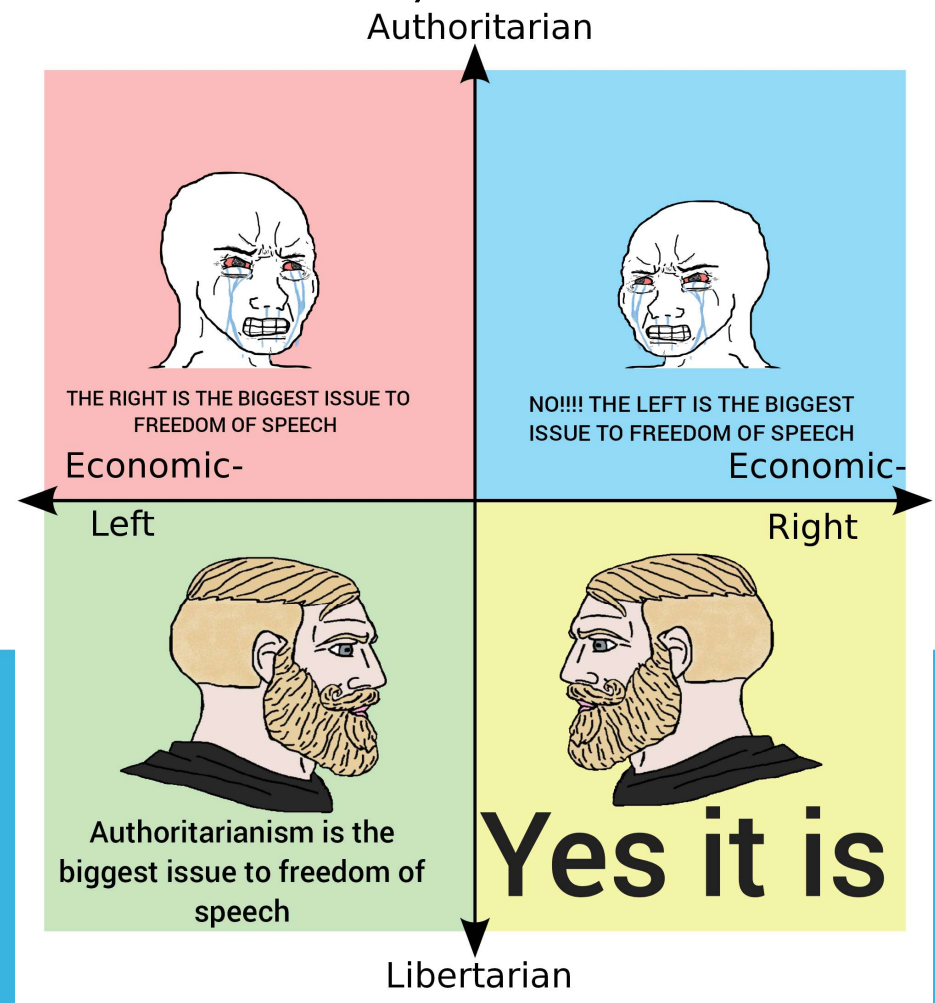


PEOPLE WHO'VE HAD THEIR POLITICAL OPPONENTS ARRESTED



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Authoritarian regimes tend to arise in relatively weak states that have weak formal institutions, and therefore informal institutions and processes are more important. This makes determining who has how much power particularly difficult.



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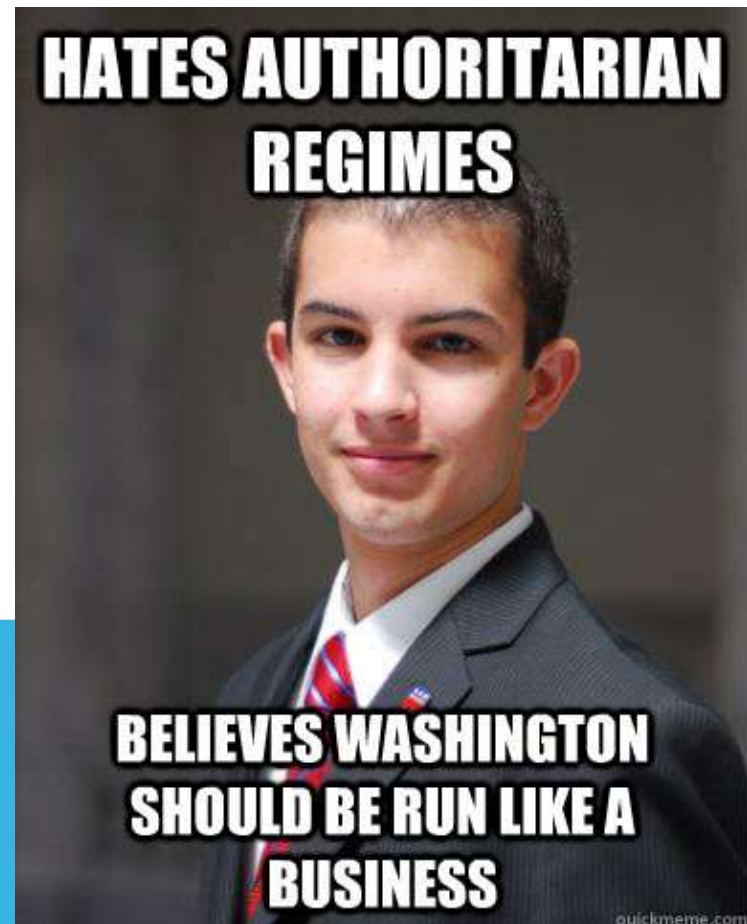
Chapter 3 outlines several subtypes of authoritarian regimes based on their origins and formal institutions:

One-Party

Personalist

Theocratic

Electoral Authoritarian



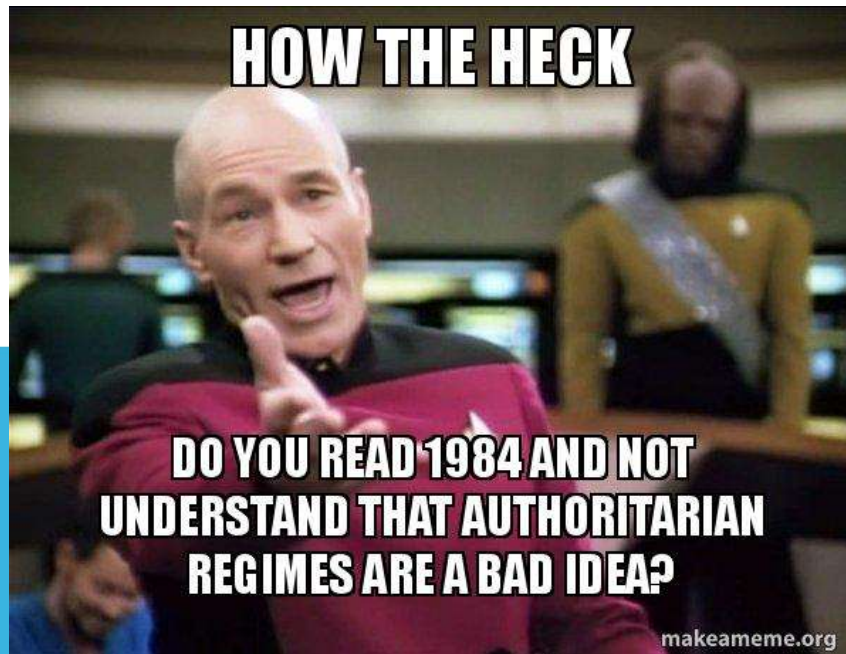
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Some key questions:

1. Are one-party regimes as a group different in distinctive ways from military regimes?
2. Does one subtype always provide greater levels of institutionalized limits on executive power?
3. Is one subtype always more repressive?
4. How do clientelist networks vary across the subtypes of authoritarian regimes?

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A key difference among authoritarian regimes that will help us to understand them better is the regime's level of institutionalization; the degree to which government processes and procedures are established, predictable, and routinized.



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Authoritarian Rule Around the World

Although not the promised land that some analysts thought it would be, the era after the end of the Cold War certainly had a significant effect on authoritarian regimes.



**WORLD
WAR III**



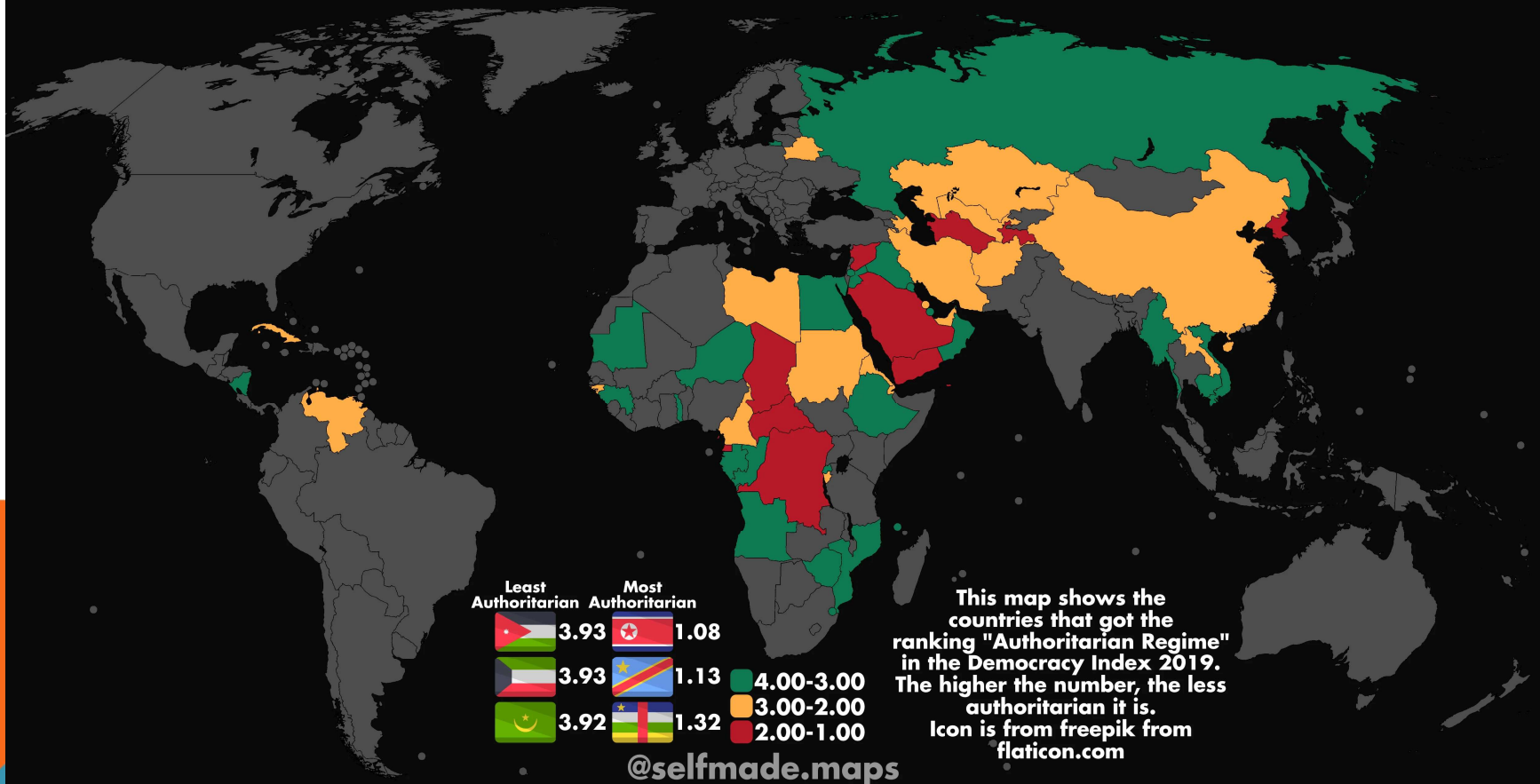
**COLD
WAR II**



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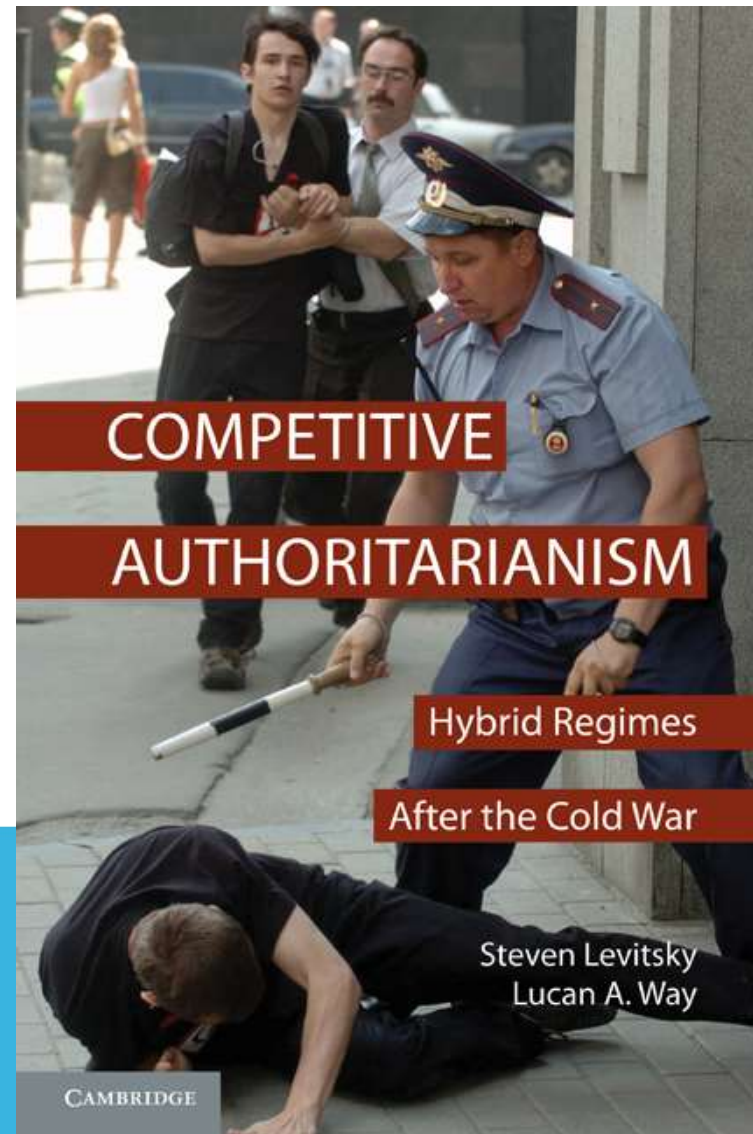


Authoritarian Regimes Worldwide



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The total number of authoritarian regimes in the world peaked in the late 1970s, though the decline was much more rapid after the end of the Cold War.



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Governing Institutions in Authoritarian Regimes

Supreme Leader – Individual who wields executive power with few formal limits in an authoritarian regime; in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the formal title of the top ruling cleric.



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Security is always a regime's top priority, and this is especially true for authoritarian regimes, which often have limited legitimacy.



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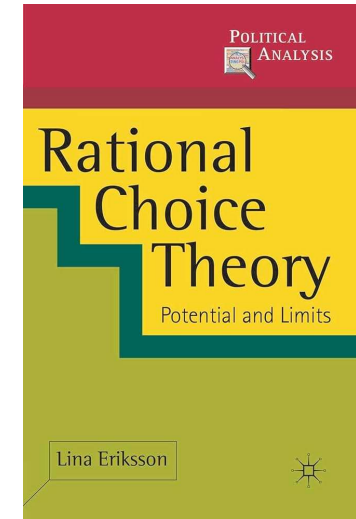
Dictator's Dilemma

An authoritarian ruler's repression creates fear, which then breeds uncertainty about how much support the ruler has; in response, the ruler spends more resources than is rational to co-opt the opposition.



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Scholars of authoritarian rule have used *rational choice theory* to explain the rise of institutions, focusing on the supreme leader's need to make credible commitments with other foreign actors.



RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

Rational choice theory is a theory that assumes human beings are rational creatures, which means they rely on reason and logic to make decisions.

DEFINITION

The commonly cited definition of the rational choice theory is that by Elster (1989), who submitted that:

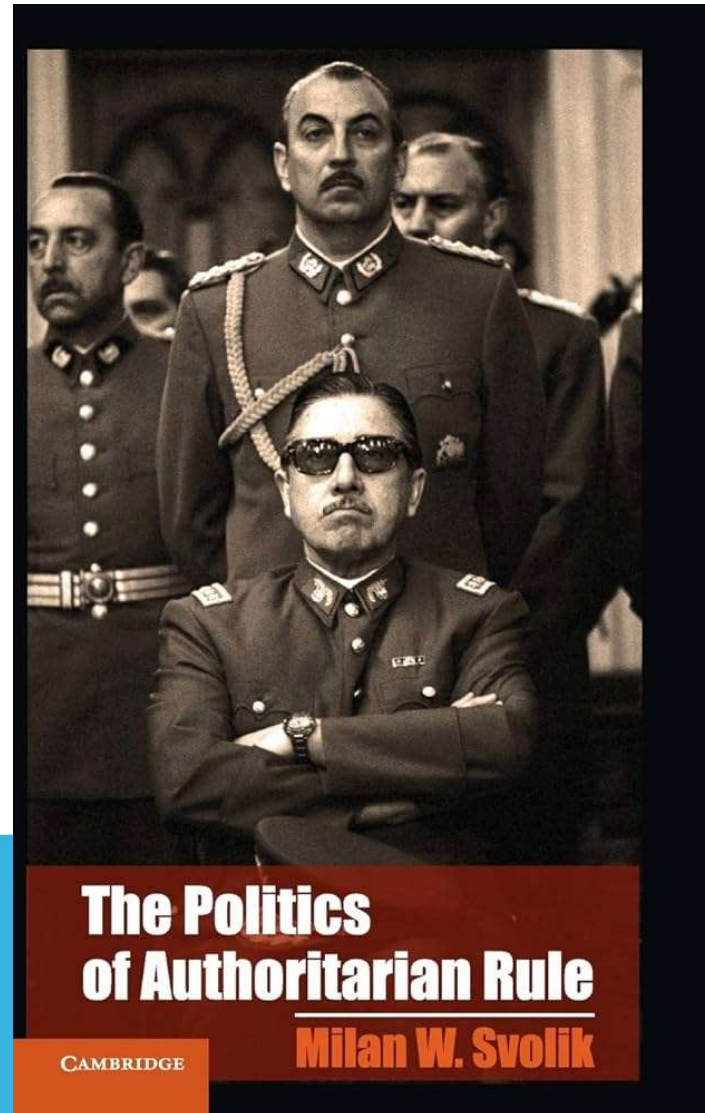
"...when faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome."

ASSUMPTIONS

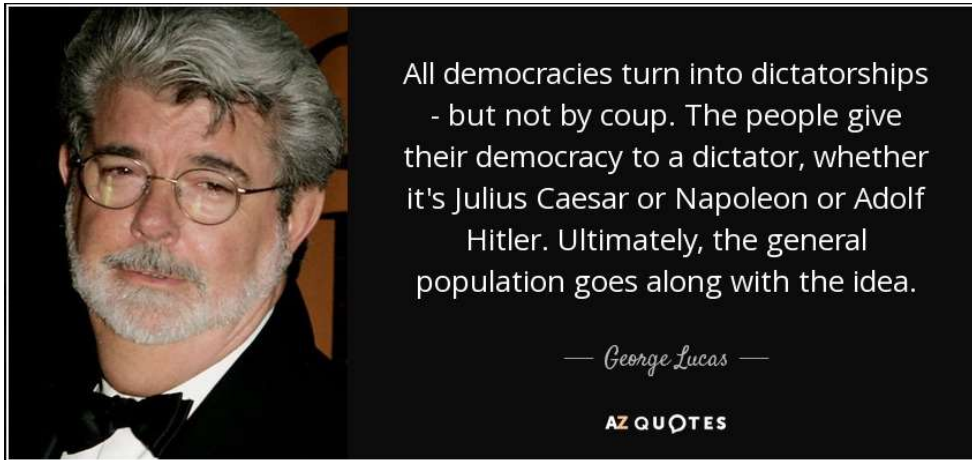
1. Decisions are a simple matter of cost vs reward
2. People take action when benefits outweigh costs
3. People will take no action, stop taking action, or take opposite action, when costs outweigh benefits
4. People utilize the resources they have at hand to maximize opportunity.

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Svolik (2012)
argued that
institutions are
most likely to
arise when a
balance of power
exists between a
dictator and his
closest allies.



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As a dictator tries to
usurp more
power for
himself, his
allies' only way to
resist is a
credible threat to
overthrow him.



**CONSERVATIVE
POLITICIANS
CALLING COLLECTIVE
OWNERSHIP AND
LGBT ACCEPTANCE
TOTALITARIAN FASCISM**



**CONSERVATIVE
POLITICIANS WHEN
ITS TIME TO
COZY UP TO A
DICTATOR, OVERTHROW
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM
OR ARM TERRORISTS**

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Gandhi (2008) applied a similar logic to the dictator's opponents: when the opposition is united, formal institutions are more likely to arise.



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Where the regime controls extensive mineral wealth, on the other hand, institutions are less likely because the dictator can use mineral wealth to co-opt segments of the opposition.

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The Problem of Succession

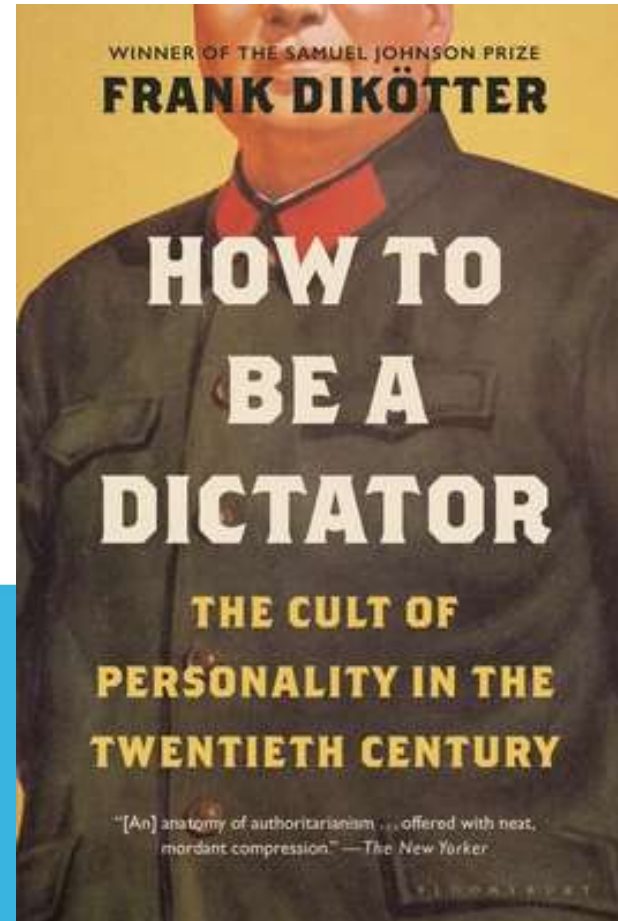
Authoritarian regimes are plagued by the question of succession. Electoral democracies provide a means of changing leadership on a regular basis; authoritarian regimes have no such procedure readily at hand.



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Elections, Parties, and Civil Society in Authoritarian Regimes

Personality Cult – Phenomenon that occurs in the most extreme cases of personalist rule in which followers constantly glorify the ruler and attempt to turn his every utterance into not only government fiat but also divine wisdom.



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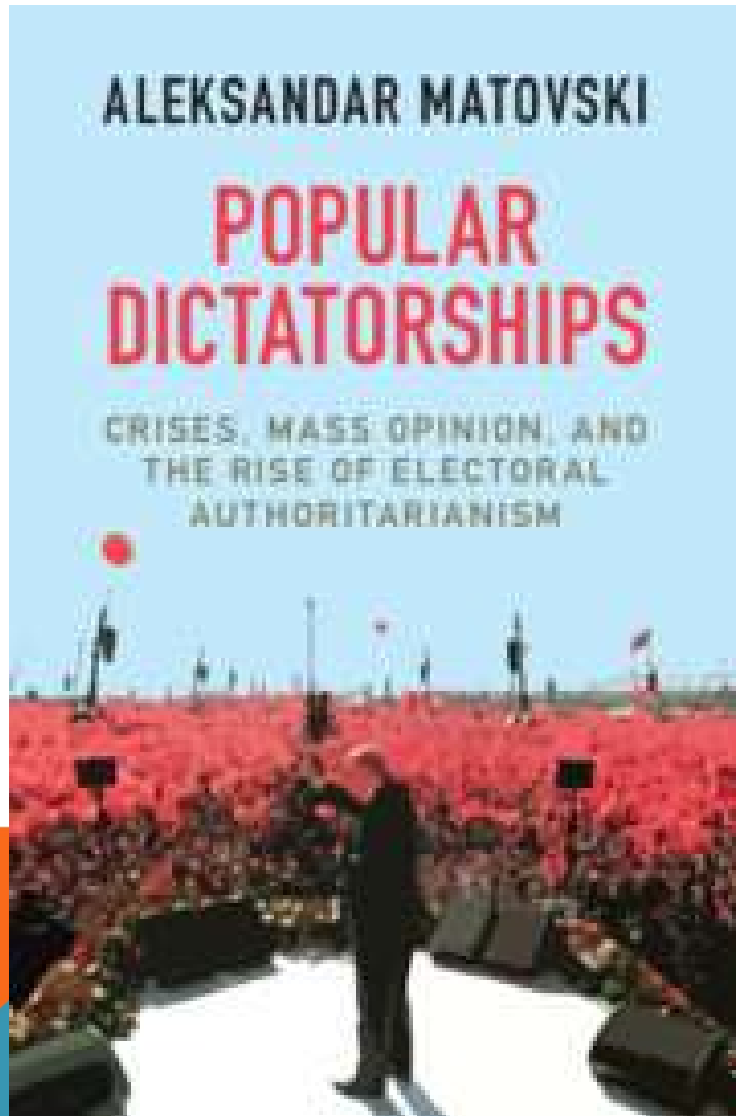
Beyond massive demonstrations of support, most authoritarian regimes encourage carefully monitored and limited political participation.

Participation in an Authoritarian Regime

- Although political participation is generally restricted in authoritarian regimes, the following forms of participation are often allowed to some citizens or practiced by others in order to gain control of government:
 - Joining political parties, serving as a member of the party, standing for office.
 - Petitioning (e-mail, phone calls, letters, face-to-face meetings) , expressing political views on the Internet.
 - Voting
 - Protests/demonstrations, attending rallies, boycotting, strikes.
 - Civil disobedience.
 - Coups d'état, revolutions, resistance movements, political violence.
 - Forming interest groups, joining social movements, citizens' policy meetings (mass line)

Even some one-party regimes hold regular elections!

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More common now are electoral authoritarian regimes in which a ruling party wins major elections easily, with some opposition parties winning a small share of the power.

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Since authoritarian rulers can hold power without any opposition or elections at all, an obvious question is, Why do they bother creating these systems?



President of Russia
Vladimir Putin



President of China
Xi Jinping



President of Turkey
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan



PM of Hungary
Viktor Orbán



President of Venezuela
Nicolás Maduro

A long-standing answer has been that elections serve as a façade of democratic legitimacy, both domestically and internationally.

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Authoritarian elections are coupled with very limited party systems.

ELECTORAL STRATEGIES UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM

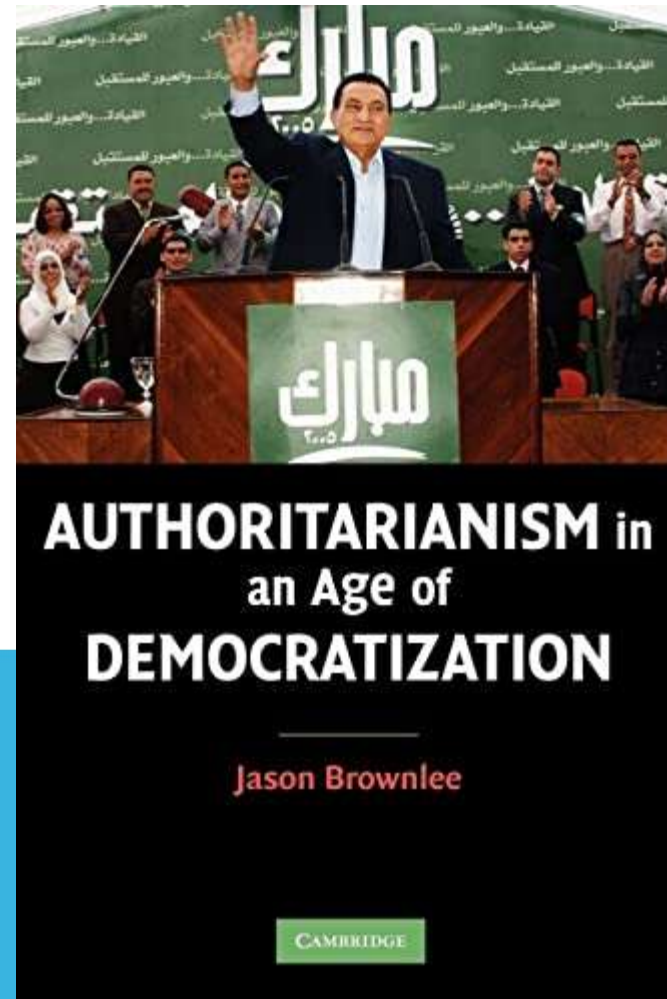


EVIDENCE FROM THE
FORMER SOVIET UNION

MEGAN HAUSER

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Using the *historical institutionalist perspective*, Jason Brownlee (2007) argued that strong ruling parties emerge early in an authoritarian regime if the supreme leader is able to repress and co-opt potential opposition to create an elite coalition within the party.



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Civil Society

“BRAZILIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS HAVE SHOWN THE WORLD THAT WINNING AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISM IS POSSIBLE.”

Pedro Abramovay

Open Society–Latin America and the Caribbean

Because participation must go through approved regime channels, civil society in authoritarian regimes is extremely circumscribed and repressed.

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3

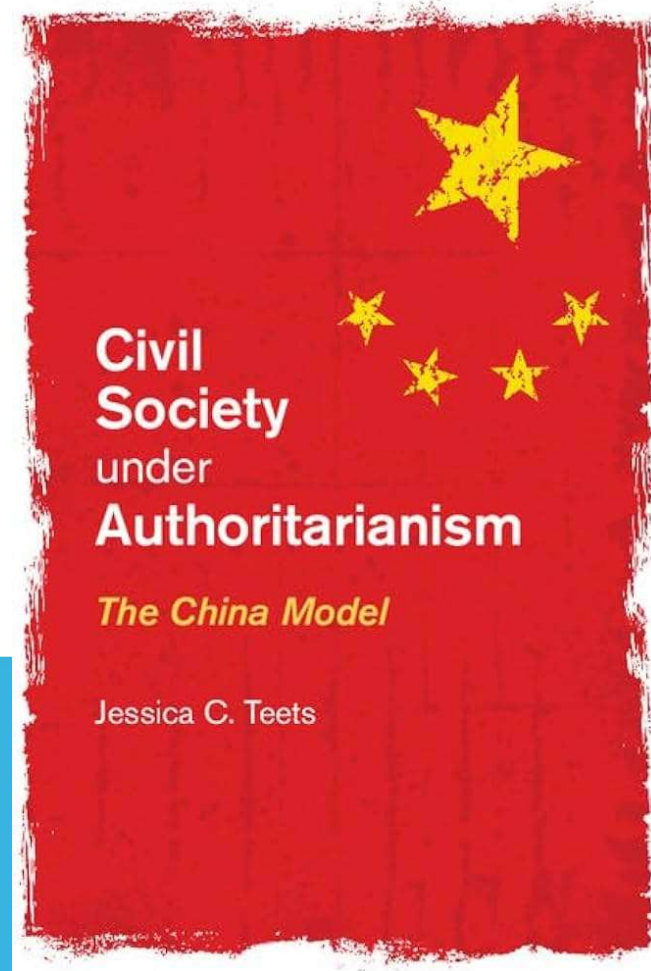
Interest Politics vs State Corporatism

- ▶ State corporatism can be seen as an alternative to interest politics
- ▶ If pluralism was the competitive market system of pressure group activity, then corporatism is the state-licensed monopoly
- ▶ The ascendancy of neo-liberalism led to the decline of corporatism
- ▶ This demise is premature given that the traditional corporatist states have reinterpreted institutions and relationships to adjust to the new economic challenges

Noncommunist regimes often use state corporatism to control interest groups.

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Jessica Teets (2014) argues that this dynamic in China is producing a new model of state-civil relations – “consultative authoritarianism” – that combines elements of liberal autonomy and state corporatism.



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Clientelism

With civil society very weak and parties and elections mainly aimed at ensuring elite cohesion and regime survival, **clientelism** is often the primary means through which average citizens can participate in politics in authoritarian regimes.

Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism

The Puzzle of Distributive Politics



Susan C. Stokes
Thad Dunning
Marcelo Nazareno
Valeria Brusco

CAMBRIDGE

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Problems with clientelism:

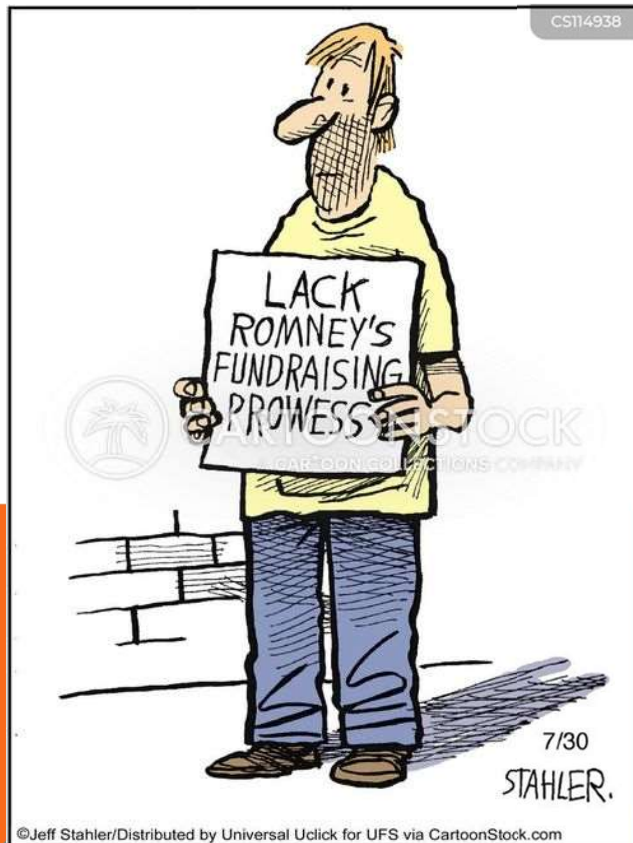
1. Informality means no client is ever guaranteed anything



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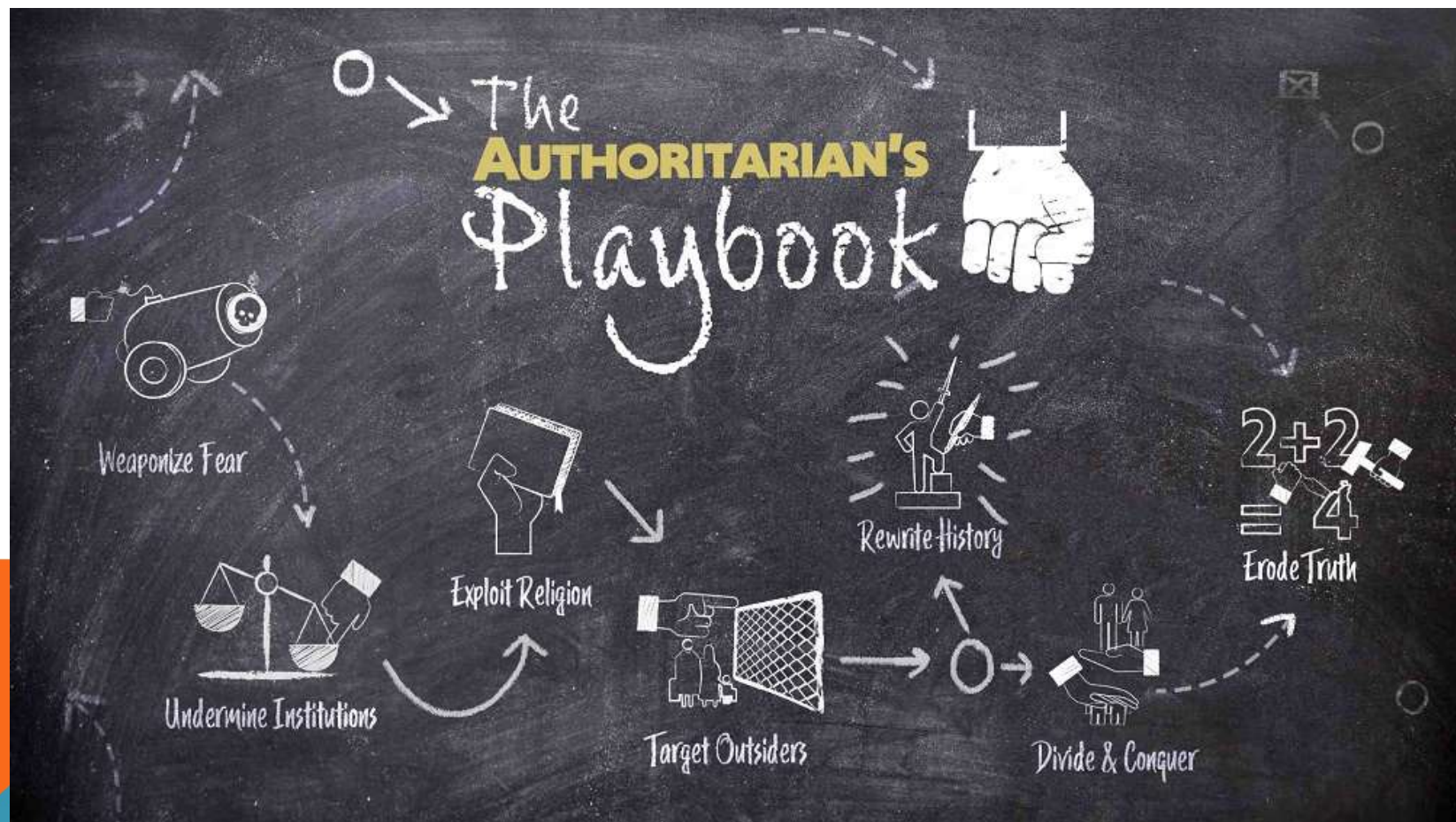
Problems with clientelism:

2. Discourages citizens from organizing on the basis of collective interests.



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Concluding thoughts and questions...



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By the dawn of the new millennium, it was clear that although democracy had expanded, authoritarianism was not about to disappear entirely.



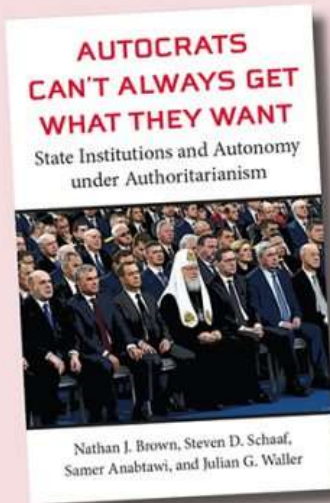
A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth. Authoritarian institutions and marketers have always known this fact.

— *Daniel Kahneman* —

AZ QUOTES

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Dictators seem to control virtually everything in authoritarian regimes. The executive would seem to be all-powerful.



Autocrats Can't Always Get What They Want: State Institutions and Autonomy under Authoritarianism, by Nathan J. Brown, Steven D. Schaaf, Samer Anabtawi and Julian G. Waller, is published in 2024 by the University of Michigan Press

However, this is often not the case, which makes figuring out who rules very difficult.

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While comparativists have long catalogued authoritarian regimes into various subtypes, certain commonalities exist in all authoritarian regimes.



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All dictators face the *dictator's dilemma*, solving it in different ways. And all dictators rule through some combination of repression, co-optation, and attempts at legitimation, again, in different ways and amounts.



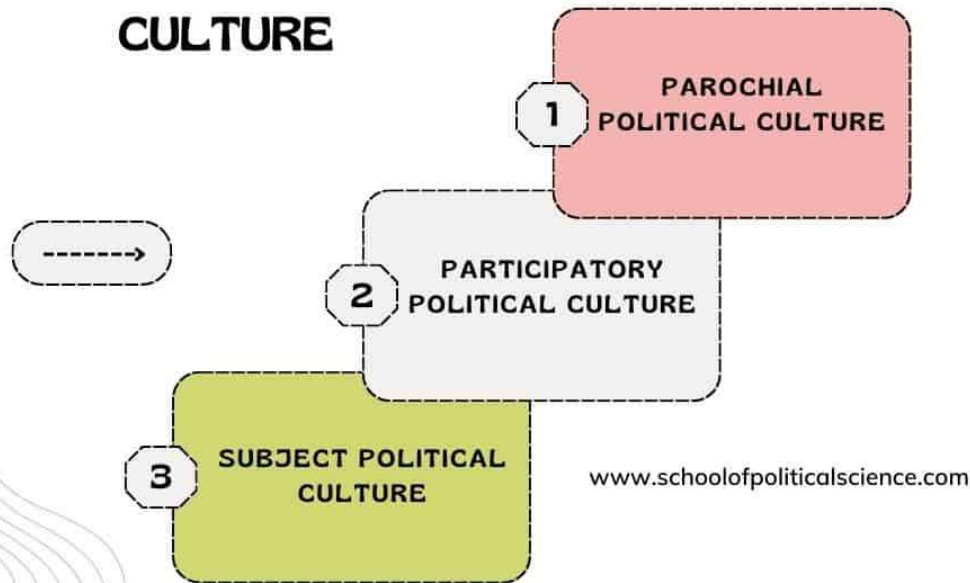
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The earliest theoretical approaches to understanding authoritarian regimes focused mainly on individual leaders or national cultures.



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TYPES OF POLITICAL CULTURE



Other scholars, looking beyond the individual, used political culture theories to argue why such regimes emerged in the first place and how they operated.

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More recently, scholars have used rational choice or historical-institutionalist models to understand authoritarian regimes.

Historical institutionalism 1.

- Need to understand the importance of history in general, and the history of specific policy sectors or public policies in particular (Skocpol, Tilly, Elias, Pierson).
- Classic social science research is synchronic; it uses a range of possible variables to explain a dependent variable. It can overlook the importance of history. There are various ways of understanding history.
- One is to emphasise the overarching historical context in the form of a global référentiel that is not dissimilar to the scheme that developed by Muller.
- Another is to focus on the sectoral level, and retrace the history of specific public policies.
- This sectoral analysis is that favoured by the historical institutionalist school. Decisions set sectors on a given path, from which a shift is extremely costly in terms past investment. Change can usually only occur in the context of a paradigm shift

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Dictators face a common set of governing problems.

To overcome these, they engage in a combination of repression, co-optation, and legitimation.



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As with many arguments in comparative politics, institutionalist theories are at the forefront of the debate today but have not definitively proven their case.



True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

— *Franklin D. Roosevelt* —

AZ QUOTES

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DIGITAL CORPORATE DICTATORSHIP



THE PERFECT SLAVERY