A Theory of Revolutionary Durability

IN JUNE 1941, SOVIET POWER hung by the barest of threads. Overwhelmed by invading Nazi armies, the Soviet Union ceded vast tracts of territory as entire Russian divisions lost contact with their commanders. Across the country, the Red Army disintegrated into bands of fugitives seeking to escape German encirclement. In the central corridors of power, panicked confusion reigned.[1]

One might have expected the Soviet regime to collapse, falling prey to either an uprising by citizens who had suffered years of starvation and repression or a coup by army officers angry at Joseph Stalin's brutal purges and catastrophic meddling in military affairs. Indeed, military disaster during World War I had precipitated the fall of the tsarist regime. Moreover, the devastating first weeks of the invasion could be traced directly to Stalin's leadership. He had refused to prepare for an invasion despite numerous intelligence reports that an attack was imminent; in fact, he had ordered the dismantling of existing defense fortifications in the east, leaving the Soviet army largely defenseless in the rear.[2] Several days after the German invasion, Stalin retreated to his dacha, leaving the rest of the leadership in the lurch. A small group of Politburo members ventured out to see him uninvited—a risky move in Stalinist Russia.[3] According to one account, the Soviet leaders found Stalin alone in the dark, slumped in an armchair, seemingly expecting arrest.[4] He later admitted that "any other government which had suffered such losses of territory . . . would have collapsed."[5] Yet Stalin's government survived, and Soviet communism endured for another half century.

The Soviet regime's survival amid extreme adversity highlights a broader phenomenon of great significance. Revolutionary autocracies—those born of violent social revolution—are extraordinarily durable. Soviet communism lasted seventy-four years; Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime ruled for eighty-five years; revolutionary regimes in China, Cuba, and Vietnam remain in power today after more than six decades. Among modern states, only a small handful of Persian Gulf monarchies match this longevity.

Revolutionary autocracies do not merely persist over time. Like the Soviet Union, most of them have survived despite external hostility, poor economic performance, and large-scale policy failure. The Chinese Communist Party held on to power in the face of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward and the "Great Chaos" unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. Vietnam's Communist regime endured the devastation caused by thirty years of war; Cuba's revolutionary regime survived a U.S.-backed invasion, a crippling trade embargo, and the economic catastrophe that followed the Soviet collapse; and the Islamic Republic of Iran endured four decades of intense international hostility, including a bloody eight-year war with Iraq.

Finally, most revolutionary regimes survived the global collapse of communism. During the 1990s, the loss of foreign patrons, economic crisis, and unprecedented international democracy promotion undermined autocracies across the world.[6] Yet many revolutionary regimes—including erstwhile communist regimes in China, Cuba, and Vietnam—remained intact. Indeed, all the communist regimes that survived into the twenty-first century were born of violent revolution.[7] Likewise, in sub-Saharan Africa, the only Soviet client states to survive the end of the Cold War were Angola and Mozambique, both of which emerged out of violent social revolution.

These cases are not anomalies. In a statistical analysis of all authoritarian regimes established since 1900, undertaken with Jean Lachapelle and Adam E. Casey,[8] we find that authoritarian regimes that emerged out of violent social revolution survived, on average, nearly three times as long as their nonrevolutionary counterparts.[9] Revolutionary regimes broke down at an annual rate that was barely a fifth of that of nonrevolutionary regimes.[10] To help visualize these differences, figure 1.1 presents the Kaplan-Meier estimates for the two regime types, along with 95 percent confidence envelopes. It shows that a striking 71 percent of revolutionary regimes survived for thirty years or more, compared to only 19 percent of nonrevolutionary regimes.[11] Importantly, revolutionary origins are
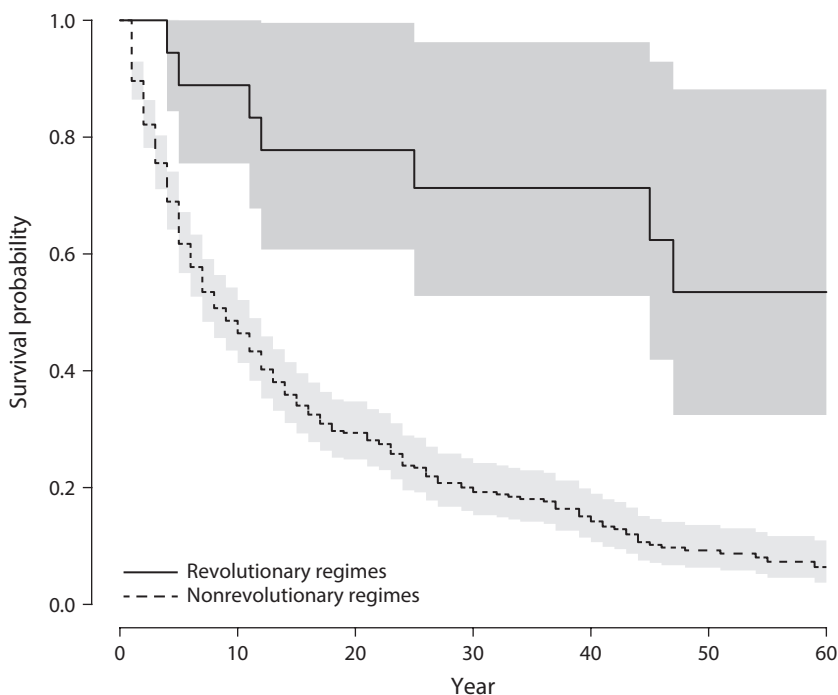
FIGURE 1.1: Kaplan-Meier Survival Curves.

positively associated with regime longevity, even when we control for standard variables such as level of economic development, GDP growth, oil wealth, and type of authoritarian regime (party-based, military, monarchy, or personalist).[12]

The durability of revolutionary regimes is highly consequential. Though rare (we count twenty since 1900), revolutionary autocracies have had an outsized impact on modern world politics. Revolutions expand state power, sometimes dramatically. As Theda Skocpol observed,[13] the destruction of old elites and mobilization of vast human and other societal resources may permit rapid industrial and military advances, enabling states to leapfrog others in the geopolitical pecking order. Thus, the Russian Revolution transformed a predominantly agrarian society into a modern industrial power capable of defeating Germany in World War II and achieving nuclear parity with the United States. The revolution shook the global capitalist system and gave rise to the Cold War rivalry that defined the post-1945 geopolitical order. Likewise, the Chinese Revolution brought the centralization of what had been a weak, fragmented state and fueled the country's emergence as a superpower. Cuba's revolution transformed

a peripheral state into one capable of successful military intervention in Africa.

Revolutions also bring war.[14] Dramatic shifts in national power tend to destabilize the regional and even international order, increasing the likelihood of military conflict.[15] Revolutionary governments generate heightened uncertainty and perceptions of threat among both neighboring states and global powers, which increases the likelihood of interstate conflict.[16] Thus, from revolutionary France to Communist Russia and China, to postcolonial Vietnam, to late twentieth-century Iran and Afghanistan, revolutionary governments have often found themselves engulfed in war. Overall, revolutionary governments are nearly twice as likely as nonrevolutionary governments to be involved in war.[17]

Revolutionary regimes also engender new ideological and political models that spread across national borders. The Bolshevik Revolution gave rise to an economic model (state socialism) and a political model (Leninism) that diffused across the globe during the twentieth century. Similarly, the Cuban Revolution gave rise to a new guerrilla strategy that transformed the Latin American Left, polarizing politics across the region for a generation.[18] The Iranian Revolution created a new model of a modern theocracy.

Revolutionary regimes, moreover, have been responsible for some of the most horrific violence and human tragedy in modern history, including the 1932–1933 Ukrainian famine, Stalin's Great Terror, the Great Leap Forward in China, and the Khmer Rouge's genocide in Cambodia.

Finally, revolutionary regimes have posed major foreign policy challenges for Western democracies. Few states were more closely associated with U.S. foreign policy ineffectiveness—if not outright failure—than revolutionary Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, and Afghanistan.

This book seeks to explain the extraordinary durability of modern revolutionary regimes.[19] Drawing on comparative historical analysis, we argue that social revolutions trigger a *reactive sequence* that powerfully shapes long-run regime trajectories.[20] Revolutionary governments' attempts to radically transform the existing social and geopolitical order generate intense domestic and international resistance, often resulting in civil or external war. This counterrevolutionary reaction is critical to long-run regime durability. Counterrevolutionary wars pose an existential threat to newborn regimes, and, in some cases (e.g., Afghanistan, Cambodia), they destroy them. Among revolutionary regimes that survive, however, early periods of violence and military threat produce three key pillars of regime strength: (1) a cohesive ruling elite, (2) a highly developed and

loyal coercive apparatus, and (3) the destruction of rival organizations and alternative centers of power in society. These three pillars help to inoculate revolutionary regimes against elite defection, military coups, and mass protest—three principal sources of authoritarian breakdown. Such a trajectory almost always yields durable autocracies.

Defining Revolutionary Regime

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous.

—MAO ZEDONG[21]

Revolutionary autocracies are political regimes that emerge out of social revolutions. We define a social revolution as the violent overthrow of an existing regime from below, accompanied by mass mobilization and state collapse, which triggers a rapid transformation of the state and the existing social order.[22]

Social revolutions possess four characteristics that jointly distinguish them from other types of regime change. First, they occur from below, in that they are led by mass-based movements that emerge outside the state and regime.[23] These may be armed guerrilla movements (China, Cuba, Eritrea, Vietnam), political parties (Russia), or militant social movements (Iran) that seize power amid mass unrest. In all cases, the revolutionary elite is drawn from outside the preexisting state. Military coups are not social revolutions.

Second, social revolutions involve the violent overthrow of the old regime.[24] This may take the form of a civil war (Mexico, Rwanda), a guerrilla struggle (China, Cuba, Eritrea, Mozambique), or a rapid and violent seizure of power (Russia, Bolivia in 1952, Iran).

Third, social revolutions produce a fundamental transformation of the state.[25] State transformation initially involves the collapse or crippling of the preexisting coercive apparatus.[26] Military chains of command are shattered by mutinies or widespread desertion, preventing the security forces from functioning as coherent organizations. In many cases, preexisting coercive structures simply dissolve (e.g., Mexico, Cuba, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Russia) or, in anticolonial revolutions (e.g., Algeria, Mozambique, Vietnam), are withdrawn. Upon seizing power, revolutionary forces usually dismantle remaining coercive agencies and build new armies, police forces, and bureaucracies—often from scratch.[27]

Fourth, social revolutions involve the initiation of radical socioeconomic or cultural change.[28] Revolutionary governments attempt to impose, by force, measures that attack the core interests of powerful domestic and international actors or large groups in society. Such measures include the systematic seizure and redistribution of property; attempts to eliminate entire social classes (e.g., China, Russia); campaigns to destroy preexisting cultures, religions, or ethnic orders (e.g., Iran, Rwanda); efforts to impose new rules governing social behavior (e.g., Afghanistan, Iran); and foreign policy initiatives aimed at spreading revolution and transforming the regional or international order (e.g., Hungary in 1919, Cuba, Iran, Russia). Because such efforts at radical social transformation trigger substantial resistance, often from powerful places, they are invariably accompanied by a heavy dose of coercion. For this reason, social revolutions are antithetical to the development of liberal democracy.

Our definition of social revolution is demanding.[29] It excludes at least three types of regime change that scholars sometimes describe as revolutionary. First, it excludes cases of mass-based regime change in which states and social structures remain intact, such as the so-called color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; the Arab Spring transitions in Egypt and Tunisia; or Third Wave democratizations in the Philippines (1986) and South Africa (1994).

Second, our definition excludes cases of radical change initiated by actors within the state. So-called revolutions from above,[30] such as those in Turkey under Kemal Ataturk, Egypt under Gamal Nasser, or Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam, do not meet our definition of revolution because they were led by state officials rather than mass-based regime outsiders. Far from involving the collapse or transformation of the state, revolutions from above are *led* by the state.

Third, we exclude cases that emerge out of violent regime change but do not initiate radical social transformations. These cases—which include China under the Kuomintang (1927–1949), postcolonial Indonesia and contemporary Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda—might be characterized as *political revolutions*, as opposed to *social revolutions*.[31] Regimes that emerge out of political revolutions sometimes share important characteristics with social revolutionary regimes, such as the creation of new armies. As a result, they too are often robust. However, only social revolutions trigger the revolutionary reactive sequence that generates the extraordinary durability observed in countries like Mexico, the Soviet Union, Communist China, and Vietnam. When we use the term "revolutionary regime," then, we refer to regimes born of *social* revolution.

Our definition does not encompass some prominent cases that have been described as revolutionary, such as the postcommunist "refolutions" of 1989–1991.[32] Because the fall of communism in Eastern Europe involved mass uprisings and produced far-reaching socioeconomic transformations, these transitions have been described as revolutionary.[33] They do not meet our criteria, however. With the exception of Romania,[34] postcommunist transitions were peaceful, in that they were driven by either peaceful demonstrations (Eastern Europe) or, in the Soviet case, elections (in 1990) and peaceful protest (after the 1991 putsch).[35] In addition, most postcommunist transitions left important state structures, including preexisting armies, intact.[36]

Our definition also excludes fascist regimes. Although Nazi Germany and Italy under Benito Mussolini have been described as revolutionary,[37] the Nazis and the Italian fascists came to power through institutional means, and with the backing of state officials.[38] States never collapsed.

Our definition of revolution is thus more demanding than those used in much of the contemporary literature. Minimalist definitions, such as those of Mark R. Beissinger, Jack Goldstone, Jeff Goodwin, and others, categorize as revolutions all cases "of irregular, extraconstitutional, and sometimes violent changes of political regime and control of state power brought about by popular movements."[39] By excluding criteria such as state and societal transformation, these definitions broaden the concept of revolution to encompass a wide array of cases, ranging from violent social revolutions in China and Russia to the protest-driven removal of autocrats such as the fall of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. Our definition yields a narrower—but more uniform—set of cases.

To identify revolutionary regimes, we compiled a list of all 355 autocracies since 1900 by drawing on data from Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz's "Autocratic Breakdown and Regimes Transitions" data set (GWF).[40] We then narrowed the set of cases to governments that came to power in an irregular fashion (i.e., not via succession or election) and from outside the state (i.e., *not* via a military coup).[41] Finally, we excluded cases in which new governments did not initiate an effort to radically transform the state and the social order. (Our coding criteria and reason for excluding each nonrevolutionary case may be found in appendixes II and III.)[42]

To ensure that we did not miss any revolutionary governments that collapsed before the end of the first calendar year, thereby failing to meet GWF's inclusion criteria for being a regime,[43] we also examined all 219 autocratic leaders who were in power for at least a day but less than a

Table 1.1 Revolutionary Regimes since 1900

Afghanistan, 1996–2001

Albania, 1944–1991

Algeria, 1962–

Angola, 1975–

Bolivia, 1952–1964

Cambodia, 1975–1979

China, 1949–

Cuba, 1959–

Eritrea, 1993–

Finland, January 28–April 13, 1918

Guinea-Bissau, 1974–1999

Hungary, March 21–July 29, 1919

Iran, 1979–

Mexico, 1915–2000

Mozambique, 1975–

Nicaragua, 1979–1990

Russia, 1917–1991

Rwanda, 1994–

Vietnam, 1954–

Yugoslavia, 1945–1990

year.[44] We identified two revolutionary governments that died in their infancy: Finland in 1918 and Hungary in 1919.[45] The fact that we could identify only two such cases increases our confidence that we have not inadvertently failed to identify short-lived revolutionary governments.[46]

Overall, then, we find twenty revolutionary autocracies since 1900; these are listed in table 1.1. In terms of regime longevity, our cases range from those that survived less than a year (Finland, Hungary) to those lasting more than seventy years (China, Mexico, Russia). They include both regimes that emerge out of classic social revolutions, such as those in China, Cuba, Mexico, and Russia, and those founded in radical national liberation struggles, as in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, and Vietnam. The list also includes some post–Cold War cases that are not always treated as social revolutions, such as Rwanda, where the Rwandan Patriotic Front government took steps to overturn the preexisting ethnic order,[47] and Eritrea, where the Eritrean People's Liberation Front sought to radically overhaul the country's rural social structure.[48]

Seventeen of the twenty regimes listed in table 1.1 are left-leaning. This pattern may be attributed to the fact that radical challenges to the existing social order, a defining characteristic of social revolution, were more likely to be undertaken by leftist (and, more recently, Islamist) forces in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Conservative or right-wing forces usually seek to preserve the existing social order.[49]

Finally, all the regimes encompassed by our definition are authoritarian. This should not be surprising. Because efforts to carry out radical social transformation attack the vital interests or way of life of powerful domestic actors and large societal groups, they require a level of violence and coercion that is incompatible with liberal democracy.[50] Social revolutions may contribute to long-run democratization, for example, by destroying institutions or social classes that inhibit democratic change, as Barrington Moore argued in the case of France.[51] In all revolutionary cases, however, the initial regime was authoritarian.

A Theory of Revolutionary Regime Durability

This book seeks to explain the durability of authoritarian regimes. Durable authoritarian regimes are those in which a single party, coalition, or clique remains continuously in power, usually beyond the lifetime of founding leaders, and often despite adverse conditions.[52] Durable autocracies are less likely to suffer serious contestation, either from within (e.g., coups) or from society (e.g., large-scale protest), even in circumstances—such as economic crisis, major policy failure, or leadership succession—that often give rise to such contestation. Moreover, when regime challenges *do* emerge, durable autocracies are better equipped to thwart them.

The early twenty-first century witnessed a proliferation of research on the sources of authoritarian durability. Some scholars pointed to economic sources of regime stability. One of these is growth. Studies have shown that economic growth helps sustain autocracy by limiting public discontent and providing governments with the resources to both maintain pro-regime coalitions and co-opt potential rivals.[53] Other research highlighted the role of natural resource wealth, particularly oil, in sustaining autocracies.[54] However, few revolutionary regimes have achieved sustained economic growth (at least initially) or possess vast natural resource endowments. In fact, most of them have experienced the kind of severe economic crisis that is widely associated with authoritarian breakdown.

Much of the contemporary literature on authoritarian durability highlights the role of political institutions.[55] Scholars argue that pseudo-democratic institutions such as elections, legislatures, and ruling parties help autocrats gain access to information,[56] co-opt opponents,[57] and provide mechanisms of coordination and cohesion among the ruling elite.[58]

The most prominent institutionalist arguments center on the role of political parties.[59] Ruling parties are said to enhance authoritarian stability by creating incentives for elite cooperation over defection. By providing institutional mechanisms to regulate access to the spoils of public office and by lengthening actors' time horizons through the provision of future opportunities for career advancement, ruling parties encourage long-term loyalty.[60] Those who lose out in short-term power struggles remain loyal in the expectation of gaining access to power in future rounds. Ruling parties thus reduce the incentives for elite defection, which is widely viewed as a major cause of authoritarian breakdown.[61]

Given that most revolutionary regimes are governed by strong ruling parties, revolutionary cases may appear to conform to such theories. Nevertheless, there are limits to the explanatory power of institutionalist approaches. As Benjamin Smith has shown, party-based authoritarian regimes vary widely in their durability.[62] Whereas some party-based regimes survive for decades, even in the face of intense opposition and severe economic crises (e.g., Malaysia, Zimbabwe), others (e.g., Pakistan in 1958, Ghana in 1966) quickly collapse, often at the first sign of duress. Indeed, as we show in this book, the formal existence of a ruling party tells us virtually nothing about its strength.[63]

Furthermore, ruling parties may not exert the independent causal force that is often assigned to them in the literature.[64] Looking back at the origins of many party-based autocracies, we see that ruling parties were often initially weak or nonexistent. Mexico's ruling party was not created until fifteen years after the revolutionary elite took power; Cuba's Communist Party was not established until six years after the revolution, and the party remained inoperative for a decade after its founding. Even the Bolshevik Party, which became the model for Leninist party regimes, was initially weak and riven by internal conflict. In these and other cases, ruling parties strengthened over time, together with processes of state-building and regime consolidation. This sequencing suggests that other, more exogenous, factors may be at work. In other words, strong ruling parties may contribute to durable authoritarianism, but we still need to understand where strong ruling parties come from.

Our statistical analysis offers further evidence that revolutionary origins are associated with more durable party-based authoritarianism.[65] We

found that among the party-based authoritarian regimes that emerged since 1900, those with revolutionary origins are considerably more robust than those without such origins. The likelihood that a revolutionary regime will collapse in any given year is less than half that of nonrevolutionary party-based regimes.[66]

Recent scholarly efforts to explain variation in authoritarian durability have taken a historical turn, examining the role of regime origins.[67] This approach may be traced back to Samuel Huntington, who argued more than half a century ago that strong ruling parties were rooted in "struggle and violence."[68] For Huntington, the strength of single-party regimes was grounded in the "duration and intensity of the struggle to acquire power or to consolidate power after taking over the government."[69] Thus, ruling parties that emerged out of violent revolution or prolonged nationalist struggle were most durable, whereas parties that seized and consolidated control of the state "easily, without a major struggle," usually "withered in power."[70] Katharine Chorley,[71] writing a full generation before Huntington, pointed to the critical role of social revolutions in facilitating the construction of strong and loyal coercive agencies. This book expands upon and tests these insights.

There exists a rich tradition of research on social revolutions.[72] Much of this research focuses on the *causes* of revolution. Scholars have long debated the causal role of modernization, class structure, culture, ideology, and leadership.[73] Since publication of Theda Skocpol's pathbreaking book *States and Social Revolutions*,[74] however, there has been a near consensus—to which this book adheres—that state weakness is a necessary condition for revolution.[75] Revolutions occur only where states are disabled by war, decolonization, or the breakdown of a sultanistic regime.[76]

We know less, however, about the *consequences* of revolution, especially for political regimes. Scholars have examined the impact of revolution on culture,[77] redistribution and social equality,[78] and state-building.[79] They have linked revolutions to the development of powerful coercive structures,[80] heightened repression and terror,[81] and war.[82] Nevertheless, there have been fewer efforts to theorize how social revolutions shape political regimes.[83]

THE REVOLUTIONARY REACTIVE SEQUENCE

Building on Huntington,[84] as well as more recent work by scholars such as James Mahoney,[85] Benjamin Smith,[86] and Dan Slater,[87] we argue that developments during a revolutionary regime's foundational period have a profound impact on its long-term trajectory. Revolutionary origins trigger
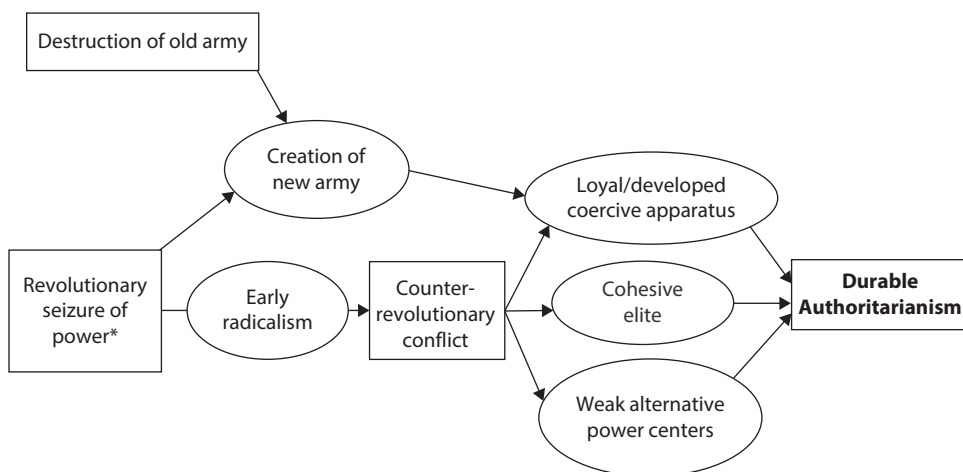
FIGURE 1.2: The Ideal-Typical Revolutionary Reactive Sequence.
* In some cases (e.g., China), the reactive sequence occurs before seizure of power.

what Mahoney calls a "reactive sequence,"[88] or a series of violent conflicts that, if they do not destroy the regime early on, dramatically strengthen state institutions and weaken societal ones, laying a foundation for durable authoritarianism.

In the ideal-typical revolutionary reactive sequence, which is summarized in figure 1.2, early radicalism triggers a violent counterrevolutionary reaction, often supported by foreign powers. This counterrevolutionary reaction is critical to long-run regime durability because it creates an existential threat that reinforces elite cohesion, encourages the development of a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus, and facilitates the destruction of rival organizations and independent centers of societal power. This process of state-building and societal weakening lays a foundation for durable authoritarian rule. In classical cases (e.g., Russia, Cuba, Iran), or what Huntington called the "Western" type of revolution,[89] the reactive sequence begins after the seizure of national power. In some cases (e.g., China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia), however, much of the conflict and transformation occurs *prior* to the seizure of national power (Huntington called this the "Eastern" type of revolution). Notwithstanding this difference in timing, this book shows that the "Western" and "Eastern" revolutionary paths unfold in comparable ways and give rise to similarly durable regimes.

Two alternative revolutionary paths yield less durable regimes. One is a radical path to *early death*, in which revolutionary attacks on powerful domestic and international interests trigger a military conflict that

destroys the regime. Hungary (1919), Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and Afghanistan under the Taliban (1996–2001) followed this path. The other alternative path is one of *accommodation*, in which revolutionaries initiate far-reaching social change but then temper or abandon most of these measures to avert a counterrevolutionary reaction. This more pragmatic approach often succeeds at limiting violent conflict, but in the absence of such conflict, revolutionary governments are less likely to forge a cohesive elite, build a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus, or destroy independent power centers. Such regimes tend to survive in the short run, but without a durable foundation, they are prone to instability. Opposition challenges—both from within and from society—are more frequent, more potent, and thus more likely to undermine the regime. This was the path followed by regimes in Algeria, Bolivia, and Guinea-Bissau.

THE SEIZURE OF POWER: EARLY RADICALISM AND THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY

You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness.

—THOMAS SANKARA[90]

In observing the strength of regimes in Mexico and the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s, or in contemporary China and Vietnam, it is easy to forget that most revolutionary autocracies are born weak. Revolutionaries seize power in a context of state collapse, in which preexisting armies, police forces, and bureaucracies have been partially or fully destroyed. Inevitably, then, new revolutionary elites inherit weak states. Rebel armies are often too small, ill equipped, and inexperienced to maintain order across the national territory.[91] In Russia, for example, Bolshevik forces had virtually no presence outside the major cities in October 1917. Likewise, Albanian revolutionaries barely possessed any state structures when Enver Hoxha declared victory in late 1944,[92] and Iranian revolutionaries controlled only a "hastily gathered, disorganized and ill-trained militia" upon seizing power in 1979.[93]

Ruling parties also tend to be weak in the immediate aftermath of revolution. In Cuba, for example, Fidel Castro ruled without a party between 1959 and 1965. Even after being formally established in 1965, the Cuban Communist Party barely functioned.[94] It never even held a congress before 1975, allowing Castro to rule in an "institutional void."[95] Likewise, Mexican revolutionaries lacked a ruling party during their first twelve

years in power. Even in Russia, the birthplace of the Leninist party model, the Bolshevik Party was initially plagued by internal conflict and loose discipline.[96]

The absence of a strong party or coercive apparatus leaves revolutionary governments vulnerable to challenges from diverse actors, ranging from ancien régime elites to remnants of the old army to rival political organizations seeking power in the wake of the old regime's collapse. For example, Mexico's revolutionary government confronted remnants of the old Federal Army, landowners, and rival armies led by Francisco (Pancho) Villa and Emiliano Zapata for nearly a decade after the seizure of power. The Bolsheviks faced opposition from the White Armies and other remnants of the tsarist regime, as well as two rival socialist parties: the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs).

Without an effective army or party and surrounded by a multitude of real and potential enemies, new revolutionary governments tend to be vulnerable. As George Pettee keenly observed, victorious revolutionaries take power "not like men on horseback . . . but like fearful children, exploring an empty house, not sure that it is empty."[97]

The aftermath of the seizure of power may be understood as a critical juncture,[98] during which the behavior of the revolutionary elite can have powerful long-term consequences for the regime. Nonrevolutionary governments tend to respond pragmatically to conditions of extreme vulnerability by seeking to broaden their domestic coalitions, build investor confidence, and cultivate international legitimacy in order to attract foreign support. In postcolonial Indonesia, for example, Sukarno sought to forge a broad governing coalition that included nationalist, Marxist, and conservative religious factions.[99] Likewise, when the People's Liberation Movement won power in South Sudan in 2011, it moved to strengthen traditional chiefs and reconcile with competing groups across the country.[100]

Most revolutionary governments do the opposite. Upon seizing power, revolutionary elites launch radical policy initiatives that threaten the vital interests of powerful domestic and foreign actors and disrupt the way of life of much of society.[101] For example, the Bolsheviks abolished private property, halted all bond payments, and repudiated Russia's foreign debts, causing "shock waves" in the international financial system.[102] Similarly, Cuban revolutionaries ignored the advice of their Soviet patrons and attempted to export armed revolution throughout Latin America in the 1960s.[103] This "revolutionary messianism" placed Cuba in the crosshairs of the U.S. government, which posed a direct threat to the regime's survival.[104]

Such radical behavior cannot be understood in strictly power-maximizing terms. Initiatives such as radical land reform, large-scale

expropriation of foreign-owned companies, confrontation with neighboring or Western powers, and efforts to wipe out secular culture challenge powerful interests and disrupt the lives of millions of people. For new governments presiding over weak states, such strategies are extraordinarily risky—sometimes fatally so (e.g., Hungary, Afghanistan, Cambodia). Such risk-acceptant behavior is very often driven by ideology.[105] Revolutions "put extreme idealists . . . in positions of power they do not ordinarily have."[106] As Stephen E. Hanson has argued, strong ideological commitments lengthen actors' time horizons. Ideologues operate "secure in the 'knowledge' of long-term success" and thus "rationally forgo the benefits of short-term egoistic behavior in order to advance the cause of the ideological collective."[107] Indeed, there is evidence that revolutionary leaders such as Vladimir Lenin, Béla Kun, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Mullah Mohammed Omar, Ho Chi Minh, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and Samora Machel were unusually ideological, in that they placed considerable emphasis on utopian or eschatological visions of a new world order.[108]

COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY REACTION

Forrest D. Colburn observed that "just as Newton demonstrated that every action brings about a reaction, so every revolution evokes a counterrevolution."[109] The radical initiatives undertaken by new revolutionary governments almost invariably generate violent reactions, both at home and abroad.[110] Large-scale expropriation of private property, attacks on dominant cultural or religious institutions, and efforts to challenge the existing geopolitical order almost invariably trigger domestic counterrevolutionary movements or external military aggression, or both.[111]

Most revolutions thus spark the emergence of armed counterrevolutionary movements, often backed by foreign powers, which must be defeated if the new regime is to consolidate.[112] The Bolsheviks were thrown into a civil war against White Armies backed by British, French, Japanese, and American forces. The Castro government confronted a U.S.-backed counterrevolutionary campaign that culminated in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. In Mozambique, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique's (Frelimo) radical agrarian experiments and support for insurgents in Rhodesia led to the emergence of a large Rhodesian- and South African–backed insurgency at home.

Revolutions also provoke *external* wars, often with neighboring states whose governments perceive a threat from the revolutionary government or a window of opportunity in the wake of state collapse.[113] For example, the bloody Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) was a direct consequence of the

Iranian Revolution, as Saddam Hussein viewed the Khomeini government as a threat.[114] Vietnam's revolutionary government fought a devastating war with the United States, while the Cambodian Revolution led to a war with Vietnam. In the 1990s, Eritrea engaged in military conflict with every country with which it had a land border. Overall, a striking seventeen of our twenty revolutions were followed by a civil or external war.[115]

Postrevolutionary conflicts generate enduring existential threats, often from powerful enemies.[116] Vietnam, for example, was in a state of continuous war—with France and later the United States—for three decades. Cuba's revolutionary regime faced decades of unrelenting U.S. hostility, and its leaders maintained a "siege mentality" as late as the early 2000s.[117]

REVOLUTIONARY LEGACIES: THREE PILLARS OF DURABLE AUTHORITARIANISM

The existential threats posed by counterrevolutionary reactions sometimes prove fatal for regimes. As chapter 7 shows, for example, the Hungarian Soviet Republic collapsed after only five months at the hands of invading Allied-backed Romanian troops. Likewise, revolutionary dictatorships in Cambodia and Afghanistan were destroyed by foreign military responses to their belligerent behavior.

Where regimes survive these counterrevolutionary reactions, however, military conflict generates processes of revolutionary state-building and societal transformation that lay a foundation for durable authoritarianism. The violent conflict triggered by efforts to radically transform the existing social or geopolitical order generates a prolonged perception of extreme threat, which reinforces elite cohesion, contributes to the development of strong and loyal coercive institutions, and facilitates the destruction of alternative centers of societal power. These three legacies serve as crucial pillars of regime durability because they help to inoculate revolutionary regimes against elite defection, military coups, and mass protest—three major sources of authoritarian breakdown.

A Cohesive Ruling Elite

Counterrevolutionary conflict tends to produce a cohesive regime elite, or one in which high-level government or ruling party defection to the opposition is rare, even during crises. Revolutions enhance elite cohesion because they polarize societies, often for decades. Intense polarization

sharpens "us–them" distinctions, strengthening within-group ties and fostering perceptions of a "linked fate" among cadres.[118] Revolutionary polarization is often accompanied by an enduring perception of existential threat. Due to continuing counterrevolutionary challenges, most revolutionary regimes face persistent threats to their survival. Such existential threats tend to generate a siege mentality among the revolutionary elite, which creates powerful incentives to close ranks. With the regime's survival perceived to be at stake, elite defection—or even open dissent—is often viewed as treason. As a result, the costs of defection are high.

To be clear, the cohesion generated by revolutionary and counterrevolutionary conflict does not eliminate the factional power struggles that are endemic to all large political organizations. However, postrevolutionary conflict creates powerful obstacles to defection, especially during periods of crisis when the regime's survival is at stake. Thus, revolutionary leaders may compete for power and disagree over policy and strategy, but they almost never attack the regime itself. Due to the heightened cost of defection, elite schisms are less frequent in revolutionary regimes than in other autocracies. In Russia, China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Cuba, Albania, Mozambique, Nicaragua—and even the hyper-factionalized Islamic Republic of Iran (see chapter 6)—revolutionary autocracies suffered virtually no defections, often for decades.

The claim that revolutions generate elite cohesion may appear to fly in the face of events in Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, where revolutionary governments carried out massive purges of the ruling elite. Indeed, since the time of the Jacobin Terror, revolutions have been said to "devour their own children." However, revolutionary purges are not as common as is sometimes believed—there were no purges, for example, in Cuba, Mozambique, Nicaragua, or Vietnam. Crucially, moreover, purges should not be treated as an indicator of low cohesion. There is broad scholarly agreement that leaders in Russia, China, and Cambodia used purges primarily as means to concentrate power. In other words, Stalin's and Mao's purges were *not* responses to serious threats of defection and opposition.[119] Likewise, years after the Khmer Rouge fell from power, Cambodian foreign minister Ieng Sary acknowledged that widespread claims of elite conspiracies against Pol Pot made during his tenure were simply concocted to justify purges.[120] Where elites are cohesive, dissident officials close ranks (or at least remain silent) even under the worst of circumstances. Thus, the fact that Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot carried out massive purges *without triggering schisms* suggests a strikingly high degree of cohesion.

A cohesive elite is an important pillar of durable authoritarian rule. Internal schisms often pose a serious threat to authoritarian survival.[121] Those best positioned to remove autocrats are members of the inner circle because they have access to the coercive, administrative, patronage, and media resources needed to challenge the dictator. In autocracies facing economic or other crises, signs of regime vulnerability may induce erstwhile loyalists to abandon ship, which can trigger collapse.[122] For example, Zambia's single-party regime collapsed in 1991 after economic crisis and mounting protest triggered a wave of defections from the ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP). As one defecting UNIP member put it, "Only a stupid fly . . . follows a dead body to the grave."[123]

By contrast, revolutionary elites tend to remain loyal even during severe crises. For example, after Lenin's incapacitation in Russia, perceived threats from Western powers dissuaded Leon Trotsky and other dissident Bolsheviks from challenging Stalin or defecting at a time when such opposition might have succeeded. Instead, Trotsky, a revolutionary war hero who was widely considered Lenin's natural successor (and who personally despised Stalin), pledged loyalty to Stalin's ruling triumvirate even after he was excluded from it.[124] Although they might have used their considerable prestige to oppose Stalin, Trotsky and other dissidents were "paralyzed by fear" at the prospect of creating a rival party.[125] Similarly, Vietnam's Communist Party leadership suffered no defections during the entirety of the war against the United States,[126] and Cuba's Communist Party leadership suffered no defections despite a catastrophic economic crisis in the wake of the Soviet collapse.[127]

A Strong and Loyal Coercive Apparatus

Social revolution and its aftermath tend to produce strong and loyal coercive organizations. While the collapse and reconstruction of the state allows revolutionaries to create new army, police, and intelligence agencies that are fused with, and tightly controlled by, the ruling elite, sustained counterrevolutionary or external military threats almost invariably lead to the development of a large and effective coercive apparatus.

Political-Military Fusion. Because social revolutions are accompanied by the crippling or collapse of prerevolutionary states, revolutionary leaders must build new coercive agencies, often from scratch.[128] Indeed, in nearly all our cases, revolutionary elites built entirely new armies, police forces, and intelligence services.[129]

Revolutionary armies differ from nonrevolutionary ones in several important ways. First, they tend to be tightly fused with ruling parties,

creating what Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande call a "dual elite."[130] Revolutionary army, police, and intelligence forces are led and staffed by cadres from the liberation struggle, and military officials hold top positions in the government and the ruling party. In such cases, it "makes no sense to ask whether the dual elite functions as the agent of the party within the army or the agent of the army within the party. It is both."[131] For example, Cuba's revolutionary regime was marked by a near-total overlap between civilian and military elites.[132] Civilian control over the military was not an issue because civilian leaders "*were* the armed forces."[133] Likewise, in Vietnam, where Communist guerrillas founded the People's Army of Vietnam in the 1940s, effectively fusing party and army leaderships,[134] the military command "was nothing more than a segment of the party leadership."[135] A similar degree of party-army fusion could be observed in China, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere.

Party-army fusion enhances the authority of political leaders, many of whom led the armed struggle. Thus, in Albania, Angola, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, party leaders were guerrilla commanders during the revolutionary war. Their military achievements and demonstrated willingness to share battlefield risks earned them "martial prestige."[136]

Building new armies from scratch also allows revolutionary elites to penetrate the armed forces with political commissars and other institutions of partisan oversight and control.[137] Partisan penetration enhances the ruling elite's capacity to monitor militaries and identify potential conspirators. In most cases, such penetration is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. Partisan interference is often fiercely resisted by traditional militaries, whose leaders value their autonomy.[138] For example, Kwame Nkrumah's attempts to introduce political commissars and party cells into the Ghanaian military met strong resistance and contributed to the coup that toppled him in 1966. Such politicization is easier when ruling parties create militaries from scratch.[139] In Albania, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Rwanda, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, revolutionary leaders successfully established political commissars, party cells, and other institutional mechanisms at all levels of the armed forces to ensure ruling party control.

The fusion of revolutionary party and army structures fosters an unusual degree of military loyalty. In most nonrevolutionary autocracies, militaries retain strong corporate identities and thus view their interests as distinct from those of the government. In postcolonial Burma, for example, military leaders believed that politicians "could not be trusted" with holding the country together.[140] Likewise, the Pakistani army viewed itself

as the primary guardian of the national interest and able to run the country more efficiently than civilians.[141] In revolutionary regimes, by contrast, civilian and military elites share an identity.[142] Army commanders view themselves as partners in the revolutionary struggle and thus tend to be staunchly loyal to the revolution and its ideology.[143] Thus, in China, there was little danger of the military betraying the revolution because the military "had *become* the revolution."[144] Likewise, in Nicaragua, Sandinista military officials viewed themselves as "defenders . . . of a revolutionary political project,"[145] and in Iran, the Revolutionary Guard viewed itself as the "principal bastion and perpetuator of revolutionary purity."[146]

Party-army fusion dramatically reduces the likelihood of military coups.[147] Coups were the principal cause of regime collapse—authoritarian and democratic—during the Cold War era.[148] Militaries seized power throughout the developing world in the decades after World War II.[149] According to Naunihal Singh,[150] coups were attempted in 80 percent of sub-Saharan African states, 76 percent of Middle Eastern and North African states, 67 percent of Latin American states, and 50 percent of Asian states during the second half of the twentieth century.[151]

Yet coups are extremely rare in revolutionary regimes. Among our twenty cases, only two regimes—those in Bolivia and Guinea-Bissau—were overthrown by the military.[152] In an analysis conducted with Jean Lachapelle and Adam E. Casey, we found that revolutionary regimes are considerably less likely to suffer coup attempts than nonrevolutionary regimes.[153] Indeed, revolutionary armies have remained loyal even in circumstances that frequently trigger intervention. In China, for example, the military remained loyal to Mao during the Cultural Revolution, even though Mao encouraged violent factional conflict that brought the country to the brink of civil war. In Soviet Russia, Stalin faced no challenge from the army despite purging 90 percent of top military officials in 1937–1938. In Mozambique, the military did not attempt a coup despite a 1992 peace agreement that required Frelimo to disband the military and create a new force that integrated its rival, the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo).[154] Regimes in Cuba, Iran, and Nicaragua did not suffer coups despite severe economic crises.

In sum, party-army fusion has a powerful coup-proofing effect. Because coups are a leading source of authoritarian breakdown,[155] revolutionary state-building contributes in an important way to regime durability.

A Strong Coercive Apparatus. Social revolutions frequently increase the power and reach of the state.[156] Existential military threats compel revolutionary governments to build a vast security apparatus. Faced

with counterrevolutionary violence and, in many cases, real or threatened foreign invasion, revolutionary governments often must invest heavily in building up their armies and internal security forces.[157] In Vietnam, decades of war gave rise to one of the world's largest and most effective armies.[158] In Cuba, the threat of a U.S-backed invasion led the Castro government to transform its "ragtag army" of 5,000 soldiers into a 300,000-strong force capable of deterring the United States.[159] In Eritrea, counterrevolutionary conflict in the 1990s transformed the country from a weak state into one of the most militarized autocracies in the world— second only to North Korea.[160]

A developed coercive apparatus—especially one that is tightly wedded to the ruling elite—enhances a regime's repressive capacity. In addition to elite schisms and coups, autocrats face potential threats from below.[161] To combat such challenges, they rely on both low-intensity and high-intensity repression.[162] High-intensity repression refers to high-visibility acts that target large numbers of people, well-known individuals, or major institutions. An example is violent repression of mass demonstrations, as in Mexico City in 1968, Tiananmen Square in China in 1989, or Iran in 2019. Low-intensity repression refers to less visible, but more systematic, forms of coercion, such as surveillance, low-profile harassment or detention by security forces, and intimidation by paramilitary forces.

Revolutionary origins increase the capacity of autocrats to engage in both low- and high-intensity repression. The vast expansion of the central state apparatus, often in a context of wartime mobilization, enhanced revolutionary regimes' capacity for surveillance and other forms of low-intensity repression. The Soviet KGB stationed officials in every significant enterprise, factory, and government institution and drew on roughly 11 million informers who infiltrated virtually every apartment block in the country.[163] Vietnam's intelligence agency (Cong an) mobilized as many as a million agents,[164] which allowed it to penetrate society "down to the smallest alley."[165] With informants in workplaces and classrooms and "wardens" overseeing every neighborhood, the Vietnamese state was able to monitor every active dissident in the country.[166]

Revolutionary governments also possess an unusual capacity for high-intensity repression. Large-scale and public repression of mass protest involves considerable risk. Not only is it likely to trigger international condemnation, but it may erode the domestic legitimacy of the security forces, which can undermine internal discipline and morale.[167] Due to fear of prosecution or other forms of public retribution, both security officials and rank-and-file soldiers may resist orders to repress. For this

reason, governments are often reluctant to order high-intensity coer-
cion, and where such orders are issued, security officials often refuse to
carry them out. Indeed, numerous authoritarian regimes have collapsed
due to the government's unwillingness—or inability—to repress protest
in a consistent and sustained manner. (Twenty-first-century examples
include Serbia in 2000, Madagascar in 2002 and 2009, Georgia in 2003,
Ukraine in 2004, Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010, and Egypt and Tunisia
in 2011.)

By contrast, states that emerge from revolutionary conflict are well
equipped to crack down on protest. Years of military struggle give rise to
a generation of elites and cadres with experience in violence. Ruling elites
that have engaged in violent conflict are more likely to unite behind coer-
cive measures, and, crucially, security officials who belong to those revo-
lutionary elites are more likely to carry out controversial orders to engage
in high-intensity repression. Thus, revolutionary ties between government
and security forces facilitated the PRI government's brutal repression of
student protesters in Mexico City in 1968, the Chinese Communist govern-
ment's high-intensity crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protesters in
1989, and the Algerian military's crackdown on Islamists in the 1990s. In
Iran, the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij—organizations created by
revolutionary forces and strengthened by years of counterinsurgency and
war—consistently carried out orders to repress during the 2009 Green
Revolution protests as well as the 2019 uprisings.

The Destruction of Rival Organizations and
Independent Centers of Societal Power

Finally, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary conflict facilitates the
destruction of both existing rivals and the social institutions that could
serve as the bases for future challenges.[168] Wars allow governments to do
things ordinary dictatorships often cannot do. For one, they provide revo-
lutionary elites with both a justification and the means to destroy political
rivals. For example, Russia's civil war allowed the Bolsheviks to wipe out
other socialist parties, including the Mensheviks and the popular SRs.[169]
In Yugoslavia, the revolutionary war allowed the Partisans to destroy the
nationalist Chetniks, who had competed for control of the country. By
the war's end, almost all potential rivals to the revolutionaries had been
destroyed.[170] Likewise, the Vietnamese Communists undertook the vio-
lent destruction of rival nationalist and religious organizations during
their struggle against the French.[171] By the time the Communist Party

gained control of North Vietnam in 1954, all major challengers had been eliminated.[172]

Crucially, moreover, revolutionary and postrevolutionary wars facilitate the weakening or destruction of independent centers of societal power: institutions or social classes whose power, resources, or legitimacy can serve as a basis for opposition. These include local elites, landowning classes, preexisting armies, and traditional monarchic and religious authorities whose "symbolic power" could be used to mobilize opposition to the regime.[173] Thus, Mexico's bloody 1913–1915 civil war weakened landowners and destroyed the old army,[174] while Russia's civil war finished off the last remnants of the tsarist forces and the landowning classes. In Yugoslavia, military conflict during World War II undermined local authority structures, weakening the traditional village chiefs who had long dominated the country,[175] and in China, the revolutionary war and land reform wiped out the dense network of local gentry, foreign and domestic churches, warlords, criminal gangs, secret societies, and clan networks that had limited the reach of the prerevolutionary state.[176]

The destruction of independent power centers weakens the structural bases of future opposition. The mobilization of trade unions, religious institutions, and other civic associations undermined dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, and elsewhere during the Third Wave of democratization. Revolutionary regimes are less likely to face such societal mobilization. In the absence of independent sources of finance, infrastructure, or legitimacy, the organizational bases of opposition effectively disappear. In China, the elimination of criminal gangs and local fiefdoms—which had provided the Communist Party with safe havens during the revolutionary struggle—deprived opponents of means to resist attacks by the central state. At the start of the twenty-first century, China had a much weaker civil society than did many countries with similarly high levels of economic development. In Vietnam, the destruction of the landowning class and the weakening of the Catholic Church eliminated potential sources of opposition to communist rule.[177] By the 1960s, all independent sources of power outside the state had been crushed, leaving opponents without a mass base.[178] As we shall see in the cases of China and Iran, the destruction of alternative power centers does not inoculate regimes against large-scale protest; however, the absence of mobilizing structures makes it harder to sustain such mobilization.

In sum, we argue that in most revolutionary regimes, robust authoritarian institutions emerge out of a reactive sequence. Notwithstanding the initial weakness of many revolutionary governments, ideologically

driven revolutionary elites launch radical initiatives that challenge power-ful domestic and international interests, resulting in civil war (Angola, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Russia), external war (Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Eritrea, Iran, Vietnam), or existential military threats (Albania, Cuba). Such conflict sometimes brings early regime collapse. But where regimes survive, counterrevolutionary conflict leads to the develop-ment of a cohesive elite, a strong and loyal military, and the destruction of alternative power centers. Because elite schisms, coups, and mass protest are three of the main sources of authoritarian breakdown, revolution and its aftermath effectively inoculate regimes against three leading causes of death.

We measure the three pillars of regime durability in the following way.[179] First, a cohesive elite is one in which defection to the opposition of high-level regime officials is rarely observed, even during periods of crisis.[180] When defections occur, few regime actors join them. Although intra-elite conflict may be extensive (and even violent), losers of factional battles and other dissident elites either close ranks or remain silent—rather than work against the regime—during crises.

Second, we separate the strength and loyalty of the coercive apparatus into its two component parts. A strong coercive apparatus is one in which the security sector—including the army, the police, intelligence agencies, and other specialized internal security agencies—is sufficiently large and effective to monitor dissent and thwart protest across the national terri-tory, down to the village and neighborhood levels. A loyal coercive appa-ratus is one that consistently supports the revolutionary regime, even during periods of crises. Loyal militaries are characterized by the absence (or near-total absence) of coup attempts or military rebellions aimed at changing the regime or removing its elite.

Third, in measuring the destruction of alternative centers of societal power, we distinguish between full and partial destruction. We score as full destruction cases in which all significant societal institutions, economic actors, and organized groups are either destroyed or emasculated and rendered dependent on the state. This was the case, for example, in com-munist revolutions such as in Russia, China, Vietnam, and Cuba. We score as cases of partial destruction those in which revolutionary governments destroy or emasculate some independent centers of societal power, but one or more societal institution survives and retains the capacity to mobi-lize against the regime. Examples include mosque networks in Algeria, the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, and trade unions in Bolivia. As we shall see, this difference can be consequential. Whereas revolutionary regimes that only partially destroy independent power centers often confront higher

levels of societal contention (e.g., Bolivia in the early 1960s, Algeria in the early 1990s), in cases of full destruction, such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Vietnam, it is often extraordinarily difficult for opposition movements to establish themselves.

DIVERGENT PATHS

Although the revolutionary reactive sequence described above may be considered the ideal-typical trajectory of revolutionary regimes (figure 1.2), it is not the only one. Two other postrevolutionary paths generally lead to less durable authoritarianism. These paths are summarized in figure 1.3.

In the ideal-typical sequence, early radicalism triggers a revolutionary reactive sequence that leads to a robust authoritarian regime. However, the reactive sequence may be aborted in two ways, resulting in less stable regimes. First, early radicalism may trigger an external military reaction that brings violent defeat, thereby causing an *early death*. Nascent revolutionary regimes suffered such military defeats in four cases: Finland (1918),[181] Hungary (1919), Cambodia (1975–1979), and Afghanistan (1996–2001). In Cambodia, for example, the Khmer Rouge government recklessly provoked a war with Vietnam, which led to the regime's demise amid military defeat. In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime's refusal to break with al-Qaeda in the wake of the 2001 World Trade Center attacks led to a U.S. military intervention that ended the regime. Challenging powerful actors and states is a risky venture, and it sometimes has fatal consequences for regimes.

We have too few cases to generalize with any confidence about the conditions under which early radicalism leads to rapid regime collapse. However, such outcomes appear most likely in small, geopolitically vulnerable states. Each of the four cases of early death—Finland, Hungary, Cambodia, and Afghanistan—occurred in small states that were highly exposed to external intervention. In larger states (e.g., China, Iran, Russia), revolutionary governments are more likely to survive their early radicalism, allowing the reactive sequence we have theorized to unfold.

Second, revolutionary elites may prove *insufficiently* radical to trigger a full reactive sequence. This is the accommodationist path depicted in figure 1.3. In Algeria, Bolivia, and Guinea-Bissau, three borderline cases of revolution, ruling parties launched radical reform initiatives (if they did not, they would not be scored as revolutionary) but then scaled back or ceased many of these initiatives to avoid conflict with domestic interests or foreign powers. Because this more pragmatic approach threatened

1. Cohesive elite
2. Strong loyal army
3. Destruction of independent power centers

DURABLE AUTHORITARIANISM

Counter-revolutionary reaction

Radical path

Military defeat

EARLY DEATH

Revolutionary seizure of power

Accommodationist path

No counter-revolutionary reaction

1. Less cohesive elite
2. Weaker, less disciplined army
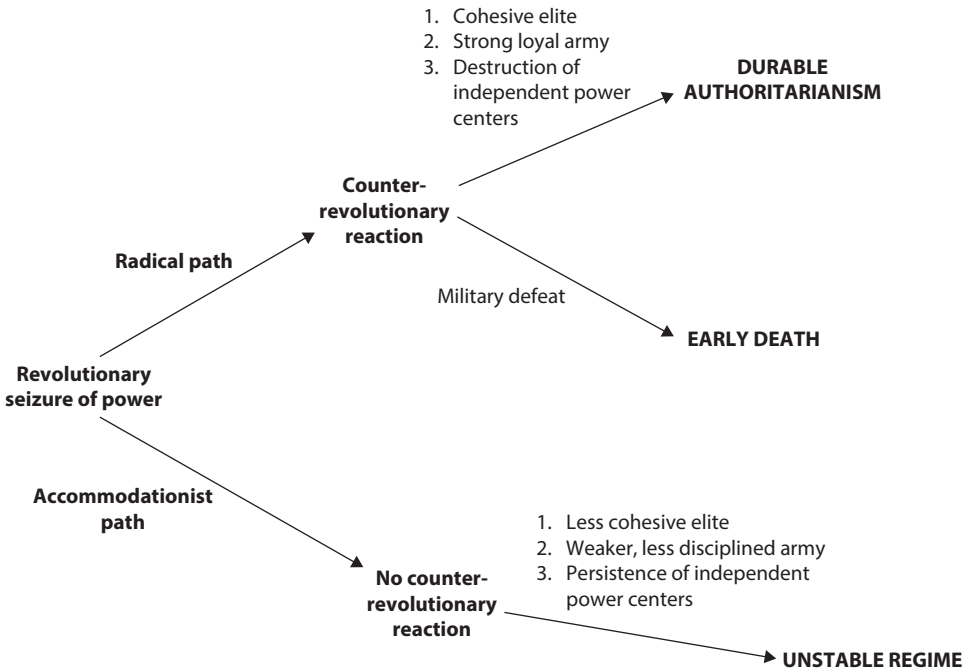3. Persistence of independent power centers

UNSTABLE REGIME

FIGURE 1.3: Three Revolutionary Regime Paths.

fewer interests at home and abroad, it provoked weaker counterrevolutionary reactions. Revolutionary governments that confiscate less property from powerful domestic and foreign actors, pursue less invasive cultural transformations, and avoid foreign policies that threaten the regional or geopolitical order are less likely to face strong counterrevolutionary resistance or external aggression. As a result, they tend to avoid the kind of destructive military conflict that threatened embryonic revolutionary regimes in Russia, Cuba, and Iran—and destroyed them in Afghanistan and Cambodia. Yet, precisely because they do not confront existential military threats, accommodationist governments build weaker regimes. They are less likely to develop cohesive elites or powerful garrison states, and they often lack the will or capacity to wipe out rivals and independent centers of power. In other words, they fail to develop the bases for long-run durability. The resulting regime is less stable because internal challenges and societal contestation are more frequent, more potent, and more likely to trigger a breakdown of the revolutionary regime.

Ultimately, then, where revolutionary elites were less extremist during the initial period, regimes avoided the counterrevolutionary reaction

that either destroyed or fortified revolutionary regimes. Accommodation-
ist governments tended to survive the early revolutionary period, but their
regimes remained prone to both internal schism and opposition mobili-
zation. In Bolivia, the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) gov-
ernment fell prey to a coup after just twelve years. In Guinea-Bissau, the
regime suffered numerous coup attempts and finally collapsed in the face
of military rebellion after twenty-five years. Although the Algerian regime
survived, it was ridden by periodic crisis, including a palace coup and a
series of debilitating schisms in the 1960s and massive protest, another
palace coup, and a descent into civil war in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

What explains the choice between radical and accommodationist strat-
egies? Leadership plays a role. Radical strategies are often undertaken by
unusually strong-willed and risk-acceptant leaders who impose them over
internal resistance and despite daunting odds. It is plausible to argue, for
example, that strong-willed leaders such as Lenin and Stalin, Mao, Cas-
tro, and Khomeini pushed through radical initiatives that their govern-
ments might not otherwise have adopted. In Iran, for example, Khomeini's
single-minded pursuit of an Islamic republic was critical to its founding,
as the strategy was fiercely resisted by many of his revolutionary allies.[182]
Likewise, the Vietnamese Communists' costly pursuit of revolution in
South Vietnam—which provoked a massive U.S. military intervention—
was driven by General Secretary Le Duan, whose "dogged persistence"
enabled the "go for broke" strategy to prevail over the more cautious "North
first" strategy advocated by other party leaders.[183] Finally, Castro's volun-
tarism and "revolutionary messianism"[184] was likely decisive in steering
Cuba's revolutionary government toward an "unequivocal, unwavering,
and reckless" strategy of confrontation with the United States.[185] It is also
plausible that different leaders in accommodationist cases might have
pursued more radical strategies. For example, Guinea-Bissau's founding
president, Luis Cabral, was more moderate than his Lusophone counter-
parts in Angola and Mozambique, even though the Party for African Inde-
pendence in Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) was in a stronger military
position than the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)
in Angola or Frelimo in Mozambique.[186]

Beyond leadership, two factors appear consequential in shaping the
choice between radicalism and accommodation. The first is ideology.
Where revolutionary elites share a commitment to a well-defined revolu-
tionary ideology prior to the seizure of power,[187] as was the case with the
Bolsheviks in Russia, the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian Commu-
nists, and Shiite leaders in Iran, they are more likely to adopt radical or

risk-accepting strategies.[188] Shared ideological commitments—whether to Marxism, anti-imperialism, or religious fundamentalism—distort leaders' understanding of the world and induce the belief (frequently unwarranted) that radical strategies either are inevitable or will succeed in the end.[189]

Where revolutionary leaders lack a shared ideology, as in Algeria, Bolivia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mexico, pragmatic strategies are more likely to prevail. In such cases, pressure from below, in the form of worker or peasant mobilization, may lead nonideological revolutionaries to adopt radical strategies. This occurred in the aftermath of the Bolivian Revolution and at critical moments in revolutionary Mexico. However, whereas ideologically committed leaders in Russia, China, Vietnam, and Iran sustained radical strategies, often at great cost, pragmatists in Bolivia and Mexico abandoned them as soon as it was politically expedient to do so.

Second, foreign support facilitates the introduction of radical measures. Superpower patronage expands revolutionary governments' room to maneuver, giving the revolutionary elite greater confidence that they will be bailed out if their radical policies fail—or protected if their behavior triggers conflict. Cuba's radical foreign policy, for example, was made possible by Soviet support.[190] In Bolivia, by contrast, the absence of superpower support left the MNR government dependent on the United States, which encouraged accommodation.[191]

In sum, durable revolutionary regimes emerge out of a reactive sequence. Most of them are born weak. Revolutionary elites that do not build powerful party-armies and wipe out rivals during protracted guerrilla struggles (as in China and Vietnam) must do so after they seize power. Such postrevolutionary state- and party-building generally occurs only in response to an existential military threat. Radical measures undertaken by revolutionary governments, which create powerful domestic and external enemies, tend to generate such threats. These counterrevolutionary conflicts sometimes prove fatal, and they are sometimes insufficient to trigger a full-blown reactive sequence. But where revolutionary governments *survive* violent counterrevolutionary conflicts, as occurred in two-thirds of our cases, rapid state- and party-building and the destruction of independent power centers lay a solid foundation for durable authoritarianism.

Moderate strategies undertaken by revolutionaries thus have a paradoxical effect. Measures aimed at accommodating powerful domestic and international actors may help ensure regime survival in the short term, but they do little to inoculate the revolution against standard threats (elite schisms, coups) that imperil most authoritarian regimes.

Of course, social revolution is hardly the only source of robust authoritarian institutions. Scholars have identified several other phenomena that generate one or more of the pillars of durable authoritarianism described in this chapter. For example, as research by Dan Slater and others has shown, violent *counterrevolutionary* conflict may also enhance elite cohesion, strengthen ruling parties, and encourage the development of a powerful coercive apparatus.[192] Likewise, *political* revolution, in which successful insurgents build new armies but do not engage in radical social transformation, may give rise to relatively cohesive ruling parties and loyal militaries.[193] Finally, large-scale agrarian reform weakens a powerful alternative power center by destroying traditional landowning classes.[194] Yet, whereas counterrevolution, political revolution, and land reform strengthen one or two pillars of durable authoritarianism, social revolution strengthens *all three* of them. In other words, the revolutionary reactive sequence is not a unique source of authoritarian durability, but it is an especially potent one because it helps inoculate autocrats against *three* principal sources of regime breakdown: elite schism, coups, and societal mobilization.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Regime trajectories are powerfully shaped by the international environment.[195] The geopolitics of the Cold War—and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global superpower—weighed heavily on twentieth-century regime outcomes,[196] particularly those of revolutionary regimes. The Soviet Union inspired revolutionary movements across the globe, provided a model (Leninism) for organizing revolutionary regimes, and eventually became an important source of military and economic assistance for both aspiring revolutionary movements and existing revolutionary regimes. Either directly or through allies, the Soviets contributed to the success of revolutionary movements in Angola, Cambodia, China, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. Soviet bloc assistance also helped to shore up revolutionary regimes in Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, and Vietnam,[197] and in some cases, such as Cuba, it likely encouraged their radicalization. At the same time, Cold War polarization intensified the domestic and international reaction to revolutionary regimes,[198] which increased both the likelihood and the intensity of counterrevolutionary conflict. The heightened stakes and threat created by Cold War geopolitical competition appears to have strengthened regimes in Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, and Vietnam by enhancing elite cohesion. By contrast, regimes that were

born after the Cold War, such as those in Eritrea and Rwanda, faced less polarized international environments and weaker external threats, which appears to have resulted in less cohesive elites.

Ultimately, however, the international environment is a secondary factor shaping revolutionary regime trajectories. In nine of our cases, including two of the most durable, Mexico and Russia, revolutionary regimes emerged either before or after the Cold War.[199] Four other revolutions (in Algeria, Bolivia, Cuba, and Iran) occurred during the Cold War but without Communist bloc assistance. Moreover, it is worth noting that among our revolutionary cases, the four leading beneficiaries of Soviet assistance (Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, and Vietnam) all survived for more than three decades after the Soviet collapse. Finally, revolutionary elites in post–Cold War Eritrea and Rwanda may be less cohesive than many of their Cold War counterparts, but as we show in the book's conclusion, reactive sequences in both countries nevertheless gave rise to durable autocracies. Robust revolutionary regimes, then, are not simply an artifact of the Cold War.

THE DURATION OF REVOLUTIONARY LEGACIES

Revolutionary legacies are enduring but not permanent. The pillars of authoritarianism degrade over time, albeit slowly and incompletely, eventually leaving regimes more vulnerable to breakdown. This process of decay was most evident in the cases of Mexico and the Soviet Union, the earliest and longest-lived regimes covered in this book.

The bases of revolutionary regime durability erode at different speeds and to varying degrees. Elite cohesion appears to degrade most rapidly. The siege mentality characteristic of most revolutionary regime elites tends to diminish as domestic and external threats subside. The process varies across cases. Where external threats persist for decades, as in Cuba, Iran, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam, cohesion erodes more slowly. Elite cohesion also weakens with generational change. The founding generation of revolutionary leaders tends to be more ideologically committed and wedded to a siege mentality, and the prestige of founding leaders such as Stalin, Mao, Josip Broz Tito, Castro, and Khomeini can have a powerful unifying effect even after the counterrevolutionary threat has disappeared. For example, Chinese veterans of the Long March in the 1930s (the "elders") almost universally viewed the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in polarized, zero-sum terms and played a critical role in unifying the party leadership behind a repressive response.[200] The departure of this founding generation can thus be expected to yield a less cohesive elite.

As existential threats recede and the founding generation disappears, the nonmaterial bases of revolutionary elite cohesion weaken. Ambition and patronage replace ideology and perceived threat as the primary glue binding together regime elites,[201] gradually transforming revolutionary parties into the more run-of-the-mill ruling party machines theorized in the literature on parties and authoritarianism.[202] For example, ruling parties appear to grow more vulnerable to elite defection during crises,[203] which increases the importance of economic growth as a source of authoritarian stability.[204]

Even when the original bases of elite cohesion disappear, however, most revolutionary regimes continue to enjoy many of the advantages of institutionalized ruling parties. In the Soviet Union, China, Mexico, Vietnam, and Mozambique, for example, established formal and informal institutions governing collective decision-making, leadership selection, and succession helped regulate intraparty conflict and limit elite defection after the revolutionary generation had passed from the scene. In addition, decades of dominance often reinforce elite perceptions of ruling party hegemony, thereby discouraging defection.[205]

The coercive pillars of revolutionary regime durability appear to degrade more slowly and unevenly. For example, the size and effectiveness of the coercive apparatus appears largely unaffected by generational change. This is certainly the case in China, where the Communist regime not only retained its capacity to monitor and control dissent in the early twentieth century but in many respects—most notably, surveillance capacity—enhanced it.[206] Regimes in Vietnam and Cuba similarly retained vast repressive infrastructures—with a demonstrated capacity for low-intensity coercion—into the twenty-first century.

Institutionalized party-army linkages are also slow to change. Decades of party-army fusion help revolutionary regimes steer clear of self-reinforcing coup traps, in which each coup reinforces patterns of military intervention, thereby increasing the likelihood of future coups.[207] Most revolutionary regimes establish institutionalized patterns of civilian control that endure long after party-army fusion erodes and the armed forces professionalize.[208] Likewise, party penetration of the armed forces often persists, providing enduring mechanisms for political surveillance that reinforces political control. As a result, even after the revolutionary generation passed from the scene in Mexico, the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and Cuba, security forces remained strikingly subordinate to civilian authorities. Although many of the original sources of military loyalty, such as existential threat, overlapping leaderships, and the founding generation's "martial prestige,"[209] weaken or disappear

over time, we observe little evidence of military disloyalty in aging revolutionary regimes.

One area in which revolutionary coercive capacity appears to erode over time is that of high-intensity coercion. With the passing of the revolutionary generation, the regime's capacity for high-intensity repression—such as the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico, the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in China, the 1992 anti-Islamist repression in Algeria, and the quelling of the 2009 Green Revolution protests in Iran—almost certainly diminishes. Whereas military officers from the founding generation tend to be ideologically committed, experienced with violence, and especially prestigious among rank-and-file soldiers, succeeding generations, which are made up of more ordinary professional soldiers with more limited revolutionary commitments, wartime experience, and prestige, may lack the confidence or "stomach" to fire on crowds or engage in other high-profile acts of repression. Such a generational change was evident, for example, in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and the 1970s. According to an unpublished study by Liudmilla Alexeyeva and Valery Chalidze,[210] the use of high-intensity coercion against protests declined dramatically in the mid-1960s—after the founding generation of Soviet leaders had died off.[211] Partly as a result, Soviet leaders had difficulty motivating the armed services to crack down on protests in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The erosion of the capacity for high-intensity coercion may thus leave aging revolutionary regimes more vulnerable to large-scale opposition protest.

Finally, the state-society power asymmetries created by the destruction of independent power centers also degrade slowly, if at all. For example, in Mexico, a middle-income country in a region that witnessed the emergence of powerful democracy movements in the late 1970s and the 1980s, organized opposition remained weak as late as the 1990s.[212] In early twenty-first-century Cuba and Vietnam, opposition groups rarely mobilized more than a few dozen followers and were largely confined to the internet.[213] Eventually, independent social, economic, or cultural actors may (re)emerge (e.g., business associations in northern Mexico, nationalist organizations in Yugoslavia, the Church in Mexico and Yugoslavia). However, the speed and extent of this emergence varies. In wealthier countries with more open economies, such as late twentieth-century Mexico and Yugoslavia, the emergence of independent associations is likely to be more rapid. However, in countries with more extensive state controls (e.g., China, Vietnam), societal organizations have remained weak after decades of rapid economic development and show no signs of strengthening.

In sum, the pillars of revolutionary regime durability degrade over time, but they do so slowly and unevenly. Even though the initial sources of durability—an ideologically committed and prestigious founding elite facing an existential military threat—eventually disappear, undermining the bases of elite cohesion and high-intensity coercive capacity, other revolutionary legacies, such as vast coercive structures and extreme state-society power asymmetries, tend to endure long after counterrevolutionary threats fade and founding generations exit the stage.

Alternative Explanations

In the statistical analysis summarized above (and detailed in appendix I), we showed that revolutionary origins are strongly associated with authoritarian durability, even when we control for various other factors that have been shown to affect regime stability, such as economic performance, oil, and type of authoritarian regime.[214]

As in any observational study, we cannot know with certainty that we have controlled for all potential confounding explanations. It could be the case, for example, that revolutionary origins are endogenous to some other factor that is causing both social revolution and subsequent regime durability. Perhaps regime durability is a function not of revolutionary origins but rather of some antecedent condition that facilitates both revolution and robust authoritarian rule.

There are sound reasons, however, for treating social revolution as exogenous to authoritarian survival. Above all, the factors that are widely viewed as the principal causes of social revolution, namely, weak or collapsing states, defeat in war, and neopatrimonial or sultanistic rule, which hollows out state institutions,[215] are all conditions that undermine, rather than enhance, authoritarian durability. Social revolutions are always accompanied by a weakening or collapse of the state.[216] It is virtually impossible for revolutionary outsiders to seize power and initiate a transformation of the social order unless the armed forces of the old regime have been fundamentally weakened.[217] As Jack Goldstone notes,[218] "It is now a truism, but worth restating, that fiscally and militarily sound states that enjoy the support of united elites are largely invulnerable to revolution from below."

Indeed, nearly all the regimes examined in this book emerged out of weak or collapsed states. In Algeria, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Vietnam, colonial powers had undermined indigenous authority structures and failed to build (or, in the case of Algeria, sustain) an effective central state. In Afghanistan, Albania, Cambodia, China, Finland, Hungary,