

Autocracies and the fall of democratic regimes

Comparative Perspectives on Democracy and Development

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Autocratic regimes

- non-democratic (autocratic) regime refers to all regimes that are not fully democratic
- a very heterogeneous category; censorship and repressions are probably the only shared characteristics
- they differ in the characteristics of their rulers, in the legitimacy they claim, and in the means with which they control power

Totalitarian vs. authoritarian regimes

- developer by Juan J. Linz (1970)
- limited political pluralism
- lack of a well-developed ideology justifying the regime
- the absence of political mobilization
- political leadership (a small group or a single leader) whose activities are by and large predictable (limited, not arbitrary or unrestrained)

Posttotalitarian and sultanistic regimes

- Linz and Stepan (1996) identified a weakened **post-totalitarian** regime unable to meet its own political goals
- in addition, they singled out absolutist personal dictatorships they call **sultanistic** regimes
- lack of ideological commitment of totalitarian leaders
- “fear and greed” as the main motivations of their supporters

Types of Authoritarian Regimes

- **A) Absolute (ruling) monarchies**
- Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Brunei
- Persistence?
- Dynasties, rentier states (oil), colonial legacy
- **B) Personal dictators and strong-man rulers**
- Suharto in Indonesia, Pinochet in Chile, Kim Chong Un in N Korea
- Populist election, military coups, one party states

Types of Authoritarian Regimes

- **C) Military rule**
- Collective, open or disguised, sustained or intermittent
- Burma, Thailand
- **D) Theocracies**
- Iran's Council of Guardians

Why authoritarian regimes persist

- authoritarian regimes of the Middle East – unfavorable ('Islamic') political culture
- geographical isolation from centers of democracy (few countries border directly on successful models of democratic rule)
- The Middle East and North Africa are not unique in their poor endowment with the prerequisites of democracy
- Other regions similarly deprived have managed to make the transition

Why authoritarian regimes persist

- Bellin: **Robustness** of the **coercive apparatus** is the key variable; depends on
- **fiscal health**: The security establishment is most likely to give up when its financial foundation is seriously compromised
- **international support** networks
- robustness inversely related to its level of **institutionalization**
- the degree to which it faces a high level of **popular mobilization**

How Autocracies Work

- Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018):
- analyze 280 autocratic regimes that took power between 1945 and 2010
- 45% of authoritarian regimes in this period were the result of military coups
- militaries and political parties are the groups most likely to seize power

How Autocracies Work

- coups rarely defend the interests of economic elites
- many coups grow out of the grievances of military officers, typically those who were excluded from promotion (e.g. because of their ethnicity)
- once in power, autocrats must collaborate with subordinates to create a political base, but they also want to keep their crews loyal

The dictator's dilemma

- they need to give their supporters enough benefits to secure their loyalty
- but not so many that any one supporter can become a viable challenger
- to deliver a continuous stream of benefits, as promises alone cannot suffice
- autocrats survive by delegating authority and patronage or by redistributing land and other resources

The role of organizations

- party-based autocracies: Parties mobilize society and provide citizens with benefits,
- i.e. create the kind of dependence that encourages popular support and complicity
- autocracies run through hegemonic political parties last twice as long as those that do not

Elections and parliaments

- fraudulent elections and weak legislatures are useful to autocrats:
- they offer a way for dictators to monitor their own regimes
- local elections reveal the competence of lower party officials (low turnout=low ability)
- National elections signal the government's strength to potential challengers
- Parliaments: to divide the opposition by strategically distributing material benefits

New forms of autocracy

- Geddes et al overlook hybrid regimes in which the playing field is slanted toward incumbents even if the outcome of any particular election is not predetermined
- in the last two decades some 2/3 of autocratic regimes organize multiparty elections
- absolute autocracies vs. electoral autocracies: elections are held but they do not meet international standards for multiparty competition

New forms of autocracy

- manipulation of key political institutions :
- **parliaments:** curbed powers, manipulated composition, fragmentation
- **elections:** limits on free elections: many opposition candidates not eligible to run, the election results are manipulated, limits on opposition campaigns etc.
- **media:** state monopoly on print capacities in the country, state-sponsored ads, faked tax problems etc.

New forms of autocracy

- **dilemmas for the opposition:** do they take part in elections and thus legitimate the regime, or do they boycott them and thus lose any chance to influence it?
- **risks for the regime:** it is impossible to allow autonomous institutions AND completely exclude the possibility of the opposition to take over

Autocracies and Civil Wars

- Fjelde (2010) argues that to avoid rebellion aimed at overthrowing the regime, autocrats have two instruments:
- **coercion**, that is, to marginalize or eliminate political opponents by force, and
- **co-optation**, i.e., to transform opponents into supporters through offers of spoils such as power positions and rents
- the capacity for both efficient coercion and co-optation is conditioned by the regime's institutional infrastructure:
- Authoritarian regimes exhibit predictable differences in their ability to avoid organized violent challenges to their authority

Autocracies and Civil Wars

- dictators who govern through political parties are more able to forcefully control and buy off opposition than dictators who either rely on the military to stay in power, or who coordinate their rule through the royal family
- military regimes and multi-party electoral autocracies run a higher risk of conflict than single-party authoritarian regimes.
- This is because military regimes lack the institutional base for co-opting political opposition and retaining the support of critical backers within the non-democratic polity

Sanctions, Autocratic Regimes, and Conflict

- economic sanctions destabilize personalist dictatorships but have little influence on the durability of party-based regimes and military juntas
- If the power is concentrated in the hands of the individual leader, it not only shapes how the dictator behaves but also increases the chances he faces a particularly nasty fate when he exits from power
- personal dictators rarely concede to sanctions: their under-institutionalized rule prevents them from controlling the transition via negotiated exit

Sanctions, Autocratic Regimes, and Conflict

- personal rulers cannot credibly commit to institutional transformations offering power sharing to the opponents
- regimes sometimes respond to sanctions by increasing political repression, particularly when sanctions fuel popular dissent
- sanctions are most strongly associated with increased repression in personalist dictatorships and less so in other autocracies
- sanctions are economically costly for the regime but are only likely to produce political change when these economic costs translate into political costs for the regime

Sanctions: Weakening Elite Cohesion

- sanctions may weaken elite cohesion, lead to defections from the ruling coalition – doubts about stability and future private profits
- sanctions thus signal international disapproval and reduce the resources available for state patronage
- for example, sanctions against Trujillo's regime in the Dominican Republic and Idi Amin's regime in Uganda decreased the sugar and coffee exports upon which the respective regimes relied, causing elite defection among both civilian and military elites

Sanctions: Empowering the Opponents

- sanctions can increase the capacities and resolve of groups outside the regime coalition (e.g. South Africa under the apartheid regime)
- opposition groups may be emboldened by sanctions, particularly if sanction-induced economic pain breeds popular dissent, increasing the likelihood of uprisings and civil wars
- However, one can also find mechanisms through which sanctions may stabilize the regimes they want to undermine

Sanctions: The Reversed Effects

- 1. economic pressure may reduce material resources for opposition groups while simultaneously increasing resources for the regime
- sanctions targeting Milošević's regime in Serbia strengthened the regime by giving him more control over the economy.
- 2. sanctions might reduce conflict risk by increasing popular support for the regime
- if elites successfully shift blame for economic hardships to "the sender"
- by mobilizing nationalistic sentiments in response to sanctions, the regimes may create a "rally-around-the-flag effect"

Comparing Non-Democracies' Socioeconomic Performance

- Miller (2015) tested and developed this argument and found out that the presence and history of multiparty autocratic elections predict significantly better outcomes on health, education, gender equality, and basic freedoms relative to non-electoral autocracy
- electoral authoritarian regimes are more motivated than closed autocracies to respond to mass preferences.
- This follows from mechanisms commonly associated with democracy, but which also apply to electoral autocracies

Comparing Non-Democracies' Socioeconomic Performance

- 1. electoral pressure. autocratic elections transform into powerful sources of popular pressure
- Despite being manipulated, many of these elections are competitive and force regimes to respond to mass demands
- 2. political openness: another channel for popular pressure
- Protests, strikes, and civil society movements motivate governments by providing information on policy demands and threatening to develop into electoral or violent challenges if left unaddressed

Comparing Non-Democracies' Socioeconomic Performance

- 3. government capacity:
- Even when manipulated, institutions contribute to bureaucratic development, specialization, and information-sharing, promoting governmental effectiveness

Consolidation and deconsolidation of democracies

- is democracy safe once democratic consolidation is achieved?
- YES: Huntington: the test two government replacements
- YES: Linz & Stepan: attitudinal, constitutional and behavioral dimension of regime consolidation
- few cases of deconsolidation
- Freedom House democracy score decreases because of hybrid regimes
- do attitudinal changes lead to institutional changes?

Democratic decay

- Today, in established democracies across the world, the slow but steady undermining of norms and institutions poses a greater threat than sudden coups
- a wide range of actors can undermine democracy gradually under the cover of law
- would-be dictators go after the courts, intimidate the press, hamper civil society, and use parliamentary majorities to push through new laws and constitutions

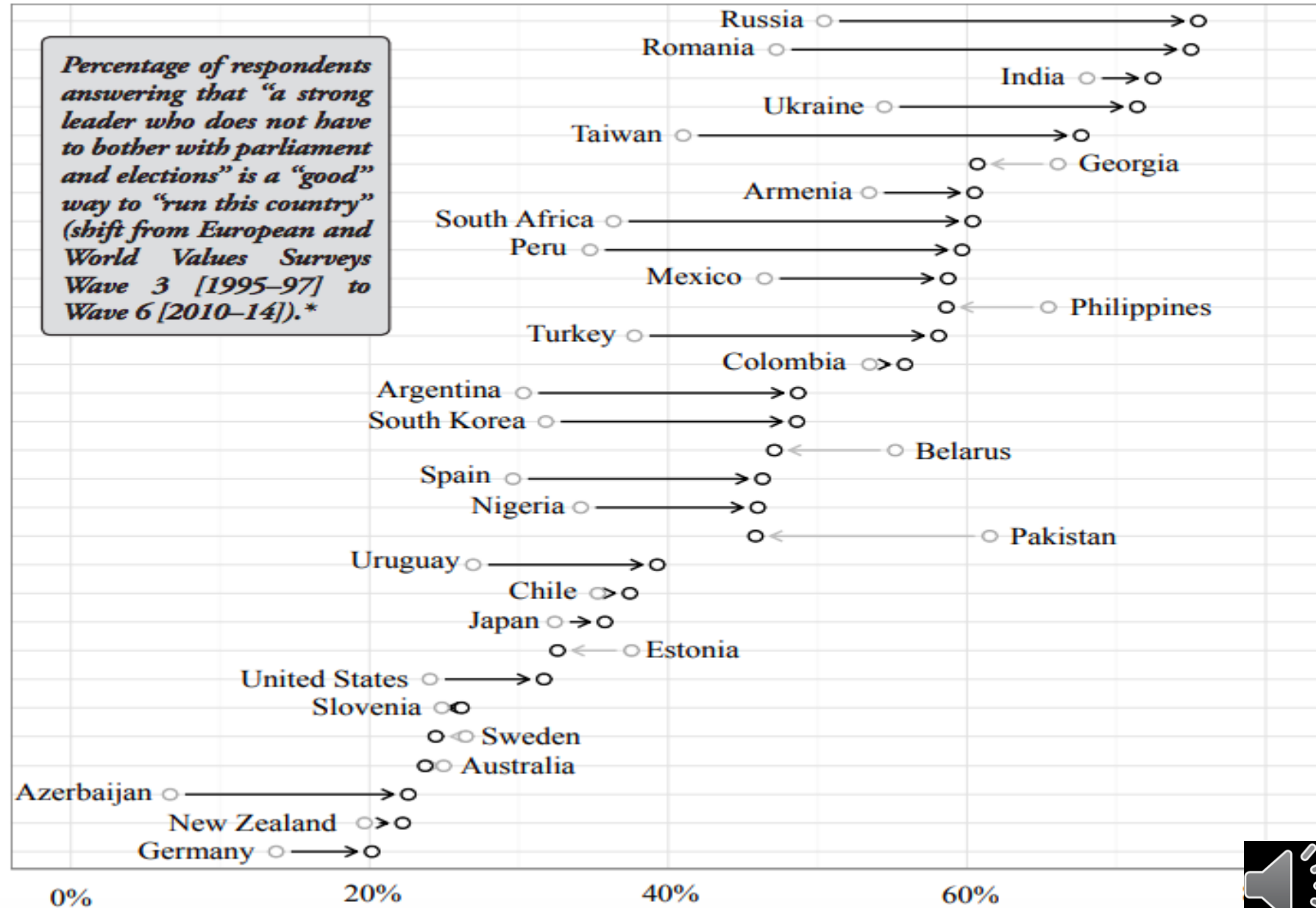
Paths to democratic breakdown

- inequality is a significant predictor of reversions to authoritarian rule
- however, there is few cases where we see a significant presence of parties, interest groups, or social movements representing the poor that could serve as the basis for distributive conflict that would in turn trigger elite intervention

Paths to democratic breakdown

- rather, conflicts within the political elite—between ins and outs—were more likely to challenge democratic rule
- the military often played a pivotal role and could often be seen as an agent of either elites (elite-reaction reversions) or excluded social forces (populist reversions)
- in many of the other cases, the military entered politics largely on its own behalf

FIGURE 2—GLOBAL RISE IN SHARE OF CITIZENS WISHING FOR A STRONG LEADER “WHO DOES NOT HAVE TO BOTHER WITH ELECTIONS”



Source: European and World Values Surveys.

