Making Career in Dictatorship: The Secret Logic Behind Coups and Repression

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Making a career is damn hard. To get ahead, you must constantly deliver and assert yourself. In the modern business world, expectations toward employees are high, and competition is fierce. Lifelong learning, extra shifts, tight deadlines, flexible work locations, and fixed-term contracts are the rule rather than the exception. Those who fail to meet these expectations risk being stuck or fired. Psychological stress and career pressures peak in economic turmoil when fears of job loss are compounded with additional demands from bosses and bad-tempered co-workers. Nobody wants to fall victim to looming austerity measures, and saving one's neck becomes paramount. In such situations, we may catch ourselves raising our hand and volunteering for an unpleasant task we would otherwise never have signed up for. But even in less dramatic situations, unfulfilled career aspirations can wear us out and feed audacious thoughts. After a hard day at work, feeling misjudged, unfairly criticized, and once again unappreciated, some of us may have also imagined what it would be like to just sack the big bosses and take charge ourselves.

Now let us imagine for a moment that your boss is not a pesky corporate manager but a brutal dictator running the country.[1] And you are not an employee in some management consultancy or insurance company but a mid-ranking officer in the country's security apparatus. Also imagine that your boss—the dictator—is an erratic and unforgiving control freak with almost unlimited power, who is distrustful of everyone around him, and who would not hesitate to destroy your life if you get in his way. Admittedly, regime agents probably do not constantly think about this danger in their day-to-day work, since every dictator should

[1] In line with contemporary research, we use the labels autocrat and dictator as well as the terms autocracy, authoritarian regime, and dictatorship interchangeably. Research on autocracies and dictatorships highlights the importance of identifying institutional commonalities and general mechanisms that operate across non-democracies (e.g., Gandhi 2008; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018; Svolik 2012). We follow the common practice of relying on a negative, minimalist definition demarcating from democracies all those regimes whose de-facto holder of executive power has assumed office through means other than free and fair elections or is no longer accountable to such elections (e.g., Frantz 2018).

have a vested interest in accommodating their guardians.[2] And yet it remains the case that officials in dictatorships are at risk of being punished, purged, or executed. They thus have to somehow adapt to these adverse conditions. But how? If you stand out as too ambitious and perhaps too clever, there is a risk that your boss will feel threatened and remove you. If, on the other hand, you come across as a fool, you are nothing but a liability and expendable.

For the vast majority, the dominant strategy likely is to keep their heads down and not stand out, either positively or negatively. That is, the goal is to not attract too much attention. But what do people do when this strategy is no longer feasible? What if they feel that their careers are in serious limbo? What do those do who made a mistake, have the wrong credentials, or simply were at the wrong place at the wrong time, and now stand with their backs against the wall?

The core argument of this book is that individuals who have come under severe career pressure are more likely than their peers to try to salvage their careers by either going all-in for the regime or by using all their power against it. In the first case, disadvantaged officials with little chance of making a successful career within the security apparatus volunteer even for the most burdensome and psychologically straining tasks the regime has to offer in the hopes that their devotion will send a signal of extreme loyalty and thus convince superiors of their value. We call this the *detouring* strategy. Regime agents go the extra mile and bear the psychological costs of the regime's most dirty work in order to avoid getting sacked. In the second case, pressured individuals choose the opposite route by taking matters into their own hands and attempting to remove the dictator in a coup. We call this the *forcing* strategy. Regime agents with no professional future in their organization decide to conquer the system in order to reshuffle the deck in their favor. This book explains who comes under career pressure for what reasons in which organizations, how dictators can manipulate and exploit career pressure, and under what conditions people are more likely to engage in extreme loyalty or extreme disloyalty—this is, when they decide to detour or to force their way up.

At this point, it should be noted that we neither intend to shift blame away from political leaders nor do we want to exculpate the individual officials with reference to systemic injustices or career setbacks. Instead, we aim to systematically show how the combination of micro-motives and institutional structures may produce a wide range of notorious macro-phenomena commonly associated with authoritarian regimes, including the expansion of the security sector, the multiplication of security agencies, mass surveillance, purges, torture, (genocidal) repression, coups, and even the initiation of international conflict.

[2]Most dictators seek to buy the loyalty of their supporters and agents by providing them with all sorts of perks and exclusive goods (e.g., Bueno De Mesquita et al. 2005; Gregory 2009; Mcmillan and Zoido 2004; Truex 2014; Sassoon 2012; Svolik 2012).

This chapter offers a first overview of what is known about authoritarian politics and where the book extends this knowledge. We believe that to understand the inner workings of dictatorial regimes, we must take a closer look at the key institution and actors in authoritarian power politics: the security apparatus and the officials who work in it. Security forces play a central role in the making and breaking of autocratic regimes by implementing even the most brutal political agenda or by overthrowing those in power. To make sense of such extreme forms of regime loyalty and disloyalty, we dissect the anatomy of authoritarian security organizations and scrutinize the resulting career incentives for individual bureaucrats. Our theory not only explains why officers engage in extreme loyalty or disloyalty but also which officers are most likely to commit atrocities for the regime or actively participate in coup attempts against it. This book thus sheds important light on the fundamental puzzle of why people with arms submit to those without, and under what circumstances armed bureaucrats turn against the very governments they have sworn to defend (Przeworski 2016).

1.1 Why Study the Dictator's Security Apparatus

At the time of writing, over two-thirds of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule, with the third wave of autocratization in full swing (Boese et al. 2022; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). For most citizens, this development means considerable grievances and suffering. Autocracies are notorious for systematic violations of civil liberties and human rights, as well as an exceptional frequency of irregular and disruptive regime transitions (e.g., Svolik 2012; Valentino 2004; Wintrobe 2000). The fundamental criterion to distinguish authoritarian or dictatorial regimes from democratic forms of governance is the absence of *politically meaningful* elections (Frantz 2018; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018). To be clear, in most dictatorships, there are also elections and referendums, but these are not meant to be lost (Hyde and Marinov 2012). Rather, they serve to give the regime a semblance of popular legitimacy or signal conformance with international norms (Brancati 2014; Gandhi 2008; Gerschewski 2013; Magaloni 2008). Voting in autocracies is neither free nor fair nor competitive. Citizens are therefore unable to vote their government out of office or hold it accountable for its wrongdoings.

The lack of electoral accountability has far-reaching consequences for the politics of authoritarian regimes. Compared to democratic governments that seek re-election, autocrats are far less tied to the wants and needs of their citizens (Bueno De Mesquita et al. 2005). In reality, this often means that autocratic leaders invest a smaller proportion of government revenues in public goods while setting aside more money for themselves. Accordingly, fewer funds are available for core state tasks, including the provision of public education, health, and security. Such extractive institutions at the cost of ordinary citizens increases grievances among the wider population (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). In the absence of institutionalized

means for political change and the orderly transfer of power, economic and social grievances do not fuel the risk of a loss of power at the ballot box, but through revolts, uprisings, and revolutions (e.g., Gurr 1970; Muller 1985).[3]

To stay in power without being forced to make costly concessions to the population, most authoritarian leaders rely on repression (e.g., Carey 2010; Davenport 2007; Escribà-Folch 2013). As Svolik (2012, 55) puts it: "violence is the ever-present, ultimate arbiter" of autocratic politics. However, dictators do not carry out violence themselves: They rarely swing the club against protesters in the streets, inflict electric shocks against critical journalists in dark torture chambers, or pull the trigger against tied and lined up dissidents. Instead, autocrats depend on security forces that carry out repression *for them*. To crush anti-regime protests, authoritarian leaders deploy heavy armoured police or (para)military units (e.g., Arriola 2013; Barany 2016; Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2021). To detect dissidents and destroy subversive networks, they field powerful secret police organizations that spy, blackmail, and torture (e.g., Hager and Krakowski 2022; Nalepa and Pop-Eleches 2022; Scharpf and Gläßel 2020; Sullivan 2016). And when revolutionaries slip through the surveillance net or even manage to take to the streets, many autocrats swiftly order their military to eliminate resistance with full force (e.g., Lyall and Wilson 2009; Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay 2004; Zhukov 2007). Together, this makes the security apparatus the central institution responsible for protecting the regime. The compliance of those who serve within the apparatus is the sine qua non condition for the (political) survival of any authoritarian regime or leader.

However, the security apparatus not only presents the regime's single most important guardian. It also poses by far the greatest threat to the rule of dictators (Svolik 2012). Historically, authoritarian leaders have been twice more likely to fall at the hands of their own lieutenants than at the hands of revolutionary masses (Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018).[4] Overthrowing governments requires both willingness and ability, which provides the military and its officers with unmatched capacity to successfully oust political leaders (McMahon and Slantchev 2015; Paine 2022; Powell 2012).[5] Armed with the necessary

[3]Of course, grievances do not automatically translate into mass mobilization (e.g., Opp 1989; Shadmehr 2014; Wood 2009). Among other factors, uprisings hinge on collective action (e.g., Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Lichbach 1998; Olson 1971), opportunity structures (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2004; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1998), resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978; Weinstein 2007), as well as coordination and information (e.g., Pierskalla and Hollenbach 2013; Shadmehr and Bernhardt 2011; Weidmann and Rød 1989).

[4]According to Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2018, 179), coups have accounted for 35% of authoritarian regime collapses since 1945, while mass popular uprisings have only accounted for 17%.

[5]There exists a broad scholarly consensus that the likelihood of coup attempts increases together with the military's disposition for a takeover and their ability to pull it off (e.g., Feaver 1999; Finer 1988; Johnson and Thyne 2018; Powell 2012). Disposition refers to the military's expectation of how much a successful coup would improve its situation compared to the status quo (Powell 2012, 1021-2). The more the military or individual factions feel aggrieved by the government, the higher the motivation to plot against it (Finer 1988; Huntington 1985; Thompson 1973). Historically, various sorts of grievances have been proposed as coup motives, including private political beliefs and organizational interests (Nordlinger 1977, 65). At the center of military corporate interests is the survival and prosperity of the organization, i.e., the military's

firepower and trained personnel, military forces combine the most important capabilities to seize the presidential palace and take control of media stations and civil administration (Singh 2014). At the same time, the combination of extractive institutions and the high concentration of power in the hands of dictators makes it excessively tempting for potential challengers to take the throne themselves. This is why the greatest danger to any autocrat's rule emanates from within the security apparatus itself.

With the security apparatus representing both the primary safeguard of and the greatest threat to the regime, leaders go to great lengths to maximize loyalty (e.g., Greitens 2016; Talmadge 2015).[6] First, many authoritarian rulers fragment their security apparatus. They set up parallel structures with overlapping responsibilities in the hope that competing units will constantly spy on each other, keep themselves in check, and ensure that no single organization acquires a dominant position (e.g., Böhmelt and Pilster 2015; De Bruin 2020; Quinlivan 1999). Second, authoritarian regimes invoke draconian penalties for disloyalty and set examples through large-scale purges to deter others from conspiring against those in power (e.g., Bokobza et al. 2022; Goldring and Matthews 2021; Montagnes and Wolton 2019; Sudduth 2017*b*). Finally, autocrats try to buy loyalty from members of the security apparatus with various privileges, such as exclusive access to better medical care, educational institutions, and business opportunities (e.g., Brooks 1998; Droz-Vincent 2007). However, all of these strategies have significant drawbacks, and they are neither easy nor cheap to implement.

internal cohesion, material endowment, and public reputation as well as preventing political interference in recruitment, promotions, and operational decisions (e.g., Finer 1988; Geddes 2004; Nordlinger 1977). Ability refers to the chances that the attempted takeover will successfully remove the sitting government and that no counter-coup will reverse the newly installed leadership. Coup plotters seek to maximize support and legitimacy in secrecy before attempting a putsch (Luttwak 2016; Singh 2014). The ability of coup plotters, therefore, depends on the possibility to infer the preferences of potential fellow conspirators or supporters, and the capacity to coordinate among those involved without being exposed beforehand (Albrecht, Koehler and Schutz 2021; Casper and Tyson 2014; Powell 2012).

[6]The relationship between autocrats and their security apparatus represent a classic principal-agent relationship (e.g., Laffont and Martimort 2002). Like an autocrat who entrusts the military with the regime's protection, a principal contracts an agent for the completion of a certain task. Principal-agent relationships are commonly marked by diverging interests and asymmetric information, which allows the agent to mislead the principal about her interests (adverse selection) and pursue her private agenda once hired (moral hazard) (e.g., Arrow 1985; Eisenhardt 1989; Dixit 2002; Miller 2005; Shapiro 2005). Since agents hold private information about their effort and motivation, principals typically find themselves in the position of the "dilettante" facing the "expert" (Weber 1946, 232). All delegation therefore entails the risk of shirking (e.g., Arrow 1985; Dixit 2002; Miller 1992). Such non-compliance can impose high costs on principals by reducing outputs, incentivizing other agents to also lower their efforts, and by inciting collusion (Albrecht and Ohl 2016; Brehm and Gates 1999; Tirole 1986). Research on institutional delegation commonly distinguishes two types of instruments principals can use to increase compliance (e.g., Dixit 2002). First, principals may invest in monitoring to learn about the agents' effort levels and punish disobedience (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). Second, principals may also invest in the selection of intrinsically motivated agents (Akerlof and Kranton 2005; Frey 1997). Other than monitoring, which is designed to induce compliance ex post, selection aims at fostering compliance ex ante (Dixit 2002). However, both instruments are not without problems. Monitoring and oversight can overload higher echelons without changing the preferences of agents and even the harshest punishments may fail to motivate those who fundamentally oppose assignments (Brehm and Gates 1999). Selection requires identifying individual commitment, which is usually private information and can be feigned by agents (Delfgaauw and Dur 2007; Dixit 2002).

Although dictators may seek to reshape their security apparatus to strengthen loyalty and complicate collusion, such structural adjustments come with significant risks and costs. First, competition within a fragmented security apparatus can trigger fierce rivalries and even plunge regimes into civil war (De Bruin 2020; Roessler 2016). Second, organizational fragmentation has been shown to reduce the effectiveness of security forces, leaving the regime potentially vulnerable to external enemies (Lyall 2020; Talmadge 2015). Finally, the maintenance of parallel security organizations plus an exclusive civilian infrastructure for the armed organs is expensive. This reduces the amount of money that dictators can siphon off into their own pockets or spend on the wider population, which may increase the risk of revolutions and the regime's dependence on the security apparatus even further (Svolik 2012). Given these drawbacks, how do dictators build a loyal security apparatus in which individuals are willing to crack down on protesters, dissidents, terrorist, insurgents, and everybody else that might cause a problem for the regime? And who are the individuals who eventually decide that enough is enough and the dictator must go?

1.2 The Political Importance of Careers

To explain why and when those who serve within the security apparatus are loyal or disloyal, this book focuses on officer careers. Professional goals and career ambitions have been shown to shape all sorts of human choices and behaviors (e.g., Besley and Ghatak 2008; Dewatripont, Jewitt and Tirole 1999; Fliessbach et al. 2007; Frank 1985; Irlenbusch and Sliwka 2006; Holmström 1999; Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2012). In the domain of politics, the desire to climb up the organizational hierarchy influences the actions and initiatives of political candidates, party members, and politicians (e.g., Cirone, Cox and Fiva 2021; Dal Bó et al. 2017; Kung and Chen 2011; Shih, Adolph and Liu 2012), civil servants (e.g., Ashraf et al. 2020; Bertrand et al. 2020; Downs 1967), as well as military officers (Acemoglu et al. 2020; Ager et al. 2021). We believe that career opportunities—and particularly the lack thereof—provide a powerful explanation for extreme loyalty and disloyalty in authoritarian regimes. Career pressure works like a magnet; it has the power to attract the loyal following of officers even for the most dirty tasks, but it can also repel those who see no chance of fulfilling their ambitions, pushing them into strong opposition to the regime. To understand how this works, we dissect the institutional anatomy of the regime bureaucracy and shed light on the career paths.

How do professional careers look like in dictatorships? Are they fundamentally different from those in democracies? A common belief is that the type of career and thus the type of bureaucracy is closely intertwined with the type of regime: while the state apparatus in democracies is said to be built on merit, a common presumption is that autocracies are held together by nepotism. Max Weber (1978) famously described how feudal rulers used

their arbitrary, unchecked power to exchange personal favours for the loyalty of slaves and mercenaries. He contrasted such a nepotist and patrimonial organization, with the "rational-legal" state based on a formalized, standardized, hierarchical, and specialized bureaucracy with professional staff. In such an apparatus, Weber explained, the careers of officials—their selection, training, promotion, and remuneration—is determined by skill and qualification. In Weber's view, the existence of such meritocratic organization would serve as a prime catalyst for the development of the state, economy, and society.

Following Max Weber, prototypical bureaucracies seem essential to generating the positive outcomes we commonly associate with liberal democracies. An extensive body of literature shows that meritocratic administrations foster economic prosperity and stability, strengthen incorruptibility, integrity, and security, and protect civil liberties and human rights (e.g., Andersen and Krishnarajan 2019; Blankenship 2018; Cole 2015; Evans and Rauch 1999; Dahlström and Lapuente 2017).[7] As such, transparent and objective promotion rules as well as officials who advance based on their skills, qualifications, and achievements, might equip democratic regimes with a highly capable state apparatus. Some even argue that such an apparatus could immunize democracies against threats by anti-democrats and authoritarian figures (Andersen and Doucette 2022; Andersen et al. 2014; Bauer et al. 2021; Cornell and Lapuente 2014). In light of these arguments and findings, one is tempted to conclude that the existence of meritocratic bureaucracy paves the way to the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1989), where liberal and prosperous democracies ultimately prevail over oppressive and corrupt dictatorships.

In contrast to democracies and their competent and qualified officials, dictators are commonly said to rely on arcane rules of nepotism and favoritism. In autocratic regimes, the story goes, those with the "right" background, kinship, or connections have the best chances of moving up and reaching the highest circles of power. Such systems offer family members, friends, associates, and members of supposedly loyal political, ethnic, or religious groups the best chances to ascend to the highest, most lucrative positions. And indeed, studies on individual dictatorships in particular regions document such nepotist promotion patterns (e.g., McLauchlin 2010; Sassoon 2016; Slater 2003; Taylor 2011). Some of the investigated regimes sought to increase loyalty by exclusively recruiting security personnel from societal groups deemed to have a personal interest in the survival of the regime, as their privileges depend on the fate of the dictator (e.g., Allen and Brooks 2022; Bellin 2004; Harkness 2016). This suggests that authoritarian rulers rely primarily on favoritism to manage their state apparatus and buy support and fealty of their underlings.

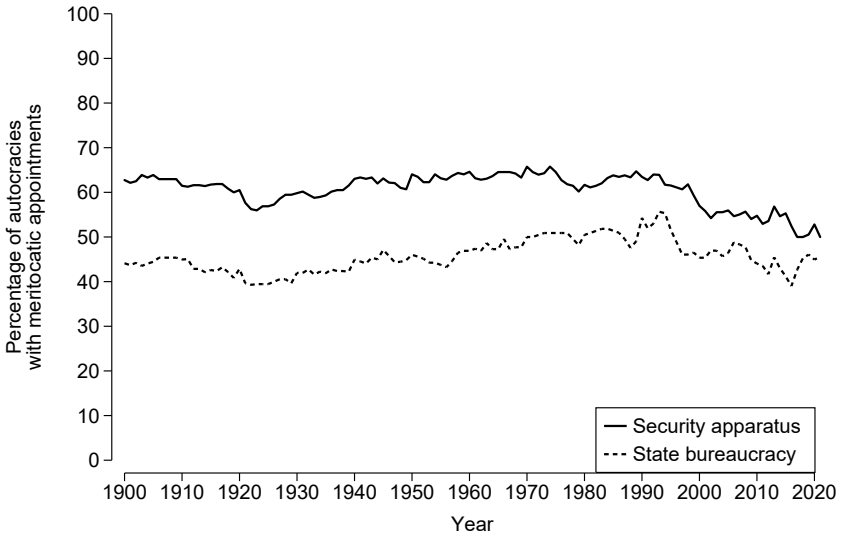
Yet, if dictatorships could only thrive on the back of a nepotist security apparatus, the story about careers would be simple. It would be the absence of meritocratic career trajectories

[7] Findings from a large-scale study by Cornell, Knutsen and Teorell (2020) cast doubt on whether a Weberian bureaucracy can enhance economic growth. If such an effect exists, it is likely to be short-term and driven by developments in recent decades.

and the paucity of skilled and well-trained officials opening the doors for all the evil, havoc, and misery in authoritarian regimes.[8] All the state violence and coups would therefore be the result of incompetent, corrupt, and criminal elements whom the nepotist dictator either successfully bribed into submission or just did not shepherd enough. Empirically and historically, however, it is not that simple.

The majority of authoritarian security apparatuses operate primarily on meritocratic principles. Since the early 1900s, almost two-thirds of the world's autocratic regimes have featured security organizations where careers depend on skills rather than political connections (Figure 1.1). Even in countries where the civilian bureaucracy is nepotistic, the security apparatus often remains meritocratic. One reason might be that nepotist systems, exclusionary recruitment practices, and reliance on a single societal group make dictators dependent, which in turn weakens organizational control as leaders cannot credibly threaten purges or punishments. Moreover, in many countries ethno-religious or socio-economic cleavages are simply too weak to be politically exploited.[9]

Figure 1.1: Meritocracy in the authoritarian regime apparatus, 1900-2020

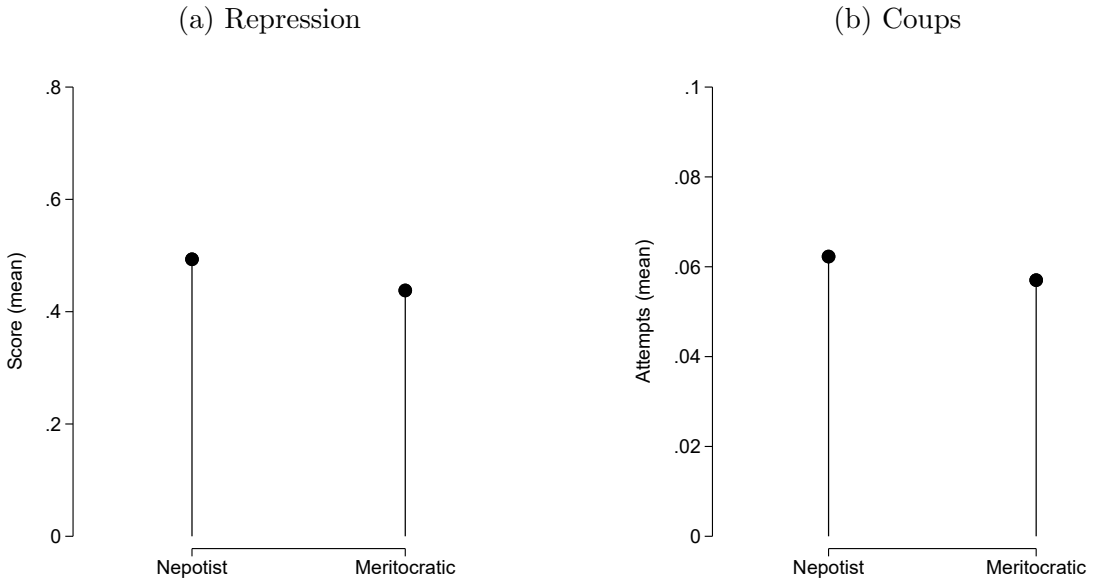


Note: Data stem from VDEM (Coppedge et al. 2022). Autocracies are identified using *v2x_regime* and appointment decisions include hiring, firing, and promotions using *v2stcritapparm_ord*. Merit-based appointments identify regime apparatuses where half or more appointments are based on skills and merit.

[8]Game-theoretic accounts suggest that dictators face a fundamental trade-off between competence and loyalty, incentivizing the selection of less competent officials for the sake of greater loyalty (Egorov and Sonin 2011; Paine 2022; Zakharov 2016). In contrast, McMahon and Slantchev (2015) argue that every leader prefers to hire skilled guardians but limit their resources for a coup. Dictators would hire incompetent agents only by mistake. Some studies empirically document the staffing of mediocre officials in Russia and China (Jia, Kudamats and Seim 2015; Reuter and Robertson 2012; Shih 2022). Yet, the picture seems to be more complex. Leaders trade skills for good connections especially during regime consolidation (Aaskoven and Nyrup 2021; Bai and Zhou 2019), when being confronted with domestic rather than foreign threats (Mattingly 2022), at lower positions (Landry and Lü 2018), and when it is about political rather than technical abilities (Lee and Schuler 2020).

[9]Even if countries are riddled by deep divisions, religion, ethnicity, or economic class define large groups of different individuals with different interests and behaviors (Scharpf and Gläßel 2020).

Figure 1.2: Repression and coups in nepotist versus meritocratic security apparatuses, 1950-2020



Note: Graph shows mean repression scores (left panel) and coup attempts (right panel) in autocracies where half or more appointments in the military apparatus are either based on skills and merit (meritocratic) or on personal or political connections (nepotist). Regime (*v2x_regime*) and appointment data (*v2stcritapparm_ord*) stem from VDEM (Coppedge et al. 2022). Updated repression data are based on Fariss, Kenwick and Reuning (2020) and coup data on Powell and Thyne (2011).

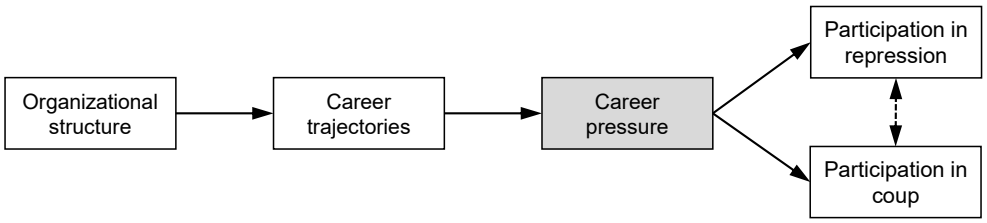
But are autocracies with a nepotist security apparatus more violent and coup-prone than their meritocratic counterparts? This does not seem to be the case either. Regimes with a meritocratic security apparatus are almost as repressive and experience nearly as many coup attempts as those with nepotistically organized militaries (Figure 1.2). This means that over two centuries, countless victims were tortured, disappeared, and killed at the hands of organizations that hired, fired, and promoted individuals based on aptness, ability, and merit. It also means that hundreds of (attempted) coups, many of which put an abrupt end to democratic systems, were carried out by professional officials, not corrupt criminals. How can we make sense of this?

1.3 The Core Argument: Careers and Regime (Dis)Loyalty

Who are the individuals that loyally carry out even the most violent orders of a regime? And which individuals participate in coups against the very government that they have pledged to protect? The core argument of this book is that *the decision of individuals to participate in either repression or coups is a function of their career pressure* (Figure 1.3). By career pressure, we understand an individual's fear resulting from any impediment to their continuance or advancement within an organization. In order to salvage their careers, pressured individuals have an incentive to pursue one of two extreme strategies. First, they

may force their way up. By *forcing*, we understand officers' participation in a coup attempt in the hope of commending themselves to successor regimes. Second, they may detour and go the extra mile. By *detouring*, we refer to officers applying for unpopular assignments where they can stand out and demonstrate their value in the hope that their loyalty will be rewarded by the current regime.

Figure 1.3: Organizational structure and careers



Why do officers come under career pressure? Security organizations, such as the army or the police, feature different career trajectories, but there are always winners and losers—those who swiftly rise through the ranks and those who get stuck or even dismissed. Whether officers find themselves on the winning or the losing end ultimately depends on the organizational structure in place. We argue that three basic characteristics of security organizations influence the career opportunities of officers with important implications for their incentives and behaviors. First, security organizations are hierarchical. Each step on the career ladder brings additional power, pay, and prestige. This is why most individuals seek to climb up in the hierarchy. Second, security organizations are pyramid-shaped. There is an abundance of positions at the bottom but only few lucrative posts at the top. Individuals who want to climb up thus face organizational bottlenecks and competition for promotions. Third, in these organizations promotion systems define the requirements that individuals have to meet in order to climb up. These requirements can be formal qualifications, individual traits, or personal connections. What unifies them is that those who fail to meet the requirements have little chances of improving their position. These are the individuals who face career pressure, and who are most likely to either detour or force their way up.

1.4 Empirical Approach

How do we empirically test the theoretical hypotheses developed in this book? Large parts of the empirical analysis are based on Argentina's security apparatus from its emergence throughout the 20th century. We show how officers' micromotives triggered political developments that have burned themselves into the collective memory of Argentine society and continue to influence the country's political landscape to this day. By opening the institutional black box of an authoritarian security apparatus, we throw light on the darkest

corners of the professional environment military officers must navigate. The look into one of Latin America's most influential security apparatus reveals clear patterns of what it takes to climb up the hierarchy, and which officers loose out.

To explore the impact of career pressure on extreme (dis)loyalty, we specifically zoom in on two landmark episodes in Argentina's history: the two coup attempts against long-term President Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, known as the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution), and the *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War), which denotes the campaign of state terror under Argentina's last military junta between 1976 and 1983. This book does not intend to provide an all-encompassing account of Argentina's intriguing history. Instead, our primary goal is to rigorously test our theoretical expectations and the underlying mechanisms. To this end, we dissect the institutional architecture and organizational anatomy down to the individual officer. What we offer is a kaleidoscopic internal perspective on the Argentine security apparatus and the agents who served within it across the twentieth century. This allows us to not only shed light on the varied professional contexts that individual officers faced over the course of their careers but also to investigate the impact of career pressures on extreme regime (dis)loyalty.

Why studying a historical case? Conducting a systematic empirical test of a theory about bureaucratic careers and extreme officer behavior in autocracies places extraordinarily high demands on the reliability, validity, and scope of the underlying empirical information. One of the reasons why previous research has approached authoritarian politics first and foremost with the help of macro and meso level explanations is the notoriously poor data situation (Barros 2016; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018; Policzer 2009). Almost by definition, personal particulars and security operations in autocracies are not subject to public scrutiny. No dictator likes to be studied—let alone those in charge of the regime's last line of defense. In autocracies, entire departments are responsible for maintaining the secrecy of sensitive information or systematically misleading the outside world about internal affairs (Deletant 1995; Gläßel and Paula 2020). This intransparency inherent to authoritarian politics is a fundamental hurdle for any investigation into contemporary autocracies. In contrast, the chances of obtaining a comprehensive picture of a regime that is no longer in power are much higher—provided that the paper trail survived and the successor regime is open to investigations into the past (Balcells and Sullivan 2018). Unlike many other fallen dictatorships, historic Argentina meets both criteria.

Another important reason why we draw on the historical case of Argentina is ethical. It should not be forgotten that delving so deeply into an authoritarian security apparatus—as we are doing in this book—could have potentially grave repercussions on people's lives and personal security, if the regime in question were still in power or its agents would still pose a threat. We want to face up to our special responsibility and contribute to protecting human life and not endangering it under any circumstances. Based on this, our goal is to

identify lessons from the past, uncover systematic patterns in human behavior, and thus help counteract illiberal rule and future atrocities.

Why Argentina? First, Argentina has suffered iron repression and numerous coups—both executed by the same officer corps. This allows us to study forcing and detouring decisions in one and the same country, while holding constant important context conditions, including among other things, the institutional environment of the Argentine army, geography, as well as broad societal aspects such as religious and ethnic diversity. At the same time, however, the case allows us to decouple individual decisions to participate in coup attempts and repression, respectively. The two coup attempts under study in 1955 and the high phase of repression from 1975 to 1983 are separated by 20 years. This ensures that we can study both phenomena in isolation and that they are not purely path-dependent, in that the same factors would have triggered both the coup under observation and the subsequent repressive campaign. In addition, due to the fact that Argentina experienced two military uprisings in 1955, we are able to compare the conspirator profiles of one failed and one successful coup attempt. This allows us to examine whether officers' decisions to force their way up depend on the coup attempt's chances of success.

Second, the case of Argentina offers unprecedented archival information on an authoritarian security apparatus and all individuals serving within it. Based on official documents from dozens of archives, we compile an original data set that comprises biographical and professional career information on every officer who served in the Argentine army at any point in time from the creation of the professional military organization through the entire twentieth century. Data on individuals' participation in coup attempts and membership in repressive units are based on the work by the Argentine truth commission (*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, CONADEP) founded in 1983 as well as numerous historic accounts without which this book would have not been feasible. Having in-depth information on all of the more than 15,000 members of the Argentine officer corps and not only on those who eventually participated in coup attempts or decided to become the regime's henchmen, has a major advantage: It allows us to directly compare their personal characteristics and careers to all others, who did not engage in extreme loyalty or disloyalty. In other words, we can test the theoretical hypotheses about the impact of career pressure on participation in coups or repression by drawing on the entire recruitment pool comprising all officers who did or did not turn into torturers or conspirators.

What do we learn from the analyses of a single-country study? Single-country studies have played a central role in the production of social scientific knowledge ever since. Yet their function has fundamentally changed from primarily theory building to predominantly theory testing (Pepinsky 2019). Single-country studies are particularly well suited to establish internal validity and to probe the plausibility of claims that would have to be assumed otherwise. Put simply, in-depth case studies are ideal for determining whether certain pro-

cesses actually work as the theoretical model suggests, for example, which career outcomes are driven top-down or rather bottom-up. Probing such plausibility questions is of central importance but requires sufficient documentation. The case of Argentina in the 1950s and 1970s is a prominent case that has received wide scholarly attention from historians, economists, and political scientists. Together with the extensive archival documentation of internal procedures and responsibilities, these insights provide a detailed understanding of the inner workings of the Argentine security apparatus and the ideal basis for establishing plausibility.

The empirical focus on Argentina also enables us to check plausible alternative explanations as thoroughly as possible. For example, it might be that political connections or patronage networks confound our suggested relationship between an officer's merit and his career outcomes. To test this claim and operationalize an Argentinean officer's access to a powerful patronage network, we check whether the individual was a member of the exclusive national Jockey Club and whether this takes away any explanatory power of our main finding (it does not). Yet the point is, while being a club member arguably is a good proxy of a person's connections in 1970s Argentina, it is unlikely to be true for 1990s Iraq or the 1960s Soviet Union. Hence, if we were to compare the impact of patronage networks across places like Argentina, Iraq, and the Soviet Union, we would have to either draw on different, case-specific indicators, and thus face the risk of comparing apples and oranges, or we would have to search for a (more coarse) measure of political connections that holds across contexts, and thus diminishes measurement validity. The focus on Argentina thus allows us to maximize internal and measurement validity, while controlling for a wide range of potentially confounding factors.

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that single country studies can never guarantee that individual processes take place in exactly the same fashion elsewhere. We therefore exhaust all means at our disposal to bring the levels of external validity of our empirical analyses as close as possible to the high generality of our theory. This particularly applies to the choice of both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as the most appropriate research designs for reaching valid conclusions and maximizing causal inference. Our empirical approach strives to isolate causal relationships that give us generalizable insights into the inner workings of authoritarian regimes and the formative processes behind repression and coups at the individual level. Each empirical chapter also closes with systematic discussions of potential empirical scope conditions and external validity. Finally, in an additional chapter on repression in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, we further illustrate our proposed career logic at work across different subtypes and ideological orientations of authoritarian regimes.

1.5 Key Findings

This book holds three key findings. First, our analysis reveals that the Argentina army was a meritocratic organization. It had a strict hierarchy and a formalized rank structure, where performance and achievements determined the selection and promotion of officers. Like in other organizations, the hierarchical, pyramid-shape structure in combination with a fierce up-or-out promotion system generated strong competition for higher posts. The systematic tracking of all army officers uncovers two key ingredients of a successful officer career, culminating in the promotion to the General ranks. At an early career stage, the most important criterion for an officer's rapid advancement was performance. Final grades at the military academy (*Colegio Militar de la Nación*) demonstrated the officer's competence and aptitude, which shaped upward mobility and subsequent career opportunities. Those with the best grades were most likely to gain access to higher education institutions. At the staff college (*Escuela Superior de Guerra*), mid-level officers would develop the management and leadership skills necessary for opening the doors to the very top.

The descriptive analysis shows that the organization and promotion system of the Argentine Army generated strong career pressures for officers. The meritocratic promotion system put tremendous pressure on those who underperformed at the first career step. We find that officers who graduated at the bottom of their cohorts from military academy had little chances of receiving advanced training and thus faced a higher risk of being stuck at mid-level ranks than their high-performing peers. In addition, the up-or-out promotion system meant that while officers were forced out of the organization at each career level, the threat of discharge was strongest at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel. Officers on those ranks were really in a career danger zone. They had to squeeze themselves through the tightest of all organizational bottlenecks in order to become a General and not see their career abruptly ended. Officers who failed at their first career step and entered the career danger zone of the mid-ranks faced extreme career pressure. Our analysis shows that they responded to this with extreme choices.

Second, our analysis reveals that career-pressured officers engage in detouring to rescue their careers. Detouring officers join repressive units in the hope that loyally carrying out the regime's dirty work will send a signal of their loyalty, which salvages their career. This strategy requires, however, that there is an organizational unit in place that is tasked with carrying out violence and thus allows for the demonstration of said value. We empirically show the detouring logic of career-pressured officers by focusing on the case of the Battalion 601—the secret police unit in charge of dismantling subversion during Argentina's military dictatorship between 1975 and 1983. Using data on all 4,000 active officers in the army at the time, we study biographic differences between those officers who joined the secret police unit and those who did not. We find that officers with poor performance at the military academy were indeed more likely to join the secret police.

Further analyses demonstrate that superiors removed career obstacles for secret police agents, which provided career-pressured officers with a chance to stay longer in the apparatus than their peers and advance vertically. Merit was less relevant for promotions within the secret police organization, and that the regime rewarded the loyal service of its agents. Moreover, using original data on memberships in the most prestigious high-society club in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires—the Jockey Club—we demonstrate that the detouring logic operates independent of personal networks. Taken together, career-pressured officials detoured over the secret police and loyally carried out the regime's dirty work, as this promised a unique remedy for their strained careers.

Third, our analysis reveals that career-pressured officers engage in forcing to salvage their careers. Aside of detouring, officers under pressure may try to change their professional outlook by getting rid of the current regime. We expect that officers pressured by the up-or-out promotion system and the likely end of their professional lives engage in maximum disloyalty, conspire against the sitting regime, and participate in a coup. Using original data on all 5,000 serving officers in Argentina, we analyze biographic differences between all 150 coup plotters who participated in the 1955 putsches against Juan D. Perón and the entire army officer corps. We find that mid-level officers who entered the army's career danger zone and thus felt the full heat of the up-or-out promotion system were more likely to participate in both coup attempts.

Additional analyses show that the forcing logic operates independent of past co-optation attempts by Perón and also improved the career outlook of participants. Using data on the recipients of brand-new import cars through a gift scheme run by the Perón government, we reveal that officers were equally likely to participate in the coups. To assess whether forcing paid off, we leverage that the Coup in June 1955 failed but the Coup in September in the same year was successful. Results show that those officers who participated in the successful coup were indeed more likely to reach the General ranks. As we would expect, we can see no such effect for the placebo case of June 1955. Moreover, since the army was not able to absorb all coup participants at higher ranks without breaking the military hierarchy, our results reveal that coup participants were more likely to obtain lucrative posts as managers and directors of Argentine companies after the September coup. Taken together, the findings show that officers under career pressure engage in maximum disloyalty, with coup participation offering the chance to clear up grim career prospects.

1.6 Key Contributions

Some years ago, Art (2012, 353) noted that "our understanding of the coercive institutions of modern authoritarian and hybrid regimes is pretty thin." We agree. Following attempts to drill deeper into the authoritarian security apparatus (De Bruin 2020; Greitens 2016;

Talmadge 2015), this book lays open the institutional anatomy of an army organization to shed light on the career trajectories and obstacles within an entire officer corps. In doing so, it not only unpacks the institutional configurations and design of authoritarian administrations but also uncovers how career setbacks influence the behavior of individual regime agents. This journey into the dark corners of a dictatorship offers three main contributions.

The theory and findings of this book offer a powerful explanation of why ordinary people engage in illegal, gruesome, and down-right evil behavior. Some have suggested that organizations run by sadists or psychopaths would be prone to commit the greatest crimes (Adorno et al. 1950). Similarly, many have interpreted illegal power takeovers and regime collapses as products of organizations that put their corporate interests above everything else (Nordlinger 1977; Thompson 1973). In contrast to these macro-level accounts, this book studies the individuals who carry out repression and coups. The micro-level perspective reveals how mundane career pressures motivate normal officials to show extreme behavior. Even the most shocking, disruptive, and daunting events can result from the actions of ordinary individuals who fear for their professional advancement and produce what Hannah Arendt (1963/2006) has so compellingly described as "the banality of evil:" the willingness to kill and maim in the name of an authoritarian regime.

The book also uncovers the dark side of meritocratic organizations. To do so, we "rediscover bureaucracy" (Olsen 2005) in the study of authoritarian regimes.[10] The approach of this book mirrors powerful accounts that scrutinize the inner workings of civil administrations in established democracies and developed nations (Dahlström and Lapuente 2017). It draws great strength from examining a state apparatus outside of Western Europe and North America (Bertelli et al. 2020). Illuminating even the most hidden corners of the military organization demonstrates that a regime apparatus built on clear and merit-based career trajectories breeds mundane career concerns that can be exploited by autocratic figures. Meritocratic promotion systems produce winners and losers in the competition for desirable positions. The losers in these systems may overthrow moderate governments and serve as willing enforcers to violent regimes, with all the adverse consequences for stability and prosperity. The uncomfortable truth of this book is that meritocratic bureaucracies are unlikely to be a firewall against authoritarianism; democracies should therefore not indulge in a mere semblance of security, trusting that meritocratic institutions would be immune to an autocratic turnaround or that their bureaucracies would not allow being misused for state repression.

Finally, the book reveals that coups and repression in autocratic regimes are related through a common cause: career problems of those who work in the regime apparatus. Our detouring

[10] Our career-pressure logic hereby responds to the call of analyzing dynamics in the bureaucracy as "individual, dyadic exchanges"—between a regime leader and one or more security officers—rather than the mere "interaction between aggregated units"—between a regime and the security apparatus as a whole (Brehm and Gates 2014, 28).

logic suggests that the existence of specialized units, tasked with the regime's dirty work, provides officials with the opportunity to remedy their grim career prospects. Accordingly, repressive organizations function as a sort of institutional pressure valve. By creating new repressive jobs, that is, by opening the valve a bit, regimes can reduce the risk of revolts by officials with poor career prospects. Conversely, the forcing logic suggests that the absence of units that allow for detouring may motivate those with jammed careers to turn against the regime. In situations where coercion is limited and only carried out by a small part of the state apparatus, opportunities to detour are slim. In such circumstances, forcing is likely to become a viable career-saving strategy. As result, low levels of repression may translate into high risks of coups, whereas high levels of repression should lower the danger of internal uprisings.

There are several implications for the survival strategies of authoritarian leaders that follow from this relationship. The danger posed by career backlogs may explain why and when regimes are more violent than others. Escalating violence and targeting broad segments of society increases the amount of dirty work, which keeps more officials busy while opening up alternative paths for those who see their professional advancement threatened. This may also explain why in many dictatorships we observe an ever-enlarging security sector. The fear of officials who force their way up may lead dictators to create new security organizations and expand existing ones. The proliferation of security organizations create additional detouring options and might soothe a larger number of individuals with career problems.[11] The growth of the security apparatus may go hand in hand with the dictator's invention of new enemies. While vigorous warnings of shadowy, secretive, and subversive enemies may be interpreted as the leader's paranoia, the findings of this book suggest that the construction of domestic or foreign enemies may be a strategy to keep the apparatus in check. In line with Carl Schmitt (1932/2007), who saw the existence of such enemies as the sine qua non of politics and the state, dictators may invent foes to create enough dirty work to keep the career-pressured officials busy, and thus ensure the stability of their regime.

1.7 Plan of the Book

The goal of this book is to give readers a deeper understanding of the inner workings of authoritarian regimes. We open up the security apparatus as the key actor in authoritarian power politics, responsible for the two notorious phenomena of dictatorships: repression and coups. Based on our institutional perspective, we explain when which officers decide to personally engage in state atrocities or actively fight the government they are sworn to protect. We trace the willingness to engage in either of the two extreme behavior back to

[11] The book's proposed logic of career pressure offers a micro-dynamical explanation for the organizational fragmentation of the security apparatus as a coup-proofing strategy.

mundane career pressures that result from the organizational structure of the authoritarian security apparatus. The remainder of this book is organized as follows.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical backbone of the book and defines the central concepts in use. The two core questions this chapter seeks to address are: Why do individuals undertake repression for the regime? And why do individuals join (risky) coup attempts against it? We argue that the decisions to become a henchman or a conspirator are inherently linked to an individual's career prospects. Officers who have their backs to the wall and fear for their professional advancement see involvement in repression or coups as ways to salvage their careers by either *detouring* or *forcing* their way up. We develop a comprehensive theory of careers in dictatorships in order to answer why officers may come under pressure in the first place but also what individuals are most likely to end up in this situation. With the help of this theory, we can tell what it takes to reach the most lucrative top ranks of an authoritarian bureaucracy, what a typical career trajectory looks like, and who comes under pressure at which point of their career.

Equipped with this theoretical knowledge, in *Chapter 3* we set out to dissect an entire security apparatus into its constituent components. Based on the career data on every single officer who has ever served in the Argentine Army, we provide the reader with an inside view on the architecture and the internal composition of the organization. This allows us to trace long-term trends in recruitment, training, promotion, and retirement patterns over more than a century. Since its creation, the army has played a key role in Argentina's modern history, including frequent transitions between democratic and autocratic spells, state bankruptcies and economic booms, revolutionary uprisings, as well as both intra- and interstate wars. Despite these various phases of turbulence, however, we find that the promotion system within the Argentine army has been stable since its professionalization by Prussian officers. In short, performance has always paid off. The apparatus was mostly meritocratic, irrespective of whether political power was in the hands of democratically elected governments, authoritarian leaders, or a military junta. This means that in contrast to Max Weber's presumption, meritocratic bureaucracies do not seem to contradict autocratic rule. Even worse, as we will find out in the following chapters, merit-based promotion systems can fuel career pressure and thus become the lubricant in the repression machinery.

In *Chapter 4*, we systematically test the detouring hypothesis. We start with the puzzling observation that secret police agents of dictatorships in such diverse places as Greece, Iran, Paraguay, Poland, Romania, and South Africa have often been described by observers as remarkably mediocre in skill and intellect. But why would any dictator whose destiny relies on a capable secret police force draw on mediocrities? Our analysis of the composition of Battalion 601, the notorious Argentine secret police unit during the Dirty War, shows that this has to do with bottom-up processes motivating such officers to do the regime's dirty work in the hopes of salvaging their careers. Comparing the profiles of more than 4,000

military officers who constituted the entire recruitment pool for Battalion 601, we find that those officers who underperformed early on in their careers were much more likely to serve in the secret police. Our results also demonstrate why this was the case. Low performers at the academy were less likely to attain advanced training, stuck at middling ranks, and faced a much higher risk of discharge than their peers. The resulting career pressure produced the incentive for underachieving officers to detour and demonstrate their value to the regime by joining the secret police and carrying out the arduous secret police work that nobody else wanted to do. Finally, we show that this paid off. Agents attained higher ranks and stayed longer in the security apparatus. These career boosting effects were most pronounced for agents with the lowest early career performance.

Chapter 5 empirically investigates the forcing hypothesis. Coups oust six times more autocrats than revolutions, while causing three out of four failures of democracy. Conventional wisdom holds that coups are, first and foremost, motivated by macro-organizational interests of the military. But why would a well-fed, meritocratic military organization stage a coup then? Which officers would participate in an illegal power seizure? Analyzing systematic differences between the profiles of coup plotters and all other members of the Argentine army in 1955, we find that career concerns seem to have motivated parts of the officer corps to turn against the democratically elected government of President Juan D. Perón. Officers threatened by retirement were most likely to conspire in the hopes of forcing their way up the hierarchy. In addition, we assess whether participating in a coup attempt is actually beneficial for people's professional advancement. As expected, this was not the case for those in charge of the failed coup attempt in June, whereas those who participated in the successful putsch in September of the same year indeed managed to reach higher ranks than their by-standing peers. On top, successful coup participants were more likely to obtain lucrative positions on the boards of private companies. Together, the chapter demonstrates that political leaders should be especially wary of officers who are in the career danger zone or stuck in an organizational bottleneck.

In *Chapter 6*, we extend our analysis along two dimensions. First, we ask what other sources of career pressure exist besides underperformance. Second, we study whether career pressure has a similarly strong impact on extreme behavior by officers in most different authoritarian regime contexts. Regarding the first question, we propose that subordinates may come under pressure for six distinct reasons: incompetence, misconduct, origin, isolation, organizational backlog, and shrinkage. We argue that every single type of career pressure has the power to trigger extreme loyalty or disloyalty. Superiors, in turn, can exploit that pressured subordinates have a strong incentive to improve their prospects for advancement by loyally executing the organization's evil tasks. Empirically, we show how each of the suggested types of career pressure unfolded their inglorious impact on repression in two dictatorships at opposite extremes of the ideological spectrum: Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Nazi Germany. We find that both regimes staffed their most deadly units not necessarily with

sadists or psychopaths but with career-pressured ordinary men. In the case of Nazi Germany, superiors in the German bureaucracy exploited all kinds of career problems to recruit willing officers for the Einsatzgruppen—the death squads responsible for the systematic killing of mostly Jewish men, women, and children during the "Holocaust by Bullets." Stalin's notorious secret police—the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD)—used a similar approach in selecting its commanders to carry out the Great Terror. The leadership made particular use of individuals who faced disadvantages in the struggle for lucrative promotions, knowing that these would desperately want to prove themselves and zealously execute even the most egregious orders to advance their careers.

But is our proposed logic of career pressure limited to dictatorships only? In *Chapter 7*, we dare to look beyond the authoritarian security apparatus in order to see whether career pressures can also help us understand the production of organized evil and conspiracies in insurgent, terrorist, and criminal organizations. What do these organizations have in common with an authoritarian security apparatus? First, transnational terrorist groups, street gangs, and crime syndicates have similar hierarchies, with a plethora of menial jobs at the bottom and few lucrative positions at the top, generating fierce competition among ambitious members. Second, again similar to dictatorial bureaucracies, rebel commanders and mafia bosses have an abundance of gruesome and immoral tasks to be delegated to their subordinates. It thus seems plausible that, to get the organization's evil work done, these leaders also turn to the very lackeys who have the most to prove. Drawing on telling anecdotes about organizations as diverse as the Islamic State in Iraq, the German Red Army Faction, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, and Los Angeles drug trafficking gangs, we time and again encounter striking analogies in the selection of security personnel and allocation of tasks. Those with the weakest standing in the organization appear to be the most likely candidates to carry out organizational evil.

Finally, in *Chapter 8*, we return to the domain of authoritarian power politics by synthesizing the newly gained insights into the micro-foundations of coups and repression. Specifically, we address the two all-important questions that probably most readers will be asking themselves at this point: First, given the common logic behind *detouring* and *forcing*, what determines whether career pressure triggers one behavior or the other? In other words, when are we more likely to see a coup attempt and when do we have to expect a significant increase in repression? And to what extent do both outcomes condition each other? In other words, from a career logical perspective, does repression affect the risk of coups and vice versa? We argue that the two strategies are indeed interdependent. Pressured individuals should have less incentive to force their way up when detouring opportunities are available to them. That is, when dictators feel in danger they might take pressure off the system, and thus reduce the risk of coup attempts by ramping up the demand for repressive personnel. Until now, research has explained the creation of more and more parallel security agencies as an attempt to establish a system of organizational checks and balances. Our complementary

explanation works on the individual level, in that new enemy images and an expanding security apparatus have the purpose of creating detouring opportunities, which deprives coup plots of their executors.

Based on the sum of theoretical and empirical insights, *Chapter 9* concludes this book with a concise summary and sketches the implications for both future research and policy-makers in order to be better able to anticipate and forestall illiberal regime transitions and organized human rights violations.

Chapter 2

The Logic of Career Pressure

This chapter develops a unified theory of careers in dictatorship that allows us to explain the participation in repression and coups. Adopting an institutional perspective, we describe how the organizational anatomy of the authoritarian security apparatus shapes the career trajectories and incentives of those who serve within it. As in other organizations, the authoritarian security apparatus is home to both winners—who swiftly progress through the ranks with ease—and losers—who have a hard time receiving promotions. While history books are usually on high fliers, we analytically focus on those on the losing end and their strategies for overcoming the career pressure they face. With their professional advancement in limbo but determined to make it to the top, these individuals have two hard choices: They may carry out the regime's dirty work, demonstrate their value, and hope that the regime will reward their loyalty with a career boost; or they may turn against the regime responsible for their career deadlock in the hope that toppling the sitting leadership will open up a way to the top.

2.1 Institutional Structure of Security Organizations

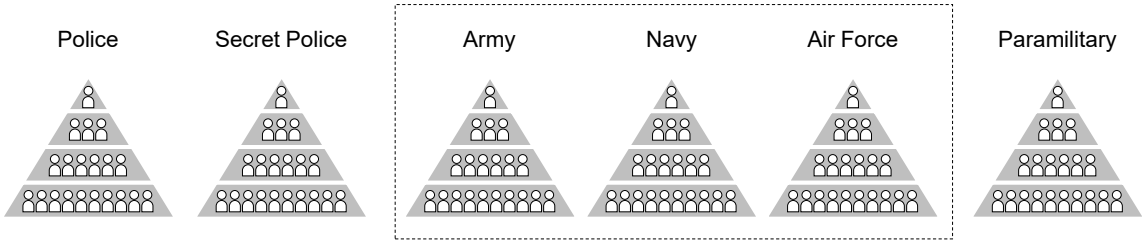
Every autocratic regime has to cope with a multitude of threats to its political survival (Frantz 2018; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018; Svolik 2012). Internationally, many dictators face propaganda from hostile neighbors, sanctions by democratic adversaries, or even invasion by foreign external foes (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Escribà-Folch and Wright 2015; von Soest and Wahman 2015; Weeks 2014).[1] Domestically, they must reckon

[1]For centuries, research has dealt extensively with the relationship between regime type and international conflict (e.g., Doyle 1983; Kant 1795; Maoz and Abdolali 1989; Paine 1986; Rummel 1997; Russet 1994; De Tocqueville 2003). There is a growing consensus on the so-called "democratic peace theory," which posits that democracies hardly ever go to war with one another, although overall they are no more or less likely to initiate or participate in international armed conflicts. In the words of Imai and Lo (2021, 901), "the relationship between democracy and peace is at least five times as robust as that between smoking and

with furious masses protesting in the streets, insurgent groups joining forces in the country's hinterland, dissenting journalists and opposition figures galvanizing international condemnation, as well as terrorists secretly planning their next attacks on government representatives (e.g., Aksoy, Carter and Wright 2012; Carter and Carter 2020; Conrad, Conrad and Young 2014; Fjelde 2010; Gläßel, González and Scharpf 2020; Kern 2011). On top, any autocrat must remain on constant alert about conspiring elites and palace revolts within the regime's inner circle (e.g., Casper and Tyson 2014; Del Río 2022; Reuter and Szakonyi 2019). And last but not least, of course, even dictators have to take care of everyday law and order problems. To handle this universe of security problems, autocrats depend on an elaborate apparatus.

The authoritarian security apparatus consists of all organizations responsible for preventing or eliminating internal and external threats to the regime. Due to the diverse challenges and complex tasks involved, autocrats maintain dozens of organizations with specific powers and jurisdictions. While the responsibilities of different organizations as well as the overlaps between them may vary from regime to regime, there are a number of institutions that can be found in virtually every autocratic country. This includes i) regular police forces tasked with public safety, which are often organizationally separated at the city, state, and national level, ii) intelligence or secret police units responsible for the surveillance and the persecution of political dissent both within the larger population and the security apparatus itself; and iii) the military in charge of national defense, which typically consists of the army, navy, and air force. Moreover, many authoritarian regimes maintain additional armed organizations, such as paramilitaries or presidential guards, that are often linked to the dictator, the ruling party, or individual ministers (e.g., Böhmelt and Clayton 2018; Carey, Colaresi and Mitchell 2015; Casey 2020; De Bruin 2020; Quinlivan 1999). Together, these organizations form the state's security apparatus with its pillared architecture (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Organizations of the authoritarian security apparatus



Note: Graph shows common security organizations. The dashed line indicates the military as part of the larger security apparatus.

lung cancer." Conversely, this means that in almost every war at least one of the parties is an autocracy. Research suggests that autocrats are less likely than democracies to win their wars, partly because they tend to fight alone rather than team up with allies (Graham, Gartzke and Fariss 2017). And finally, Reiter and Stam (2002) argue that autocracies are more willing than democracies to engage in international conflicts even if their chances of winning are low because failure cannot be punished by voters. Together, this means that autocrats often present enormous challenges to their militaries and demand a great deal from them.

Each security organization, in turn, has its own structure, which is often complex and nested. In many dictatorships, large-format organigrams are needed to show who directs, reports, and is accountable to whom under what conditions. To the untrained eye, these organizational charts often look like a maze of solid, dashed, and dotted lines, as well as variously colored arrows in all cardinal directions, connecting myriads of scattered branches, specialized departments, operational units, and councils. Notwithstanding this complexity, however, all of these organizations share three key characteristics: a clear hierarchy, a pyramidal shape, and a promotion system (Figure 2.2).

Hierarchy. Security organizations generally feature a rigid and strict hierarchy. Throughout history, hierarchical layering has allowed security organizations to efficiently coordinate and implement their missions in an orderly, rapid, and coherent manner—especially in confusing emergency situations. Hierarchical organizations consist of a specific number of rank levels stacked on top of each other. These layers are held together by the chain of command, which defines the line of authority. Orders travel down from higher to lower ranks, until they reach the officer who is to carry them out, while information and requests travel up until they reach the officer authorized to decide. An officer's position in the hierarchy thus determines their level of responsibility for and control over others. To reflect the disparities between superiors and subordinates, each higher rank comes with additional amounts of power, income, and prestige.

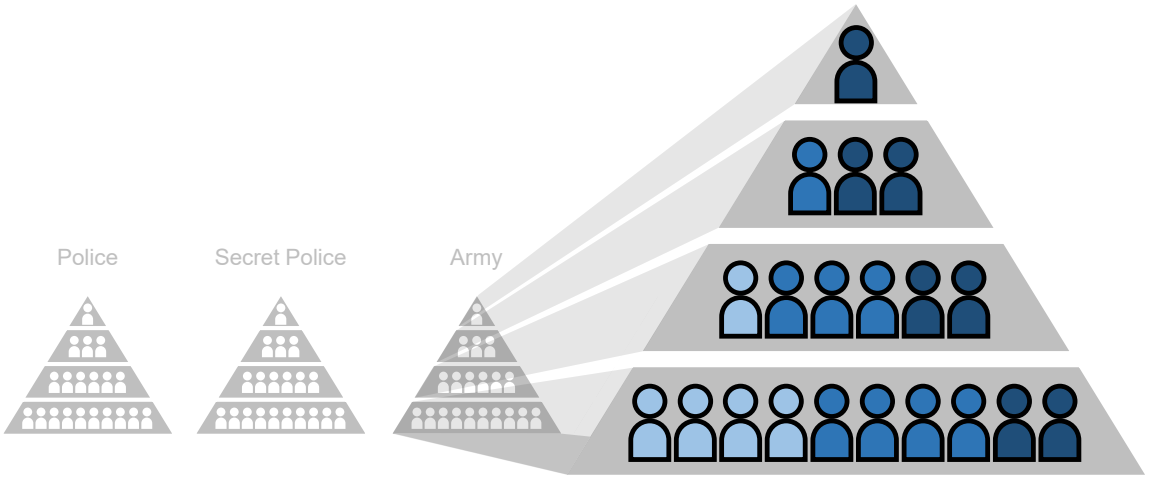
Pyramid shape. Authoritarian security organizations are typically pyramid-shaped. They offer an abundance of positions at the bottom but only few lucrative positions at the top. In hierarchical, pyramid-shaped organizations, fresh recruits usually enter the organization at the lowest level to then ascend rank by rank. While pyramidal organizations may differ in terms of steepness and wideness, with many even resembling a diamond rather than a classic pyramid, the number of available positions usually declines at each step on the career ladder.[2] Partly dependent on fluctuations in cohort size or periods of over-recruitment, organizational bottlenecks can become acute at various points in the hierarchy. For example, in the military, the tightest bottleneck is usually located between the field officer and the general ranks.

Promotion system. In security organizations, promotion systems regulate upward mobility. The promotion system in place defines the set of criteria that officers have to meet in order to maximize their prospects of advancing in the pyramidal hierarchy. The closer the match between the promotion criteria and a candidate's characteristics, the higher the expected rank by the end of their career. Officers typically climb up the hierarchy until they reach a position where they are no longer competitive against their peers of equal rank

[2]From an organizational perspective, the steepness is determined by the number of hierarchy levels or ranks, while the wideness is based on the number of posts on each hierarchy level or rank.

(Lazear 2004, 160).[3] In principle, promotion criteria can be nepotist or meritocratic. In the first case, it is primarily about *who* you know. Candidates may need an influential patron, be an active regime party member, or belong to a specific social class, sect, or tribe in order to rise to the most lucrative ranks. In meritocratic promotion systems, it is more about *what* you know. From the start, recruits are evaluated based on their skills and performance, they have to demonstrate aptitude and competence.

Figure 2.2: Zooming in on the structure of an authoritarian security organization



Note: Graph shows the stylized institutional structure of an exemplary army organization within the larger security apparatus. Colors indicate the match between individuals' characteristics and the organization's promotion criteria. The higher the saturation, the greater the fit.

2.2 The Implications for Officers

Each of the three institutional characteristics—hierarchy, pyramid shape, and promotion system—has one direct implication for the officers that serve within security organizations (Table 2.1). First, hierarchies motivate officers to climb up the ranks. Second, the pyramidal shape of security organizations implies that not all can do so. And finally, promotion systems incentivize officers to adapt their behaviors to prevail professionally. The interplay between the three institutional characteristics and the corresponding individual-level incentives shapes the career patterns in authoritarian security organizations. The structure and incentives are fundamental to how career pressures emerge, which officers are affected, and how they seek to overcome them.

Incentive to seek promotion. The fact that security organizations are hierarchically structured implies that officers have a strong incentive to advance within the organization.

[3]The sets of criteria can be formalized down to the last detail and explicitly include the requirements for each career stage. Even in less formalized systems, subordinates tend to know the rules of the game inside out. As members of the organization, they observe what management wants every day and see which of their peers and superiors is getting praise, and who is being pushed out.

Table 2.1: The impact of institutional characteristics on individual-level incentives

Institutional characteristic		**Implication for members**
1) Hierarchy	$\longrightarrow$	Incentive to seek promotion
2) Pyramid shape	$\longrightarrow$	Need to compete for advancement
3) Promotion system	$\longrightarrow$	Incentive to fulfill specified criteria

With each step up the career ladder, the promoted officer acquires substantial personal power, income, and social prestige (Baker, Jensen and Murphy 1988; Svolik 2012). In many authoritarian security organizations, top positions carry additional perks, further fueling incentives to seek expeditious promotion. Such benefits can include priority health care and luxurious housing as well as access to corruption networks or illegal business circles (Bellin 2004; Brooks 1998; Droz-Vincent 2007). These vertical inequalities in hierarchical organizations make promotions very appealing. In fact, the desire to climb up appears to be so strong that it even prevails in organizations where advancement is associated with a significantly heightened risk of psychological stress or even physical harm. Otherwise, it would be hardly understandable why Soviet agents sought promotions although Stalin had repeatedly eliminated his high-ranking officials in deadly purges (Montagnes and Wolton 2019).

But do all members of authoritarian security organizations want to advance within the hierarchy? Downs (1967, 88-98) identifies five types of subordinates within organizations: climbers, conservers, zealots, advocates, and statesmen. He argues that four of them seek promotion. Climbers strive to improve their positions within organizations out of self-interest. Zealots seek power "both for its own sake and to effect the policies to which they are loyal," advocates "because they want to have a significant influence upon policies," and statesmen "to have a significant influence [over] policies and actions." The only deviating group, which Downs (1967) calls "conservers," would rather try to retain the position they hold than improve it.[4] It thus seems plausible that the hierarchically layered structure of authoritarian security organizations substantially raises the incentives for most officers to seek promotion.

Moreover, in authoritarian security organizations, hierarchies often not only create an incentive to seek promotion but turn it into an imperative. Extensive research shows that dictators frequently use their unconstrained powers to purge officials (Bokobza et al. 2022; Goldring and Matthews 2021; Sudduth 2017*b*). For security officers, creating the impression of being superfluous can be quite dangerous. Hence, even so-called conservers are well-advised not to rest on a position for too long. Otherwise, there is a chance that they will be chopped should the leadership come to the conclusion that the apparatus needs a slim down.

[4]The five-fold typology by Anthony Downs (1967) maps onto Joseph Schlesinger's (1966, 10) distinction between individuals with progressive versus static ambitions. While the former type strives "to attain an office more important than the one he now seeks or is holding," the latter aims at staying on a particular position.

The situation is even worse in one of the many authoritarian security organizations that operate on the so-called 'up-or-out' principle—a tenure track system that is also practiced by firms in the accounting, investment banking, and consulting industries (e.g., Mandis 2013; Stewart, Gruys and Storm 2010). Up-or-out systems require the members of hierarchical organizations to rise to a certain rank within a given period of time. Those who fail to do so are forced to leave. Under such systems, officers have no chance to simply retain their position since—by design—members can only remain at each rank for a limited time.

Need to compete for advancement. With security organizations being pyramid-shaped and the number of available positions declining at each career step, officers striving for promotions are necessarily in direct competition with their peers. In this contest for higher posts, individuals have to constantly assert themselves against competitors in order to make it through the organizational bottlenecks. From the moment they enter the organization and well into their careers, officers are measured against their cohort, i.e. the cadets they started together with. In effect, this turns careers in the autocratic security apparatus into a long horse race between the same jockeys.

On top of this intense race within the same cohort, high fliers from the following cohort further aggravate the struggle for promotion. As in many other government agencies, security organizations such as the police and the army hire new members based on regular recruitment cycles. Each new wave of recruits pushing up the hierarchy adds yet another group of competitors against which the slightly older cohort is evaluated and compared with. This competition usually accompanies officers throughout their professional lives. Officers know that at every rank level, a certain share will come away empty-handed. As a result, the built-in bottlenecks often generate rivalries among junior- and mid-level officers, which peak at the latest when it is about admission to the senior ranks.

Incentive to fulfill specified promotion criteria. Promotion systems produce winners and losers. The criteria determine which individuals with which profiles are most likely to prevail in the competition for higher ranks, and which are most likely to fail (Figure 2.2). The ability to outdo peers depends on whether subordinates meet the promotion requirements, which may be based on past achievements, individual traits, or personal connections.[5] In effect, officers have a strong incentive to tick as many boxes on the list of promotion criteria as they can in order to climb up the ranks. While one can do little to meet certain criteria such as, for example, the own ethnicity, other criteria can be met or even exceeded. For example, skills can be acquired, performance can be shown, and connections can be built.

In nepotist security organizations where promotions fundamentally depend on connections, officers must access the right networks and win the personal trust of influential patrons

[5]Promotion requirements may differ across career levels. For instance, posts at the entry level may be allocated based on performance while higher positions may be based on connections (Moore and Trout 1978).

as soon as possible. One's affiliation to a particular family or clan may serve as a direct entrance ticket to privileged circles. The vast majority of officers, however, need to build connections with their direct superiors and convince them of their personal loyalty. In order to further increase their promotion prospects, officers are well-advised to capitalize on every opportunity to personally interact with their higher-ups such as, for example, at the officers' mess. In addition, of course, exclusive clubs, fraternities, and foundations offer good opportunities to build up a powerful network. For a career-seeking officer in a nepotist security organization, this means starting early and being persistent.

In meritocratic organizations where it is about individual performance, officers also lay the foundation for future advancement at an early stage. The importance of early achievements is particularly well documented for careers within the military where "[p]romotions are consistently based on achievement criteria, which include relative standing in one's graduating class from the military academy, [and] attendance at advanced training centers" (Nordlinger 1977, 43).[6] Final grades at the military academy demonstrate the officer's competence and aptitude. Those with the best grades also have the best chances of being invited to advanced training courses or gaining access to one of the higher education institutions, such as Command and Staff Schools or War Colleges. At these institutions, officers may not only become experts in specific areas, but most importantly, they acquire the managerial knowledge and leadership skills needed to assume commanding positions that ultimately open the doors to the top.

Irrespective of whether security organizations operate on meritocratic or nepotist promotion systems, what unifies them is that those officers who fail to meet the criterion in place have little chance of improving their positions. What happens to those who do not meet the promotion criteria in place? And how do they go about it?

2.3 The Loser's Dilemma

Officers who are no longer competitive in an authoritarian security apparatus are under significant career pressure. Believing that higher ranks are unattainable and that one's ambitions are being denied can create feelings of professional rejection, envy, or even existential fears. This load may motivate officers to consider extreme action to overcome their career problem and make it to the top. In order to better understand these considerations and thus see how career pressure shapes extreme officer behavior, we have to put ourselves into the shoes of those at the losing end of the promotion system and describe the dilemma they confront. For career-pressured officers, simply transitioning from the authoritarian security

[6]Early performance is even important in nepotist regimes, as personal networks have less impact on promotions at lower ranks (Moore and Trout 1978, 460-1; Sassoon 2016, 106-8).

apparatus to the civilian world is hardly an option. Such a move is associated with great professional and private difficulties.

The professional challenges stem from the fact that officers are highly specialized professionals. Years of training turn them into a "peculiarly expert at directing the application of violence" (Huntington 1985, 12). While these skills allow officers to protect those in power from foreign armies, domestic insurgents, or defiant protesters, such abilities are less valuable for finding lucrative and stable employment in the corporate world. For officers who need to leave the security apparatus, the prospects for a second career in the private economy are often bleak. The specialized skills they have acquired during their service time are usually not in high demand outside of the regime apparatus, which makes it challenging to find a new job with a comparable income.[7] Limited job opportunities and the risk of financial insecurity can result in high psychological stress and anxiety, as officers with low advancement prospects try to navigate an uncertain future.

Apart from the strong specialized knowledge, the all-encompassing socialization within autocratic security organizations produces several stressors for career-pressured officers. Individuals are commonly recruited into the security apparatus in their formative years, which allows the organization to break the cadets' mentalities and put them back together as professional soldiers (Jackson et al. 2012). Seemingly endless drills, repeated inspections, and tough physical training, coupled with specific initiation rituals, hazing, and political indoctrination commonly forge a strong identification with the organization and regime (Barnett 1967; Dornbusch 1955; Wood 2008). The socialization process also exposes officers to the organization's distinct culture, structure, and values, which not only shape the individuals' goals and aspirations but also give them a sense of purpose and belonging that is rare to find in the civilian world (Akerlof and Kranton 2005; Böhmelt, Escribà-Folch and Pilster 2019). As a result, officers who see their professional future threatened may experience a deep identity crisis and face questions about their purpose, value, and future life.

Career-pressured officers are also likely to develop feelings of envy. After years of intense competition with members of the same rank, the officer's own cohort constitutes the most important reference group. For officers with bleak career prospects, being overlooked for promotion while close comrades-in-arms are granted to take their next career step, may lead to frustration and jealousy. Such feelings are particularly likely to occur in situations where career-pressured officers are convinced that they had been unfairly treated or discriminated. For officers, as for many others, the belief to deserve better is a strong motivator to actively

[7] In autocracies, career setbacks may damage an officer's reputation well beyond the respective organization, thereby further complicating the search for attractive positions outside of the security apparatus. Potential employers may use career problems to infer the officer's personal suitability and regime loyalty. Such conclusions are particularly damaging for officers in regimes where the state apparatus is closely intertwined with economic sectors.

change things, even if this entails high personal risks or radical changes in behavior (Fourati 2018; Zizzo 2003).[8]

On top of these fears and grievances, officers with poor career outlooks may be concerned not only about their own future but also the future and well-being of their most loved ones. A security officer "normally lives and works apart from the rest of society" which implies that "physically and socially he probably has fewer nonprofessional contacts than most other professional men" (Huntington 1985, 16). In contrast to liberal regimes, dictatorships have a paramount interest in keeping the members of the security apparatus and their families as separated from the civilian world as possible. To ensure that officers will loyally defend them against revolutionized masses, many leaders minimize social interaction between the repressors and the potentially repressed by maintaining separated systems of schooling, healthcare, housing, and other spheres of life. Thus, when career-pressured officers leave the apparatus, their families practically have to start over. They have to move out of the premises, give up on privileges, and find their way into a civilian society they barely know.

In light of all these problems, officers under pressure have strong incentives to remain in the dictator's security apparatus and unlock their career blockade. But how can they do that? What options do they have?

2.4 Two All-in Strategies

As the personal and professional costs of leaving the authoritarian security apparatus are so high, most officers under career pressure are desperate to do anything they can in order to stay in and salvage their careers. The question is: How? How can they remain part of the apparatus and avoid the grievances and insecurities of a dropout? And how can they still achieve their ambitions and rise in the hierarchy, even though they are no longer competitive?

The answer is: If officers with bleak career prospects want to reach the most lucrative positions in the authoritarian security apparatus, they must go all in and put everything on one card. In a dictatorial system, this essentially leaves them with two hard choices on opposite ends of the loyalty spectrum: *Detouring* and *forcing*. Those officers who embark on the detouring strategy are putting all their chips on the current regime. By taking the arduous detour of doing the regime's dirty work, they try to send the leadership a costly

[8] When officers compare their careers to more successful colleagues, they may feel a sense of relative deprivation (Pettigrew 2002; Smith et al. 2012)—the perceived discrepancy between their own situation and the situation of others in one's reference group. Relative deprivation is among the most prominent explanations of why individuals decide to take action against perceived injustices. It has been used to understand individual participation in social movements, civil unrest, rebellion, and terrorism (e.g., Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch 2011; Gurr 1970; Hechter, Pfaff and Underwood 2016; Horowitz 1985; Siroky et al. 2020).

signal of their reliability and determination. The hope is that the regime will recognize their value, appreciate their sacrifice, and reward their extreme loyalty with promotions. In contrast, career-pressured officers who engage in the forcing strategy are betting everything they have against the current regime. If they actively take part in removing the current regime, these officers are speculating that the successor government will reward them for their risky efforts.

Next, we detail how the logic of career pressures shapes extreme loyalty or disloyalty among officers on the micro level, which notoriously manifests in repression and coup attempts on the macro level.

2.4.1 Detouring

Pressured officers who pursue the detouring strategy attempt to salvage their careers in accordance with the rules set by the sitting regime. Metaphorically speaking, since the regular stairways to the upper floors are blocked by those who better fit the promotion criteria, career-pressured individuals can only take the rusty fire ladder to climb up. In the authoritarian security apparatus, using this rusty ladder means carrying out the most arduous tasks the regime has available. If officers are to salvage their careers on the terms and conditions of the current promotion system, they must convince their superiors of how valuable they can be to the regime in place. By doing the regime's dirty work, officers with grim career prospects may hope to compensate for their lack of competitiveness in other dimensions. For such an unorthodox detour to pay off, the respective task must be i) essential to the regime and ii) so filthy that nobody else wants to do it.

What do career-pressured officers expect from carrying out the regime's dirty work? Why would they assume that taking on the most unpopular jobs that no one else wants to do could land them more prestigious positions? The officers' rationale behind detouring is threefold.

1. By volunteering for dirty work and showing extraordinary dedication, officers disadvantaged in the promotion system can hope to (re)gain the attention of their superiors, which is usually reserved for the winners and high-fliers. In order to have a chance for promotion and to build up a certain reputation, visibility with the higher echelons is essential. Officers who volunteer to carry out the regime's dirty yet important work that no one else wants to do may thus expect to again move up in their superiors' notebooks and the list of future promotion candidates.

2. More importantly, career-pressured officers may hope to stand out from their peers by sending a costly signal of extreme loyalty to the regime. Superiors in security organizations must know that they can always rely on their subordinates but they cannot be sure how loyal individual underlings really are and how far they are willing

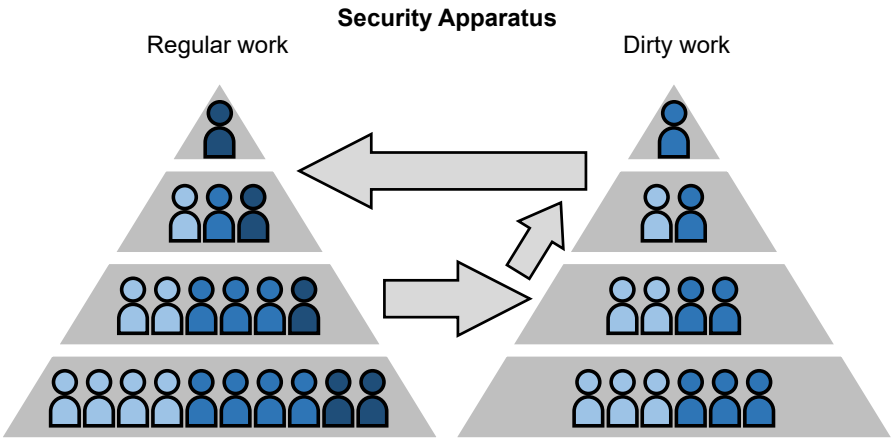
to go. Good grades alone or an officer's contacts provide rather little information about personal regime loyalty when it matters most. In contrast, the voluntary execution of the regime's dirty work constitutes hands-on evidence of loyalty, which should be much more revealing to the leadership than mere lip service from those who have always climbed the ranks with ease and thus never had to demonstrate real skin in the game. Career-pressured officers putting themselves forward for the most arduous tasks demonstrate their willingness to make sacrifices for the regime, even if the nature of the dirty work comes with enormous psychological burdens and violates basic moral principles.[9] These officers may therefore hope that loyally carrying out dirty work will give them a decisive advantage over their competitors. If everything is going according to plan, the regime will recognize their value and reward the officers' sacrifices with promotions.

3. Finally, detouring officers can speculate on further improving their bleak career prospects by avoiding direct competition with the best-performing peers. Career-pressured officers understand that high-flyers, who fully meet the promotion criteria, should see little need to take up burdensome dirty work or join the non-prestigious units charged with its execution. If those who get promoted anyway are not serving in the dirty work units, the benchmark in those units should thus be lower as well. In other words, it is easier for career-pressured officers to stand out and ultimately assert themselves when the entire unit is staffed by equally uncompetitive colleagues. In the best-case scenario, shown in Figure 2.3, officers climb the ranks in the dirty work unit, gain a reputation, make influential contacts, and then return to regular security work at a more senior level. So if all goes according to plan, detouring officers can not only delay the end of their careers and squeeze themselves through the next higher bottleneck but even acquire one of the lucrative positions and leave behind more competitive peers who seemed far ahead. From the perspective of pressured officers standing at a crossroads in their careers, such prospects can motivate them to go the extra mile and shoulder the burden of the regime's dirty work.

What dirty jobs does an authoritarian security apparatus have available? Where can officers with bleak career outlooks find unpopular tasks? And which units offer the most filthy assignments where losers of the promotion system can stand out? In every autocratic security apparatus, there is (at least) one organization that offers the unorthodox career paths that career-pressured officers are looking for. This organization is the secret police. These units are charged with particularly evil work. While carrying out such work is indispensable for the regime, few individuals are really up for doing it. In the name of protecting the regime, secret police agents must spy on, intimidate, torture, and even kill people. In contrast to regular policemen or soldiers, agents do not use these measures against ordinary criminals

[9] According to Grossman (1996, 222), agents who commit atrocities know that they make a "Faustian bargain with evil" in which they pay with "their peace of mind."

Figure 2.3: Detouring



Note: Graph shows two hierarchical, pyramidal organizations within the larger security apparatus. The organization on the left offers regular tasks, whereas the one on the right is supposed to carry out dirty work. The schematic coloring of the officers who serve within them indicates the extent to which they fit the promotion criteria defined by the apparatus. The darker the coloring the higher the officers' fit. Arrows trace the ideal career path, as envisioned by career-pressured officers pursuing the detouring strategy.

or foreign armies but "more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population" (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965, 22). This requires agents to regularly perpetrate repression that defies moral norms, incurs social stigma, and entails high psychological burdens even for trained specialists (Grossman 1996, 222–6; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo 2002, 214–31).[10] Brazilian secret policemen, for example, "manifested such stress-related symptoms as insomnia, hypertension, fear, and depression [...] exacerbated by an inability to talk about their work" (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo 2002, 15). Compared to service in the regular security apparatus, secret police work is emotionally much more "difficult, arduous, and exhausting" (Plate and Darvi 1982, 128). High-flyers who do not face career pressure and can advance with ease should therefore have little incentive to engage in burdensome secret police tasks (Browning 1998, 169). For detouring officers, this reduces competition and improves their prospects for promotion within the secret police.

Furthermore, career-pressured officers have an incentive to join the secret police, because they can expect that those who carry out undesirable secret police tasks signal their commitment to the regime. As secret police agents, they have the opportunity to build a reputation of being loyal and zealous—characteristics that are highly valued by both superiors and leaders. In the words of a Uruguayan officer, repressive zeal was "rewarded by the authorities either in promotion or in assignment" (Plate and Darvi 1982, 141). While officers often have difficulties proving such reliability in the regular security apparatus (Moore and Trout 1978, 455–6), secret police service allows agents to demonstrate their loyalty by spying, kidnapping, torturing, and neutralizing alleged regime enemies.[11] Officers with career problems

[10] Agents may also worry about future repercussions, as dictators' henchmen are often the first to be held accountable after the regime's fall (DeMeritt 2015).

[11] In the extreme case, this may even entail going against one's friends or acquaintances.

may therefore hope that completing such arduous tasks will not only improve their chances of advancement within the secret police, but also open doors to higher ranks back in the regular security organizations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that agents do indeed see their secret police service as an opportunity to salvage their faltering careers. In Nazi Germany, for example, police officers "blocked by the 'bottleneck' of seniors ahead of them" sought to join the Gestapo—anticipating that they "lacked any hope of status" otherwise (Browder 1996, 22, 83). Similarly, Polish functionaries saw the secret police as a vehicle for social advancement (Dudek and Paczkowski 2005, 243), and Paraguayan officers who "could not make it up the ranks" (Plate and Darvi 1982, 134) took over the unpopular task of torture. Driven by the hope of future reward and promotion, career-pressured officers are therefore likely to put themselves forward for the secret police.

2.4.2 Forcing

In contrast to the detouring strategy, where officers submit to the rules of the regime and go the extra mile to save their careers, the forcing approach constitutes a fundamental break with the existing system. To revisit the metaphor above, rather than climbing the arduous fire escape, officers pursuing the forcing strategy enter the forbidden elevator that takes them straight to the executive floor. In the domain of the authoritarian security apparatus, the unauthorized use of the elevator reserved for the higher echelons means actively turning against the regime. If pressured officers want to break their career blockade with force, they must become part of the gravediggers of the old regime and the midwives of the new one. By doing away with the current regime, officers with grim carer prospects may hope to overtake those peers who have been favored by the current leadership and its rigid promotion schedules. For such an unorthodox forcing approach to pay off, the act of sabotage must i) be successful such that the new leadership will come to power, and ii) the individual's contribution has to be so significant that it will materialize in a career boost.

Why exactly would career-pressured officers believe that undermining the incumbent regime could salvage their careers? What gains do they hope to reap from their disloyalty, considering how severely they would be punished if things went wrong? The officers' rationale behind forcing is threefold.

1. By participating in sabotage against the regime, career-pressured officers may hope to put an end to the system that is preventing their professional advancement. Most officers understand that the actual targets are not their direct superiors, who probably also just have to abide by the rules, but those at the top who make them. The goal must necessarily be to attack the system as such and depose the decision-makers responsible for the perceived injustices and unfulfilled ambitions. "Students from Aristotle to Brinton have noted that the gap between expectations and achievement is the essential

factor in revolutions" (Schlesinger 1966, 2-3). In this sense, disadvantaged officers are no exception when they try to escape their career deadlock by breaking with the very regime they have pledged to protect.

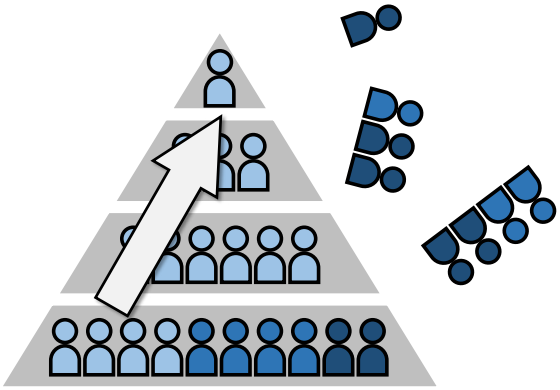
2. In the event of a successful overthrow, those officers who helped eliminate the regime can expect on being rewarded for their efforts by the successor regime. They have reasons to believe that the new regime will be very generous, not only out of gratitude but also to avoid the risk of falling victim to the officers' next sabotaging operation. On the one hand, the hard-pressed saboteurs may assume that the new government should be very grateful to those it owes its political power. On the other hand, officers who have just ousted the previous leadership might anticipate that the new regime is well aware of their capacity to overcome problems of coordination and collective action. Accordingly, most saboteurs understand that they have significant leverage and that the regime must be forthcoming should it seek to stay in power for longer. Career-pressured officers may thus speculate that their forcing strategy will provide them with immediate access to lucrative positions and gratifications.

3. Finally, career-pressured officers may expect that forcing significantly improves their long-term advancement prospects. Those who actively helped to install the new leadership have probably also connections to the upper echelons. Officers with career problems may use these channels to influence key features of the promotion system in their favor. Changes may entail altering the requirements and cycles through which officers are elevated to the next higher ranks. This offers career-pressured saboteurs the unique opportunity to adapt new promotion criteria to their own profiles. The officers opting for the forcing strategy therefore may not only hope to overtake their previously more competitive peers, but to cement newly gained career advantages, as shown in Figure 2.4.

What is forcing behavior in the authoritarian security apparatus? Which actions can career-pressured officers undertake in order to force their way up? Members of the security apparatus have undergone extensive training in the use of force, they possess the tactical and operational knowledge to jam communications, capture buildings and neutralize target persons—and they have access to plenty of weapons and ammunition. Unarmed governments usually stand no chance against a well-planned operation by disloyal officers who manage to exploit the element of surprise and leave the remaining parts of regime guardians paralyzed. Forcing by career-pressured officers is thus the participation in a coup d'état. It is the illegal and overt attempt by members of the security apparatus to unseat the sitting executive (Powell and Thyne 2011, 252).

Participating in a coup attempt is a high-risk endeavor. Historically, every second coup attempt fails with the majority of conspirators usually paying with their lives (Easton and Siverson 2018; Singh 2014). Most people probably think of coups as acts carried out by the

Figure 2.4: Forcing



Note: Graph shows one hierarchical, pyramidal security organization within the larger security apparatus. The schematic coloring of the officers who serve within them indicates the extent to which they fit the promotion criteria defined by the apparatus. The darker the coloring the higher the officers' fit. The arrow demonstrates career-pressured officers speculating that pursuing the forcing strategy will unlock their career blockade and bring to power a favorable regime.

entire security apparatus and led by the highest-ranking generals. However, the majority of coups are planned and executed by surprisingly small officer factions of varying ranks and branches (Albrecht, Koehler and Schutz 2021; Luttwak 2016; Singh 2014). A key reason for this is that officer corps are internally heterogeneous entities. While some members might be open to a coup, many others are likely to outright oppose it. This implies that if the former want to successfully oust the government, they need to make sure to keep their plans remain secret. As every additional accomplice increases the risk of detection, the number of insiders has to be as small as possible and every single participant must reliably complete their assigned task dead on time. Put simply, all cogs in the coup clockwork must mesh.

Coup operations hold available a variety of indispensable tasks whose fulfillment should earn the executor the utmost recognition and gratitude from the new leadership. For career-pressured officers, playing an active role in a risky coup endeavor, therefore represents a unique opportunity not only to salvage their career but to catapult themselves into entirely new professional spheres. For this to work, on the day of the coup itself, the main operational objective is to take out the leader along with key ministers and other loyal regime elites who otherwise could take over, organize resistance, and prevent the successful consolidation of the new regime (Luttwak 2016). First and foremost, this requires several unit commanders ideally from the dictator's innermost security circle. Otherwise, even more men- and firepower are needed to break the resistance of loyal elite units like the presidential guard. Simultaneously, officers have to carry out many other tasks. Government buildings must be occupied, strategically important access routes need to be sealed off, potentially loyal reinforcement troops have to be kept at bay, their communications infrastructure must be cut down, major transportation hubs need to be closed, national media stations have to be

taken over, pro-coup narratives must be broadcast, and public protest by unions or other groups aligned with the old regime must be eliminated.

Failure of any one of these simultaneous tasks may derail the entire operation. Historically, military takeovers have failed for various, sometimes seemingly trivial, reasons. In 1917, for example, the attempted coup led by the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, General Kornilov, literally lost its steam when the railroad workers' union refused to work the rails to Petrograd. As a result, Kornilov's remotely based troops never made it to the capital (Luttwak 2016, 57). In 1979, a young air force officer, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, led a coup attempt against the highly unpopular military junta in Ghana but failed partly because the soldiers did not run a siren which should have mobilized an entire motorized regiment (Singh 2014, 158). As a result, most of the coup supporters lost faith and backed down. In 1982, an initially successful coup attempt in Kenya flopped when the officers in control of the national radio station were prevented from broadcasting their messages. As they had failed to also capture the transmitting facilities, "someone loyal to the government soon pulled the plug and stopped all transmitting" (Kebschull 1994, 572). Finally, the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey failed because the plotters had to start five hours early after the secret services had found out about their conspiracy. As a result, the helicopter packed with special forces who had the mission to neutralize President Erdogan arrived 20 minutes late at his Marmaris hotel. This allowed Erdogan to give TV interviews via Facetime and call on his supporters to defy the coup plot (Shaheem 2016). The anecdotes demonstrate how important it is for coup plotters to combine the element of surprise with the meticulous execution of tasks. They also explain why career-pressured officers can expect to be generously rewarded for their participation by the new regime.

2.5 The Leaders' Perspective

Having established why career-pressured officers have an incentive to participate in repression or coups, let's change the perspective and put ourselves into the shoes of a regime or coup leader. Does it make sense for the dictator to allow losers into his secret police? Likewise, is the mastermind behind a coup likely to reveal his secret plans to career-pressured officers and entrust them with an important task? To answer these questions, we start from the observation that both regime and coup leaders, just like any superiors, face delegation problems (e.g., Dragu and Przeworski 2019; Tyson 2018; Svolik 2012). While both would want the work to be carried out as they would have done themselves, they commonly lack the time and resources to do so. This implies that leaders must delegate essential tasks to officers who in turn may simply decide to pursue their own goals instead (Arrow 1985). In technical terms, this means that every leader struggles with problems of adverse selection and moral hazard (Dixit 2002). Put simply, neither regime nor coup leaders can know for

sure to what extent the interests of their respective subordinates overlap with their own, which makes it hard to identify the "right" person for the job. And on top, they have a hard time verifying the actions of the hired subordinate, making it easier for the latter to shirk and misreport. Next, we discuss how much the interests of regime and coup leaders are threatened by disobedient underlings, and what they can do to maximize obedience within their secret police and among coup participants, respectively.

2.5.1 Regime Leaders

What are dictators looking for when staffing their secret police? Regime leaders are primarily interested in surviving in office (Bueno De Mesquita et al. 2005). Existential threats to dictators' rule usually emerge from revolutionary masses or disloyal members of the regime elite (Svolik 2012).[12] The dictator's knee-jerk reaction to such challenges is usually the use of maximum violence (Davenport 2007). However, as such a response may have unpredictable consequences, most autocrats rely on capable and loyal secret police forces to prevent risky end-game scenarios in the first place (Greitens 2016; Plate and Darvi 1982; Scharpf and Gläßel 2020). The idea is to deploy secret police agents who spot emerging threats and terrorize people into submission before the regime faces an insurmountable challenge.

For autocrats, both the risk and consequences of disobedience among the secret police are grave. Disloyalty in the core repressive unit usually marks the end of the dictator's rule by revealing his weakness and enabling opposition groups and rival elites to turn against him (Albrecht and Ohl 2016; DeMeritt 2015; Dragu and Lupu 2018). At the same time, officers are most likely to shirk when they find tasks unpleasant or burdensome (Milgram 1974). This certainly applies to secret police work, which routinely transgresses almost universally held moral beliefs. Spying, torturing, disappearing, and destroying the lives of alleged regime enemies and their families entail enormous psychological costs that most people seek to avoid (Browning 1998; Grossman 1996; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo 2002).[13] The dictator must thus fear that his secret police will not go after enemies with the vigor needed to let him sleep easy. In the leader's worst-case scenario core, the repressive unit abandons him when he needs its unconditional loyalty the most, such as in times of mass uproar or a vicious power grab by rival elites.

[12]Unlike in democracies, popular elections, parliaments, and critical media do not usually pose a threat to autocrats. In autocracies, elections are not designed to be lost but to mimic democratic principles and generate legitimacy (Gandhi 2008; Hyde and Marinov 2012; Magaloni 2006). Parliaments serve as vehicles for cooptation to absorb and corrupt opposition figures (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Gerschewski 2013; Reuter and Robertson 2015). And since the media is typically not free, journalists are rarely investigative or openly critical of the regime (Gehlbach and Sonin 2014; Gläßel and Paula 2020; Guriev and Treisman 2022; Huang 2015).

[13]Historical accounts suggest that during combat more than two-thirds of professional soldiers, including those who fought in the American Civil War and the two World Wars, avoid killing their enemies, let alone civilians. Many soldiers deliberately miss their targets or seem to avoid enemy confrontation altogether (Grossman 1996, 3-28).

To make matters worse for the dictator, the monitoring of subordinate units and agents—a standard tool for increasing compliance in "normal" environments (Dixit 2002; Miller 2005)—is highly impracticable in the realm of the secret police.[14] To be effective, secret police organizations must be able to operate in the shadows. The whole purpose of intelligence work is to be secretive and autonomous. Only then can they effectively detect and eliminate looming regime threats. Regime leaders interested in an effective secret police force, therefore, cannot resort to extensive monitoring to keep secret police agents in check.[15] With monitoring efforts being largely ineffective in generating the necessary compliance, regime leaders must think carefully about who they hire and whether they should accept career-pressured officers who willingly put themselves forward.

A naive dictator with a meritocratic security apparatus might think that the most successful officers would make for the most viable secret police agents. After all, the top performers should also be most capable of detecting and eliminating threats. However, authoritarian leaders have good reason to doubt that the winners in a merit-based system would make zealous secret police agents. Most importantly, competent high-flyers lack the incentive to lower themselves to do the regime's dirty work. Their careers run smoothly, and they would have very little to win from undertaking the burdensome detouring over the secret police. On top, the most skilled agents may simply remain idle once their leader is in danger, knowing that they are indispensable under any successor regime irrespective of its political color (Zakharov 2016).[16] In light of these constraints, dictators are thus likely to admit career-pressured officers to their key coercive unit even if they are not the most competent or the most skilled.[17] This way, the regime can fully benefit from top performers in the regular security apparatus while exploiting the career pressures of underachievers to forge loyal secret police.

[14]Monitoring must be comprehensive in order to be effective. However, such oversight does not change the preferences of subordinates and thus fails to motivate them for work they fundamentally oppose (Brehm and Gates 1999).

[15]Notwithstanding, many dictators set up parallel institutions to constantly spy on each other. We do not argue that counterbalancing is ineffective per se. De Bruin (2020) shows that parallel security structures and the presence of paramilitary organizations outside of the regular military reduce the success rate of revolts but fail to lower the number of actual attempts.

[16]According to Egorov and Sonin (2011), regime leaders might even need to worry that capable agents use their competence to seize an all-dominant position in the regime, which makes them an additional internal threat. By contrast, McMahon and Slantchev (2015) argue that any regime has the incentive to hire skilled guardians while providing them with limited resources in order to prevent the agents from developing an independent power base on par with the political leadership itself. Rulers would hire incompetent agents only if they mistakenly considered them competent. As the authors point out, constituent components of the studies' proposed mechanisms are barely quantifiable and have thus not been systematically tested (Egorov and Sonin 2011, 906; McMahon and Slantchev 2015, 307–11).

[17]Autocrats seem to be well aware of the competence-loyalty tradeoff. For example, Alexandru Drăghici, the former interior minister of Romania, bluntly stated that his secret police agents "had a fairly low level of training and general knowledge, but that these shortcomings were compensated for by their powerful revolutionary enthusiasm" (Deletant 2005, 304). Likewise, members of the Bezpieka secret police in communist Poland have been described as "extremely undereducated" with "no political or social experience" (Dudek and Paczkowski 2005, 242–3). Accounts of the czarist Okhrana, Lenin's Cheka, Hitler's Security Service, the State Security of Czechoslovakia, and other organizations hint at similar patterns (Blažek and Žáček 2005; Browder 1996; Zuckerman 1996).

How do regime leaders feel about career-pressured officers in nepotist systems? Again, naive dictators might simply believe that members of their preferred ethnic or religious group would automatically be the regime's most ardent defenders. Ultimately, their own privileges are tied to the regime's stay in power. But as in meritocratic systems, most leaders probably understand that winners in nepotistic security apparatuses see little need to personally get their hands dirty if they have a smooth career anyways. As for the high-performers in a meritocratic system, for well-connected officers in a nepotist system, there is too little to win from detouring. In addition, leaders may anticipate that officers in the favored group face a classic collective action problem (Olson 1971). While they all want the regime to stay in power, none is probably willing to actually shoulder the dreadful work. As a result, the shared interest in the survival of the regime might not materialize in personal diligence. More savvy dictators, in turn, likely anticipate that disadvantaged officers are determined to demonstrate their value with the utmost loyalty and zeal in the hope of obtaining a significant career boost. Regime leaders overseeing a nepotistic security apparatus are therefore unlikely to counteract the self-selection of hitherto discriminated officers eager to loyally execute dirty work in the hope of climbing up.[18]

2.5.2 Coup Leaders

What are coup organizers looking for when recruiting co-conspirators? Generally speaking, coup leaders want to take power without being caught or punished (Luttwak 2016). Irrespective of whether they pursue personal, corporate, or ideological goals with their power grab, all coup masterminds ultimately want to survive their conspiratory efforts and not end up behind bars or get killed. It goes without saying that the chances of survival first and foremost depend on whether the attempt successfully ousts the government or not. Regimes are usually harsh on the organizers of failed coups (Bokobza et al. 2022).[19] While the universe of failed conspirators across time and space is hardly verifiable—let alone their subsequent fates, it seems highly likely that only a few are able to flee the country in due time or escape punishment altogether. According to one estimate, over 60% of all individuals involved in failed coup attempts either paid with their life or ended up in prison (Easton and Siverson 2018, 599). "The major participants captured after an abortive coup are often promptly

[18]The logic of career pressure may thus also help us understand why, "despite a widespread assumption that 'packing' is the ubiquitous solution to ensure bureaucratic compliance, most state bureaucracies are not actually packed with the leader's in-group members" (Hassan 2020, 4). Even in countries with highly politicized social cleavages and exclusive promotion schemes, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq or President Assad's Syria, the composition of security organizations is more heterogeneous than commonly assumed (Sassoon 2016, 124).

[19]This is not to say that regimes react uniformly to failed coup attempts. Some leaders may find it beneficial to downplay the scale of a conspiracy to avoid the impression that opposition within the security apparatus might be more widespread (Easton and Siverson 2018). In some circumstances, they might even feel compelled to refrain from extreme punishments against conspirators, fearing that such retaliating measures would lead to an outcry among officers or motivate another potentially more dangerous coup attempt (Sudduth 2017*a*).

executed, with or without the formality of a trial" (Kebschull 1994, 576).[20] The enormous dangers for coup leaders require them to put together a team of conspirators that can get the job done and is extremely reliable.

For coup leaders, the risk of disobedience among potential coup candidates is nerve-racking high. On the one hand, when approaching potential co-conspirators, coup leaders need to reveal enough information in order to convince the counterpart of the plan and its high chances of success. On the other hand, they have to think very carefully about whom they approach in the first place and whom they trust to have enough grudges against the regime to resist the temptation of ratting them out directly. When approached, most officers are unlikely to initially know whether the regime is simply testing their loyalty or whether there is a genuine offer to become a coup participant. In addition, even if the officer considers the proposal to be sincere, rather than joining a risky putsch operation they might consider betraying the coup organizers, leaking the plan to the higher-ups, and cashing in the reward from the sitting regime. This implies that coup leaders must keep the conspiracy circle as small as possible. Given that there are no second chances, every contact needs to be well thought out.

Moreover, for coup leaders monitoring also only presents a very blunt sword. In fact, the constant supervision of individual coup participants appears even less feasible than in the case of the secret police. To keep conspiracies secret in the planning stage of a coup, written reports or frequent personal meetings pose extreme risks and have to be avoided altogether.[21] On the day of the overthrow itself, monitoring is downright impossible. Every officer involved must autonomously carry out their task, while the overall coup circle is too small for coup participants to check on each other (Luttwak 2016).[22] This implies that coup leaders have to be all the more selective in recruiting their confidants.

At first sight, it might seem plausible to assume that in a meritocratic security apparatus coup plotters would recruit high-performing colleagues. Their skills and intellect might ensure that every coup task is carried out properly, minimizing the risk that the coup would fail due to ill-judgment, bad decisions, or technical errors. Coup leaders might also expect competent commanders to have more authority and esteem, which would bring more loyal units to the operation. But again, coup organizers probably anticipate that competent officers in a meritocratic system have little to gain from a successful coup. Their career is on

[20] Studying the aftermath of three exemplary failed military takeovers in 1989-90, Kebschull (1994, 576) reckons around 100 officers being killed for their involvement in the coup attempt against the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, a minimum of 69 executed Nigerian army officers for their putsch against President Ibrahim Babangida, and the shooting of 28 Sudanese officers on the first day after the failed coup attempt against Omar al-Bashir alone.

[21] Coup conspiracies thereby share similarities with other clandestine and covert undertakings such as terrorist plots. Shapiro (2013) argues that terrorist leaders may build bureaucratic control systems to monitor their followers, which in turn increases the risk of the organization being exposed and destroyed.

[22] In addition, coup leaders know that threats of punishment are inevitably empty since they can penalize disobedience only after a successful overthrow. However, an ongoing coup operation is doomed to collapse as soon as the first officers start to chicken out (Singh 2014).

track already, and they are predestined for the most lucrative positions anyway. Coup leaders will therefore have a hard time convincing high flyers of the marginal personal benefits they might receive in the event of a successful overthrow of the current regime. They might be equally concerned that approaching high performers will be directly leaked to the leadership, ruining the entire conspiracy before it could actually take off. Coup leaders are thus well-advised to focus on those on the losing end—hard-pressed officers who hold enough grudges against the regime leadership and see their coup participation as the last chance to salvage their careers.

Finally, coup leaders in nepotist systems have even fewer reasons to approach the beneficiaries of the current regime. Other than high-flyers in a merit-based system, well-connected cronies are unlikely to have high competence or abilities that they could lend to the conspiracy. Probably the only real benefit that a coup organizer could expect from hiring some of the most privileged officers is their central position. These could be exploited to access the regime's most neuralgic points. For example, having recruited officers with excellent connections to the ruling elite might facilitate the quick neutralization of key ministers or the ruler himself. However, clever coup organizers are unlikely to fall victim to such foolhardy fantasies. First, the well-connected cronies have relatively little to gain and a great deal to lose from going against their regime. Second, under normal circumstances, it is virtually impossible to find out whether—deep down—any one of the favored officers actually harbors a grudge against the dictator. And third, any attempt of finding out who is against the regime leadership is fraught with extreme danger of blowing the conspirators' cover. In light of these risks and dangers, coup organizers have the best chance of success when they rely on career-pressured officers–those with the strongest personal interest in bringing down the old regime and advancing their careers in the new one.

2.6 Summary

Who serves in the most brutal units in dictatorships to carry out the regime's dirty work? Conversely, what individuals become active members of a group of coup plotters to violently overthrow the very government they have sworn to protect? And above all, why do they do it? This chapter suggests that the answer lies in the interplay between the organizational anatomy of the authoritarian security apparatus and the career interests of the individual members who serve within it. We argue that the active participation of officers in repression or coups represents two opposite strategies to salvage their own career through detouring or forcing. We expect that career-pressured officers are more likely than their high-flying peers to put themselves forward to carry out arduous secret police work in the hopes of demonstrating their value to the current regime, compensating for their weaknesses, and being rewarded with promotions. Analogously, we hypothesize that professionally disadvantaged

individuals are also more likely than their colleagues with better career prospects to actively participate in coup attempts in the expectation that they can commend themselves to the successor regime and thus boost their careers.

How do we arrive at these expectations? Adopting an organizational perspective, we first describe how the institutional structure of the authoritarian security apparatus shapes the career trajectories and incentives of officers. We identify three institutional features of security organizations with far-reaching behavioral consequences for their members. First, the strictly hierarchical structure of security organizations implies that each higher rank comes with significant gains in pay, power, and prestige, creating strong incentives for officers to seek promotion. Second, the pyramidal shape of the organizations, with an abundance of positions at the bottom but few lucrative posts at the top, produces recurring bottlenecks that require officers to compete with their peers for advancement. And finally, the promotion system defines the requirements officers must meet to climb up. These requirements can be formal qualifications, individual traits, or personal connections. What unites them is that those officers who do not meet the relevant requirements have little chance of advancement and face the highest risk of discharge. These losers are under significant career pressure.

We then go on to clarify why officers on the losing end in the authoritarian security apparatus should have a strong interest in salvaging their careers. To do so, we portray the counterfactual and the bleak prospects for individuals forced to leave the apparatus prematurely. The core of the loser's dilemma is that transitioning out of the authoritarian security apparatus into the civilian world is associated with great professional and private difficulties. Above all, this has to do with the fact that autocracies often deliberately separate the living environments of security officers and their families from the rest of society. Leaving the apparatus in dictatorships may therefore amount to a complete reset, potentially with the loss of significant privileges in areas such as schooling, housing, medical care, etc. Given how frightening the consequences of dismissal from the authoritarian security apparatus appear, pressured officers are likely to look for unorthodox ways to salvage their careers, compensate for their comparative disadvantages, and advance after all.

One of the two unorthodox career-salvaging approaches is detouring. To commend themselves to the current leadership and to demonstrate their value, officers with bleak career prospects go the extra mile and do the regime's dirty work, which is psychologically so burdensome that no one else would want to do it. Eventually, they hope the regime will recognize their efforts and reward them for their personal sacrifices with promotions. More concretely, their rationale is threefold. First, by volunteering for dirty work and showing extraordinary dedication, officers disadvantaged in the promotion system hope to regain the attention of their superiors, which is usually reserved for the winners in the system. Second, by shouldering the psychological burden of the most despicable tasks the repressive apparatus has to offer, they hope to stand out from their peers and signal extreme loyalty to the

regime. Finally, by taking the detour via dirty units like the secret police, career-pressured officers may expect to evade direct competition for promotions with the system winners, who have the luxury of staying clear from the filthiest work.

The other unorthodox strategy to rescue one's career is forcing, which is exactly the opposite of detouring. Namely, career-pressured officers opting for the forcing strategy seek to commend themselves to the next regime by doing everything they can to get rid of the current one. Again, the rationale behind forcing is threefold. In the short run, disadvantaged officers hope that their active sabotaging of the incumbent leadership will successfully eliminate the system responsible for their professional misery. They may further expect that those who actively contributed to the overthrow of the previous regime will be rewarded with promotions for their efforts by the subsequent rulers. And in the long term, they might even hope to use the newfound influence gained from their role in taking power to drive reforms to the promotion system in their favor. In sum, forcing officers hope that their contribution as stirrup holders for the new regime will be reciprocated such that the change in the political leadership eventually also serves as a stepping stone for their own careers.

At the end of this chapter, we then changed the perspective and explained why regime and coup leaders are likely not to counteract the self-selection of career-pressured officers into their ranks. Both superiors in security organizations and coup organizers can take advantage of mundane career pressure to implement their repressive or subversive agenda, respectively. Career-pressured officers may be a key human resource to cement the iron-fist rule of a dictatorship, as much as they can form the nucleus of its gravediggers. In the following chapters, we set out to empirically test our theoretical expectations by examining which individuals—from the wide range of potential candidates—actively participated in the most horrendous acts of state violence or hostile power takeovers and who did not. To accomplish this, we next empirically dissect the dictator's security apparatus, zooming in on the officers and their institutional environment with high-resolution data.

Chapter 3

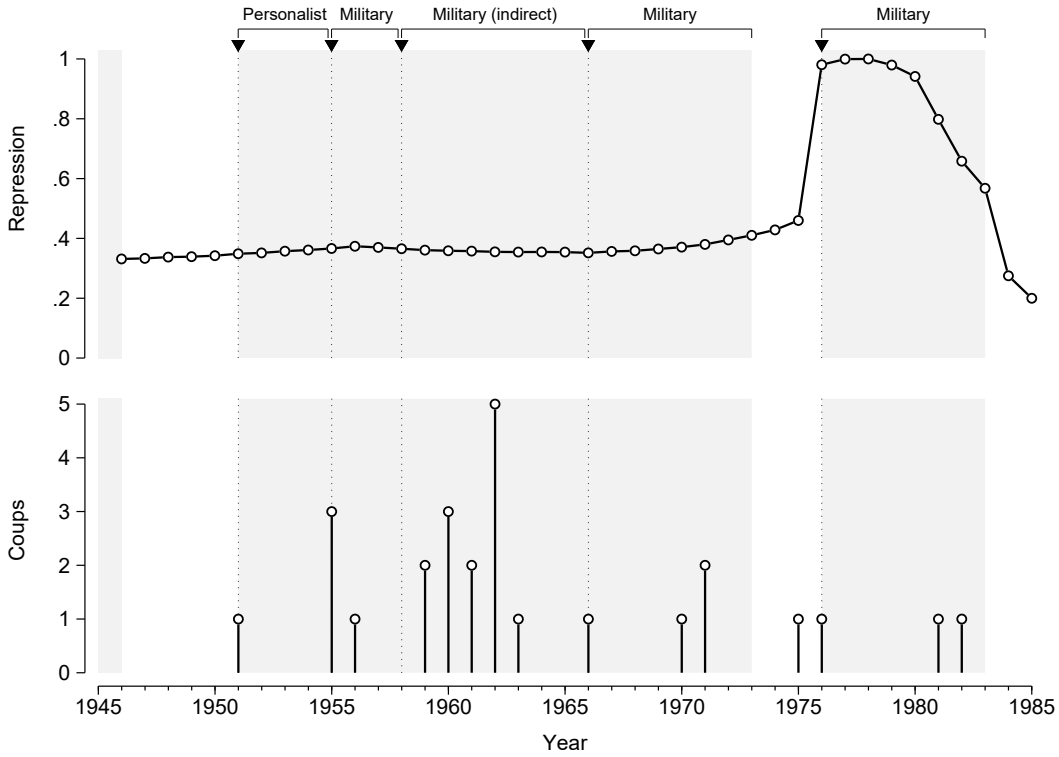
Dissecting a Dictator's Security Apparatus

This chapter lays the empirical groundwork for the systematic investigations of our theoretical expectations. To observe the logic of career pressure in a real-world dictatorship, we dissect Argentina's security apparatus, examine its structure, and trace its operating principles. Throughout its checkered history, the Argentine Army has served as the main instrument of power for various autocrats. Often enough, the army itself created or ended the regimes. As can be seen in Figure 3.1, Argentina's society experienced a multitude of coups, in particular during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as episodes of severe violence, culminating in the highly repressive dictatorship that took power in 1976.[1] Epistemologically, the case of Argentina allows us to investigate the genesis of both coups and state violence perpetrated by members of the same organization at different points in time.

The main goal of this chapter is to reconstruct the organizational structure, the promotion system, and the career patterns in the Argentine Army to understand how and which officers come under career pressure. For this reason, we adopt an approach that necessarily deviates from conventional historical work and may seem somewhat unorthodox since we refrain from

[1]Since World War II, Argentina experienced five periods of authoritarian rule (Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018). The personalist regime by Juan Domingo Peron (1951–1955) was followed by the military dictatorship under the leadership of the army generals Eduardo Ernesto Lonardi (1955) and Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (1955-1958). Argentina then entered into a period in which the governments of the civilian Presidents Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962), José María Guido (1962-1963), and Arturo Umberto Illia (1963-1966) were de facto controlled by the chiefs of the Argentine Army Héctor Solanas Pacheco (1958-1959), Carlos Toranzo Montero (1959-1961), Raúl Alejandro Poggi (1961-1962), John Baptist Loza (1961), Juan Carlos Lorio (1962), Juan Carlos Onganía (1962-1965), and Pascual Ángel Pistarini (1965-1966). In 1966, the military again ruled openly with the Presidency resting in the hands of the army generals Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970), Roberto Marcelo Levingston (1970-1971), and Alejandro Agustín Lanusse (1971-1973). Finally, the coup in 1976 marked the beginning of Argentina's last military dictatorship led by army generals Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-1981), Roberto Eduardo Viola (1981-1981), Carlos Alberto Lacoste (1981), Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (1981-1982), Alfredo Oscar Saint Jean (1982), and Reynaldo Benito Bignone (1982-1983).

Figure 3.1: Yearly levels of repression and coup attempts by the Argentine army, 1945–1985



Note: Graph shows how the centrality of the army for repression (top panel) and coups (bottom panel). Dotted lines in gray-shaded areas denote the start of new autocratic regimes. Regime data stem from Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2018), repression data from (Fariss, Kenwick and Reuning 2020), and coup data from Chin, Carter and Wright (2021).

describing the history of Argentina and its army in great detail and chronological order. That is, while our analyses are necessarily informed by thick historical works, we do not dare to reproduce the top-notch historical accounts by historians and sociologists.[2] That implies that this chapter cuts across thick descriptions of important singular political events in the history of Argentina's Army, such as, for example, the rift between pro- and anti-Peronist officers and the subsequent military confrontation between the so-called *Azules* (Blues) and the *Colorados* (Reds) in the early 1960s.[3] Instead, this chapter relies on meticulously gathered,

[2]Readers interested in the political history of Argentina may want to consult the excellent works by Rock (1987) and Romero (2013). Outstandingly detailed accounts of the entire history of the Argentine military can be found in Potash (1969, 1980, 1996) and Rouquié (1978, 1982).

[3]A large number of excellent works offer detailed accounts of the role of the army in Argentine politics at specific time points. Potash (1996) provides what is probably the most in-depth study of the camps and conflicts within the Argentine military during the 1960s. Fraga (1992) focuses specifically on the processes within the army during the Presidency of Arturo Frondizi. Lewis (2002) gives an excellent overview of the political turmoil and violent conflicts in the 1970s and Argentina's last military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. Correspondingly, Andersen (1993) illuminates the political and ideological development leading up to Argentina's state terrorism, and the threats posed by right-wing and left-wing groups. Fraga (1988) complements these analyses with a detailed account of the developments within the army between the return of Juan Domingo Perón in 1973 and the military coup in 1976. For detailed treatments on the development of different political ideologies within the military in Argentina, see Rock (1995) on nationalism, Finchelstein (2014) on fascism, and Scharpf (2018) on their effect of state terror in the late 1970s. Pion-Berlin (1988, 1989), and Pion-Berlin and Lopez (1991*a*) cover the military's national security doctrine, while Feierstein (2014) demonstrates similarities with the genocide perpetrated by the Nazi regime

fine-grained quantitative data concerning the Argentine Army and its officers, which we thoroughly analyze, interpret, and complement with qualitative data. We hold that our approach, while it may appear overly reductionist to some readers, has distinct advantages. First, to readers without detailed knowledge of Argentine history, it offers an easy-to-digest primer on the country's military using state-of-the-art visualizations, which allows readers to detect similarities with other countries, periods, and security organizations. Second, to case experts, our data-based approach provides new perspectives through the quantitative depiction of hitherto unseen patterns and organizational features of the inner workings of Argentina's Army.

Any systematic investigation of a theory about careers in authoritarian security organizations and extreme officer behavior requires an analysis database of unprecedented scope and depth. However, the inherent opaqueness of authoritarian politics creates a significant hurdle for scholars seeking to examine authoritarian politics. No sitting dictator is keen on outsiders scrutinizing his viziers, making those working in the security organizations exceedingly difficult to study. And when regimes fall, many people have a vested interest in hiding or even destroying incriminating material. As a result, data on personal particulars and security operations are patchy at best, even for well-studied dictatorships of the past, or entirely absent at worst. As a result, previous works have predominantly focused on macro or meso-level factors and indicators in their study of authoritarian politics (e.g., Barros 2016; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018; Greitens 2016; Policzer 2009). Studies examining individual torturers and coup leaders in more detail have been unable to find out whether the perpetrators under study differ systematically from the rest of their peers—again for lack of extensive data on the entire recruitment pool.[4] The database underlying this book is both comprehensive and sufficiently fine-grained to determine what differentiates ordinary men engaging in extreme behaviors from those ordinary men who do not.

The case of Argentina provides an unprecedented wealth of archival sources on an entire authoritarian security system and all individuals serving within its central organization. By utilizing official documents from dozens of archives, we compile a comprehensive dataset that contains biographical and professional career information on every member of the Argentine army's officer corps. This dataset constitutes the empirical backbone of this book. It comprises in-depth information on all 15,000 officers who graduated from Argentina's

in Germany. In addition, Carlson (2000), Mazzei (2002), and Robin (2008) offer detailed accounts of the French training mission in Argentina in the 1950s and how French counter-revolutionary doctrine changed the political outlook and repression strategies of Argentine officers. Norden (1996) studies the military rebellions between 1987 and 1990, tracing them back to the intra-army cleavages and internal divisions of the 1976-1983 military regime. See Pion-Berlin (2010) and McSherry (1997) for broader analyses of Argentina's civil-military after the country's return to democracy in 1983, which Huser (2002) and Fraga and Leslie (1989) complement with historical accounts.

[4]Studies like, for example, Browning (1998) and Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo (2002) have been forced to 'select on the dependent variable' and only study individuals who torture or kill in the name of the regime. While offering extraordinarily detailed accounts of individual perpetrators, such research designs cannot explain why certain individuals show extreme loyalty or disloyalty towards a given regime while others do not.

military academy and joined the army at any point in time from the creation of the professional military organization in 1870 through the entire twentieth century. For each officer, the dataset contains details to be found in soldiers' personnel files, including date and place of birth, educational achievements, areas of specialization, advanced training certificates, combat deployments, as well as retirement type, date, and rank. For the first time, we can therefore illuminate each corner of an army organization, grasp its anatomy, and track the officers operating within it.

Together, the entirety of individual-level data allows us to reconstruct the composition and internal processes of the Argentine Army at any time in its historical development. Next, we provide in-depth insights into the inner workings of an authoritarian security apparatus at an unprecedented high resolution. The idea is to investigate the building blocks of our theory. One central question is whether the empirical patterns we unveil in this chapter correspond to the basic institutional features of authoritarian security organizations, which we outlined in Chapter 2. By illustrating the institutional environment with various visualizations of our officer data, we establish the empirical prerequisite for the tests of the detouring and forcing hypotheses in the subsequent chapters. To this end, we uncover the organizational structure of the Argentine Army, the operating principles of its promotion system, and the required criteria for officers to advance through the ranks. Most importantly, we demonstrate which individuals come under career pressure and for what reasons.

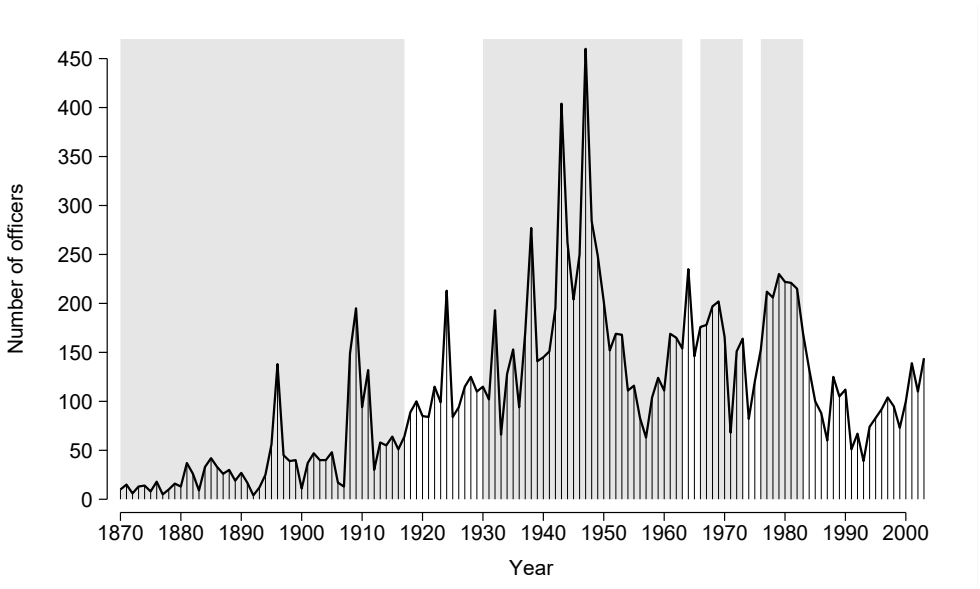
3.1 A (Very) Short Primer on the History of Argentina's Armed Forces

The roots of the Argentine Armed Forces date back to the War of Independence fought against Spain's colonial troops between 1810 and 1818. The War led by several revolutionary figures, including José de San Martín and Manuel Belgrano, was the culmination of years of political and social upheaval in the region to break free from the yoke of colonialism and establish an independent nation. After achieving victory and emancipation from Spanish rule, however, newly independent Argentina slid into a period of almost constant civil war, which largely prevented the consolidation of political stability until the signing of the Argentine Constitution in 1853. Infamous Caudillos—most of them leaders of individual provinces with sufficient resources to maintain private militias—alternately allied against the government in Buenos Aires while also fighting each other. The multitude of civil wars of varied intensity saw the involvement of several external powers, including neighboring Uruguay and Brazil, as well as British and French colonial forces. After decades of infighting, finally, the Argentine constitution prohibited provinces from maintaining their own private armies and allowed the national government in Buenos Aires to work on a new, cohesive, and unified

army. However, the orderly formation of such a force faced yet another delay due to the drawn-out Triple Alliance War against Paraguay.

The opening of the Colegio Militar de la Nación in late 1869—the military academy of the Argentine Army—marks the founding date of the country's modern army based on a structured officer education program. For then-serving President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the Colegio Militar was the key to the formation of a new European-style army organization. The first director of the military academy was Colonel János Czetz, a former commander of the Habsburg Empire and General of the Hungarian defense forces, who had joined the Argentine military after his immigration in 1860. Czetz was a respected military cartographer and scientist who advocated rigorous academic training for young army cadets. On July 19, 1870, the first students entered the academy. Since then, all Argentine Army officers have had to graduate from the Colegio Militar de la Nación to enter the officer corps. Figure 3.2 shows the number of new recruits joining the military academy from the year of its foundation until 2004. As can be seen, annual intake numbers vary considerably. Cohort sizes peaked noticeably during World War II. The differences in the number of freshmen resulted from organizational demands or political decisions in some years, while in others mundane factors such as limitations in the capacity to accommodate additional personnel constrained the intake of new cadets.

Figure 3.2: Freshmen joining the military academy, 1870–2004



Note: Graph shows the size of incoming officer cohorts joining the military academy at any given year. Gray-shaded areas denote periods under autocratic governance, based on data by VDEM (Coppedge et al. 2022).

For the first 22 years of its existence, the Colegio Militar was located in the Palermo neighborhood, northwest of Buenos Aires, and the residence of the former governor of the Argentine Federation, Juan Manuel de Rosa. In 1892, due to lack of space, the academy moved to San Martín, in a building that had previously hosted an arts and crafts college, which soon

proved to be too small as well. However, due to repeated economic crises, the last move to the newly built venue was delayed until 1937. Since then, however, the military academy resides in the town of El Palomar, a place of high symbolic value in Argentina's history. In 1852, it was the site of the Battle of Caseros, where the Grand Army led by then Caudillo of Entre Ríos, Justo José de Urquiza, won the decisive victory against the troops of then President Juan Manuel de Rosas. The victory of the Grand Army paved the way for the country's unification under the leadership of Urquiza. The decision to place the military academy on this historic site in 1937 highlights how much the country's political history is intertwined with that of the army.

3.2 Anatomy of the Argentine Army

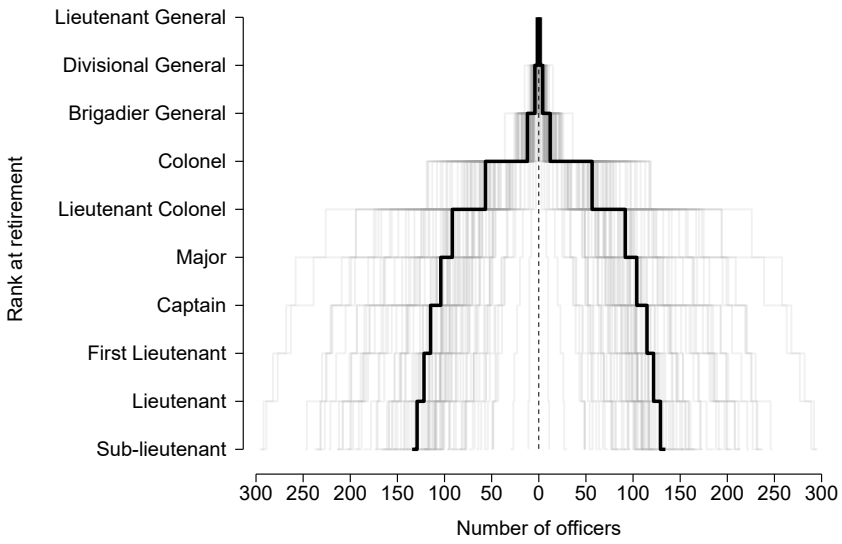
Let us now open the black box and look inside the Argentine Army to understand its institutional structure and operating principles that govern the careers and professional lives of its officers. First of all, do the inner workings of the Argentine Army match the prototypical characteristics of authoritarian security organizations that we identified in Chapter 2? Is the army pyramid-shaped and has a clear hierarchy? What do standard career paths look like? What does it take to get promoted, and who are the losers in the promotion system who will—sooner or later—come under career pressure? To answer these questions, we next provide detailed information on the army's shape, hierarchy structure, and promotion system.

As can be seen from the officer cohorts visualized in Figure 3.3, the shape of the army resembles that of a pyramid. There is an abundance of positions at the bottom but only a few at the top. Panel (a) shows the absolute number of officers per cohort who have reached the rank indicated on the y-axis. Depending on the size of the cohort at the outset, i.e. when graduating from the military academy, the base of the pyramid is either wider or narrower. What all cohorts have in common, though, is that the number of officers remaining in the organization decreases with each higher rank. While the apparatus can accommodate most officers at the lower ranks, there are fewer and fewer positions available as they climb up the pyramid. While the steps vary in steepness and width for each cohort, generally speaking, the most dramatic tapering occurs at the colonel and general ranks. Here the number of remaining officers is reduced quite considerably. In other words, the bottlenecks in the organizational structure are particularly tight as officers try to climb to the general ranks.

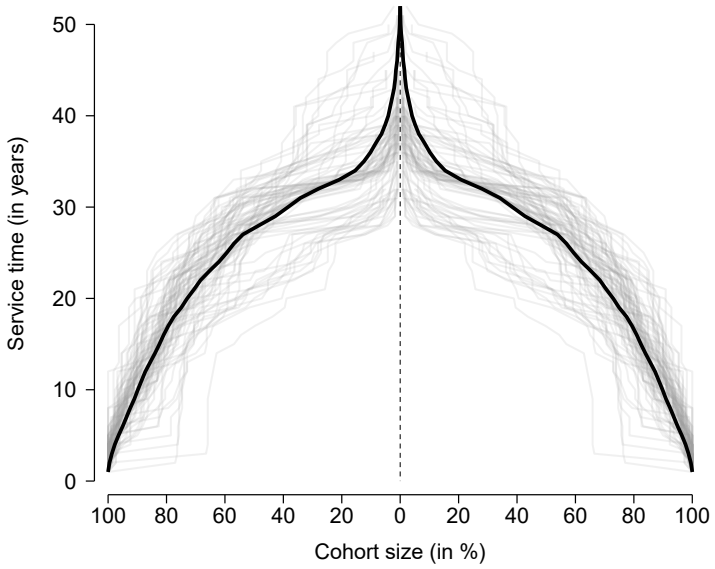
Panel (b) in Figure 3.3 shows a similarly shaped pattern by visualizing the relative retention rate across years of service. More precisely, for each cohort, the graph depicts the percentage of officers who have served in the army for at least as many years as indicated on the y-axis. Due to the more fine-grained career metric, the resulting pattern somewhat resembles the shape of a Buddhist stupa or a helmet dome on top of a Russian Orthodox cathedral. It

Figure 3.3: Pyramidal shape of Argentina's Army

(a) Ranks



(b) Service time



Note: The graph depicts the gradual attrition of officer cohorts in two ways. Panel (a) shows the absolute number of officers per cohort who have reached the rank indicated on the y-axis. Panel (b) visualizes the percentage of officers from each cohort who have served as many years in the army as indicated on the y-axis. Gray lines give individual cohorts. Solid black lines indicate the average cohort. Both graphs are mirrored to emphasize the pyramidal shape.

features a hemispherical base and a bell-shaped spike on top. Yet, the substantive interpretation remains unchanged. Most officers can remain in the organization for at least 10 (about 90%) to 20 years (about 75%). After that, the attrition rate significantly accelerates or, conversely, the retention rate decreases. Less than 40% of officers reach the 30-year mark. Finally, only 5% of officers manage to stay in the Army for 40 years, which allows

them to retire as generals when they are in their early 60s. Here, too, not all cohorts show the exact same pattern. For some, the retention lines begin to taper a little earlier, while others bend later, but then all the more sharply. Together, we now have a first impression of the hierarchy and organizational shape of the army as well as the variance in retention rates across officer cohorts.

Has the personnel composition of the army changed over time? Thanks to the temporal scope of our officer data, covering all officer careers over a century, we can slice the organization into cross-sectional profiles as histologists do. This allows us to inspect the personnel structure of the Argentine army at any point in time and trace its anatomic development. Turning the military hierarchy on its side, Figure 3.4 visualizes annual profiles of the officer corps between 1930 and 1983.[5] Each profile provides information on the seniority distribution within the active officer corps for the specific year indicated on the y-axis. As seen at the bottom of the graph, the army in 1983 presents a textbook example of a pyramidal security organization. The density curve starts high on the left and tapers down to the right in waves. Thus, in 1983, the officer corps consisted of many officers with little service time who had just graduated from the academy (lieutenants) and only a few officers with high seniority (generals).

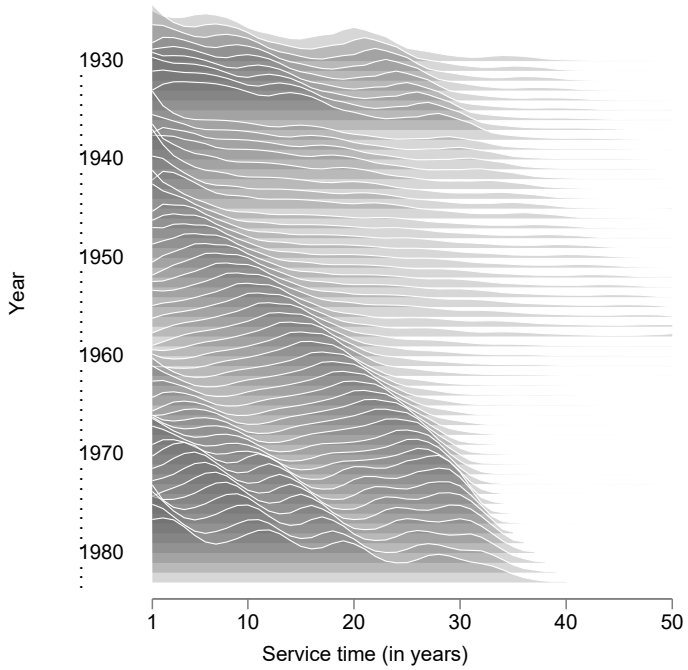
In addition, Figure 3.4 reveals how periods of exceptional over- or under-recruitment may impact the personnel composition of authoritarian security organizations potentially for decades. For example, the Argentine army in the 1940s saw a massive recruitment campaign with disproportionately many cadets joining the military academy (as shown in Figure 3.2). Upon graduation, the new officers had to be incorporated into the organization, leading to a maximally left-skewed seniority distribution in the organization by the 1940s. Subsequently, the large cohorts trudged through the officer corps—much like a snake's prey being moved deeper and deeper into the body. As a result, the shape of the organization changed into a diamond in the 1960s, before gradually re-approaching the classic pyramid shape due to officers' retirements. Altogether, the patterns vividly demonstrate that the Argentine Army as a whole features an anatomy typical of authoritarian security organizations. Officer cohorts shrink with each step up the rank ladder. Security organizations including the Argentine Army, therefore, look like a pyramid from the outside.

Yet, the anatomy of an authoritarian security organization is not limited to its organizational stature but also includes the internal organs that have different functions and roles. In the army, such organs are represented by individual branches with specific capabilities and tasks on the battlefield. The Argentine Army consists of five branches—infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineering, and signal.[6] As is the case for most modern armies, the infantry in Argentina

[5]The years are determined by the availability of officers. To be most informative, each organizational slice has to have officers across all ranks, which prevents us from visualizing years for earlier and later periods.

[6]Historically, the army branches varied with regards to their prestige and recruitment base. Both within and outside the army, the cavalry was commonly seen as the noble, aristocratic elite, which promised its cadets high prestige and exclusive access to the general ranks. The prestige rested, at least in part, on the

Figure 3.4: Relative distribution of seniority levels within the officer corps sliced by year, 1930–1983



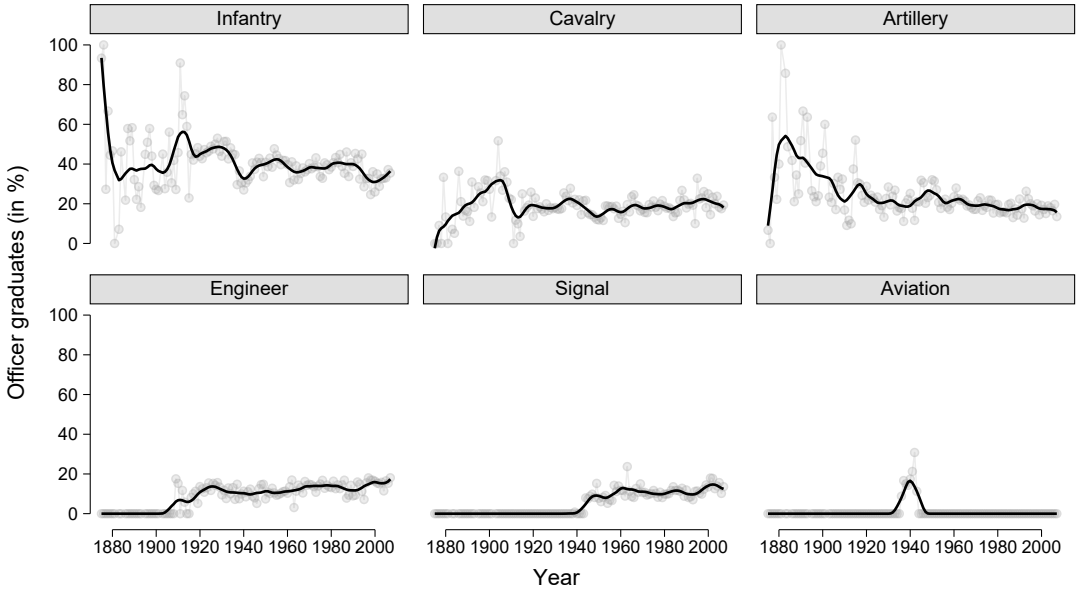
Note: Graph visualizes the anatomy of the Argentine Army over time. Each slice shows the composition of the entire officer corps in the year indicated on the y-axis. The x-axis shows service times (in years). Curves are densities, reflecting the number of officers with a certain service time among all officers in a given year. In other words, the height of a curve indicates a third dimension, i.e., the relative frequency of a given seniority level. To facilitate interpretation, consider two example years: The curve at the bottom of the graph shows the anatomy of the army in 1983. It starts high on the left and waves downwards to the right. The army thus approximated the shape of a pyramid: many officers with little service time and decreasing numbers of officers with higher seniority levels. The situation was different in 1960. Here, a large share of officers had already served for ten years or more, while lower seniority levels were underrepresented. The army's structure in 1960 was thus more diamond- than pyramid-shaped. This disproportion was due to severely over-recruited cohorts in the 1940s, who then moved through the organization like a wave.

consists of soldiers who fight on foot and engage in close combat. Its members often further specialize to operate in a variety of environments, from urban areas over dense jungles to impassable mountains. The cavalry historically consisted of soldiers mounted on horseback, but today officers command fast-moving units that operate armored vehicles, such as tanks, used for reconnaissance and breaking through enemy lines. Argentine artillery has long-

fact that officers commanded their troops from horseback. Originally home to old patrician families with long military histories, the cavalry branch often attracted affluent members from the upper echelons of Argentine society, which reinforced its aristocratic reputation (Mazzei 2013, 99-101; Rouquié 1978, 336-7). In contrast, the infantry, lacked the cavalry's prestige despite or maybe because it being the largest army branch. Its members would commonly have to bear the brunt of war with fatality numbers usually being highest among this branch. The infantry often attracted cadets from poorer segments of Argentina's society for whom the military profession promised social upward mobility that would be unattainable otherwise. The prestige of artillery, engineering, and signal branch was more mixed, ranging somewhere between the infantry and the cavalry. For cadets, it was easier to join these branches than the cavalry, and like the infantry, positions offered substantial social mobility. This made the branches attractive to well-educated recruits from Argentina's middle and lower classes, despite the limited access to the general ranks and the General Staff (Norden 1996, 114-5).

range firepower and utilizes a variety of heavy weapon systems to support ground forces or attack distant enemy positions. Engineers are responsible for building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary for units to operate effectively in the field, including bridges, fortifications, and other structures critical to the success of military operations. Finally, the signal branch is responsible for maintaining communication networks within the army, allowing different units to coordinate and share information effectively.

Figure 3.5: Branches in the army, 1873–2007



Note: Each graph shows the percentage of cadets who joined either one of the five army branches each year. During World War II, a significant proportion of officers joined the Army's Aviation Service, the predecessor of the Argentine Air Force established in 1945.

Figure 3.5 shows the percentage of army cadets who joined the different branches each year. Commonly, cadets indicate which branch they want to join at the beginning of their second year at the academy. Admission is based on availability and each individual's track record. As is typical for modern armies, most young officers end up in the infantry (around 40%), followed by cavalry and artillery (around 20%, respectively), as well as engineers and signals (around 10%, respectively).[7] These branch-specific quotas have remained fairly stable since the early 20th century with relatively few outliers across the cohorts. By contrast, in earlier cohorts, the army leadership sometimes assigned an exceptionally high proportion of cadets to a single branch of service, such as infantry and artillery.

What happens after the officer cadets graduate from the academy? After admission to one of the service branches and the successful completion of the military academy, cadets start their career as commissioned officers, usually earning the rank of sub-lieutenant. Their uniform now features a silver star on the epaulet as an insignia of their official rank. Situated

[7]During World War II, a significant proportion of graduates joined the Army's Aviation Service, the predecessor of the Argentine Air Force established in 1945. Since then, the army and air force have had separate officer corps.

at the lowest level in the officer corps, they typically have to earn their first stripes as commanders of a platoon and demonstrate their leadership skills. Like any other professional security organization, the Argentine Army is strictly hierarchical and follows a clear chain of command. With each promotion, officers move up one level in this hierarchy, commanding an increasing number of soldiers. While the exact number of subordinates and units varies from branch to branch, Table 3.1 gives an overview of how much power officers accumulate by moving up the hierarchy. For example, officers with the rank of major typically command company-sized units with around 200 soldiers. Two promotions later they might lead a battalion with more than 1,000 soldiers. The increase in responsibility and authority is also reflected in the salary level, the pension entitlements, and the prestige of the respective rank. Taken together, these factors not only account for considerable vertical inequality within the army but also provide officers with strong incentives to strive for promotions.

Table 3.1: Ranks and units of the army

Rank of commander	**Number of soldiers**	**Unit/Formation**
Divisional General, Lieutenant General[1]	20,000-45,000	Corps
Brigadier General	3,000-5,000	Brigade
Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel	1,000-1,500	Regiment, Battalion, Group
Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel	300-1,500	Company, Squadron, Battery[2]
Captain, Major	100-300	Company, Squadron, Battery[3]
Lieutenant	40-50	Section
Sub-Lieutenant	10-40	Platoon

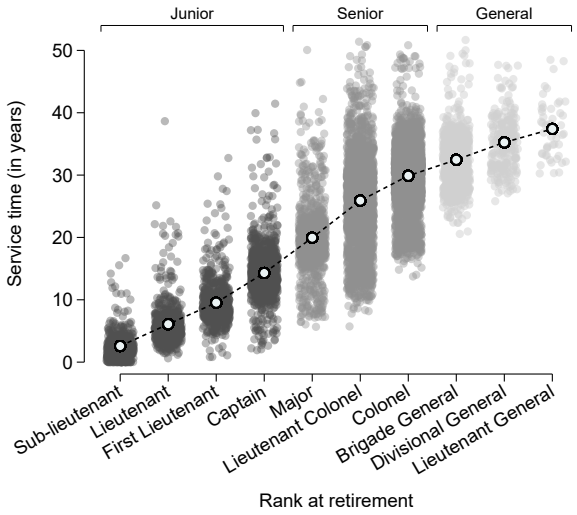
Note: Historically, regiments consisted of three battalions and were commanded by a colonel. Nowadays they are equivalent to a battalion and commanded by a lieutenant colonel. [1] The rank of lieutenant general is reserved for the chief of the Argentine Army. [2] Organically independent units [3] Units organically depend on a larger unit.

Climbing up the hierarchy takes a considerable amount of time. As a rule, ranks may not be skipped, and officers must have been in grade for a minimum time to be eligible for consideration by the Promotions Board. The time in grade depends on the officers' rank, usually ranging from 24 to 48 months.[8] As a result, military ranks are closely associated with seniority. Figure 3.6 visualizes this relationship. The graph shows the rank that all Argentine army officers attained at the end of their careers as a function of the years they served. From left to right, the x-axis lists the ranks that officers in the Argentine Army can attain, from lowest (sub-lieutenant) to highest (lieutenant general). Analogous to the military systems in most other countries, these ranks can be broken down into the three categories of junior officers (captain and below), senior officers (major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel), and general officers (brigadier general and above). The vertical distribution of dots along the y-axis shows two clear patterns. First, the higher the rank of an individual officer, the longer, on average, he has served. Second, despite the clear relationship between

[8]For example, in 1915 the minimum years in grade were 3 (Sub-lieutenant), 4 (Lieutenant), 4 (First lieutenant), 4 (Captain), 4 (Major), 4 (Lieutenant colonel), 4 (Colonel), 4 (Brigadier general), 4 (Major general). In 1950, the minimum years were 2 (Sub-lieutenant), 2 (Lieutenant), 2 (First lieutenant), 4 (Captain), 3 (Major), 3 (Lieutenant colonel), 3 (Colonel), 3 (Brigadier general) (Potash 1969, 249, footnote 41; Potash 1980, 110, footnote 48).

seniority and rank at retirement, there is variation in the number of years that it takes officers to reach their highest rank. In other words, some officers climb the career ladder faster than others, if at all. This raises the question of what criteria determine which officers win or fail in the promotion system. Put differently, what determines how long officers can stay in the army and at which rank do they retire?

Figure 3.6: Ranks and service times in the officer crops

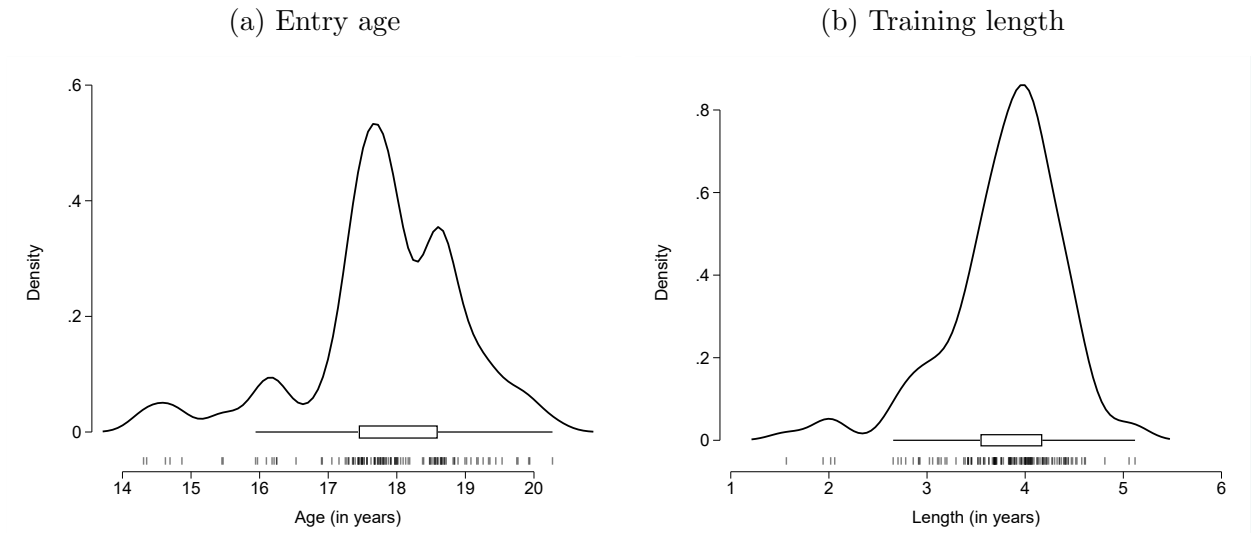


Note: Graphs show the relationship between service time, i.e. years between graduation from the military academy and retirement, and military rank. Dots denote individual officers. The connected line indicates the average service time.

3.3 The Importance of Merit

Career advancement within the Argentine Army has been primarily based on merit. In fact, the Argentine Army's promotion system requires that officers lay the foundation for their careers very early on in their careers. In the following, we show that the achievements of cadets at the military academy have a significant impact on their career progression. To illustrate how early these foundations are created, Figure 3.7 shows the distribution of the entry age with which the young officer candidates go to the military academy in Panel (a) and how long they study there in Panel (b). Typically, cadets enter the military academy after graduating from high school, around the age of 18, and take an average of 4 years to complete their training. A lot is already decided during these four years between 18 and 22. In fact, young cadets greatly complicate their career outlook from the start if they perform poorly at the academy. And vice versa, high-performing cadets can be confident that the doors to higher posts will open much more easily for them later on in their careers.

Figure 3.7: Officers and their education in Argentina's army



Note: Graph shows officers' age (average=17.9 years) when entering military academy *Colegio Militar de la Nación* and the duration of the subsequent officer education (average=3.8 years).

How important is the performance of cadets at the military academy for their subsequent professional success? Figure 3.8 shows the distribution of graduation ranks among officers who later made it to the ranks of general as well as among those officers who left the army at junior or mid-levels. The graduation rank indicates how good a cadet's final grade was relative to his peers in the same cohort. It ranges from 0 to 100 with larger values indicating worse relative performances.[9] That is, officers with excellent grades who graduate top of their class receive a value of 0 while underachieving officers who graduate bottom of their class receive a value of 100. Metrics like the graduation rank are key in most modern armies and prominently appear in virtually every officer's personnel file.[10]

Figure 3.8 depicts the strong relationship between early performance at the military academy and subsequent advancement to the highest positions. Cadets with a low graduation rank, who graduated top of their class, were much more likely to rise to the general ranks, whereas most graduates at the bottom of their cohorts had to leave the organization as junior or mid-level officers. As detailed in the introductory chapter already, merit-based promotion systems and authoritarian rule do not contradict each other. In fact, Figure 3.8 shows that the link between officers' graduation rank and their subsequent appointment as generals was even stronger when Argentina was ruled by autocratic governments compared to democratic

[9]More formally, the graduation rank metric is based on the following formula:

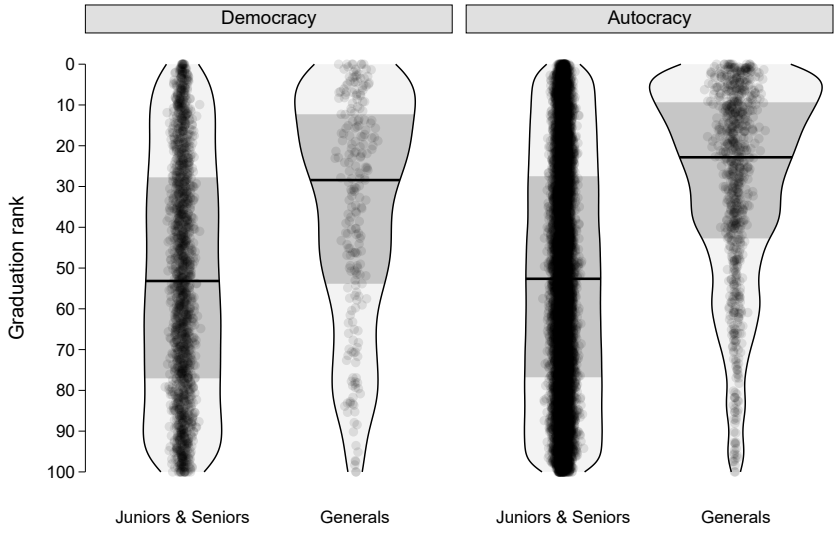
$$\text{Graduation rank}_{i,j} = \left(\frac{\text{Rank}_i - 1}{\text{Cohort size}_j - 1} \right) * 100,$$

where Rank is the absolute position of an officer i among her peers and Cohort size is the total number of cadets that graduated with officer i in cohort j.

[10]The raw graduation rank, sometimes also called class rank, is a piece of information widely shared within and outside the army. For example, class rank is commonly mentioned in biographies of officers and used as a go-to reference for individual aptitude.

periods. Promotions within the Argentine Army predominantly rely on merit, with significant weight placed on an officer's performance at the academy. The graduation rank of officers determines their future advancement within the military hierarchy.

Figure 3.8: Early performance and career opportunities across Argentina's regimes



Note: Graph shows the importance of graduating at the top of one's class (lower values of graduation rank) to subsequently be promoted to general ranks. Dots are individual officers. Data includes all cohorts after professionalization in 1909. Black vertical lines denote the respective median, and gray boxes give upper and lower quartiles.

The significance of graduation rank as the starting point for an officer's career progression raises the question of the criteria used to rank cadets within their cohorts. Military academies, such as the Colegio Militar de la Nación, the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, employ structured curricula designed to equip individuals with the essential skills required for military command and leadership. Around the globe, these programs typically span several years and cover various aspects of military education, leadership development, academic studies, and physical fitness.[11] At the Argentine Colegio Militar de la Nación, similar to other academies

[11] In the past, academic studies at the Colegio Military de la Nación typically included math (analysis, algebra, geometry), physics, chemistry, biology, geography, topography, history, and literature. These courses dominated the cadets' education in the first two years at the military academy. In the third and fourth years, education largely depended on the cadet's army branch and included subjects such as armory, explosives, fortification, mechanics, tactics, horse riding, military geography, and military history. Cadets were also trained and evaluated in command skills, leadership qualities, military conduct, and physical fitness. Finally, cadets received language training in Spanish, English, French, and some also in Portuguese. Today, first-year cadets at the Colegio Militar are trained in the basics of tactics, physical education, single combat, command and leadership, theories of the state, principles of constitutional and administrative law, algebra and calculus, Argentine history, and English, among other subjects. In the second year, cadets participate in weapons handling and shooting, physical education applied to combat, theory and dynamics of combat tactics, ethics, command and leadership, sciences applied to military technology, differential and integral calculus, as well as administrative systems and staff administration. The third year includes courses on tactics in military operations, command in combat, physical education applied to personal defense, introduction to scientific knowledge, war theory and military thought, military geography,

like West Point, the final grade is predominantly based on academic achievements and military leadership performance, which together constitute approximately 80 percent. The remaining 20 percent is determined by factors such as athletic performance and disciplinary record.[12] Taken together, these weighted assessment criteria determine an officer's graduation rank. As it is generally considered a reliable and comprehensive reflection of an individual's demonstrated intellectual capabilities, aptitude, and potential, the graduation rank holds significant weight in promotion and assignment decisions.

How come the Argentine Army is such a merit-based organization, despite the prevailing perception of the country's considerable problems with corruption? One plausible explanation lies in the sustained impact of the Prussian military in the modernization of the Argentine Armed Forces dating back to the end of the 19th century (Atkins and Thompson 1972; Nunn 1975). At the time, the Argentinean government sought to transform its military into a state-of-the-art, professional army that would be capable of containing a seemingly immanent "two-front military challenge from locally powerful neighbors—Brazil and Chile" (Atkins and Thompson 1972, 259). To do so, the Argentinians turned to Prussia, which many considered to have the role model of a modern military force concerning armament, professionalism, discipline, and organizational structure at the time. Beginning in the 1890s, the German Empire became the almost exclusive supplier of equipment and armaments for Argentina. And in 1899, the first Prussian military advisory mission arrived in Argentina to design and roll out an advanced military training program modeled on the Prussian *Kriegsakademie*. One year later, the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* (Higher War School) welcomed the first cohort of prospective staff officers. Tellingly, the School's first director, Colonel Alfred Arent, was a former Prussian officer and the leader of the military mission.[13] In addition, Prussian officers were actively involved in designing the curricula for and teaching at several other military training facilities, including the Colegio Militar de la Nacion, the Military Aviation School, the Military Geographical Institute, and the Escuela de Tiro (Ballistic School).

Through their influence on the education of Argentine officers, Prussian advisors also shaped various other military affairs in the country, including officer promotions.[14] By 1920 Ar-

management of material resources, as well as military law and disciplinary code, and international law, human rights, and international humanitarian law. In the final year cadets participate in courses on specialized tactics and technology, the history of the Argentine military campaigns, international relations, globalization, and regionalization, negotiation and conflict resolution, statistics, and public finance and management.

[12] Historically, the two subjective performance indicators capturing the "character" and "military values" accounted for less than 10% of the cadet's final grade.

[13] Prussian officers were in charge of the Higher War School, essentially teaching "all Argentine staff officers" until 1914 (Nunn 1975, 4). Until the start of the First World War, Prussian military advisors practically dominated the Argentine General Staff affairs.

[14] The German advisors insisted that those officers who had excelled in the rigorous Prussian training programs should be promoted as quickly as possible. The extent to which the Prussians impacted the Argentine military also becomes manifest in other aspects as well. For example, in 1901, the Germans actively contributed to the drafting of the country's conscription law, and in 1907, Argentina adopted the German war doctrine (Rudolph 1985, 289)

gentina had, like other Latin American countries with European training missions, "European-style obligatory military service laws, salary scales, retirement systems, promotion schedules, systematic training, specialized courses, and rewards based on merit, not connections" (Nunn 1975, 2). While in many cases, "theory and practice were far apart," Argentina's army seems to have maintained a merit-based promotion system (Nunn 1975, 2). This might also be because from 1905 onward hundreds of Argentine officers were sent to Germany to attend advanced training, complete tours of duties with German combat units, and observe military maneuvers (Atkins and Thompson 1972). Upon their return, some of these Argentine officers heavily lobbied for the continued orientation toward the German military system, despite its devastating defeat in the Great War and the constraints on German military advisory missions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.[15]

How can it be that performance at the first career step determines officers' chances of ascending to the general ranks? How can graduation rank have such a long-term impact on career success? In Argentina, like in most professional military organizations, early career achievements, specifically performance at the military academy, influences access to staff and command training at war colleges and higher war schools. Successful participation in training at places such as the United States Army Command and General Staff College or Argentina's Escuela Superior de Guerra prepares senior officers (mayors and lieutenant colonels) for their tasks in the general ranks.[16] Courses on leadership philosophy, military history, planning, and decision-making provide officers with the managerial training that is essential for moving into the army's highest positions.[17]

Figure 3.9 shows that in Argentina, excellent performance at the military academy, i.e. a low graduation rank, is the entry ticket to Higher War School. Nearly all officers who graduate at the top of their cohort at the Colegio Militar subsequently receive the chance to attend the Escuela Superior de Guerra for staff training. As the graph shows as well, this is very different for the officers who graduate at the bottom of their cohort. Poor grades at the military academy commonly shut the door to advanced training which, in

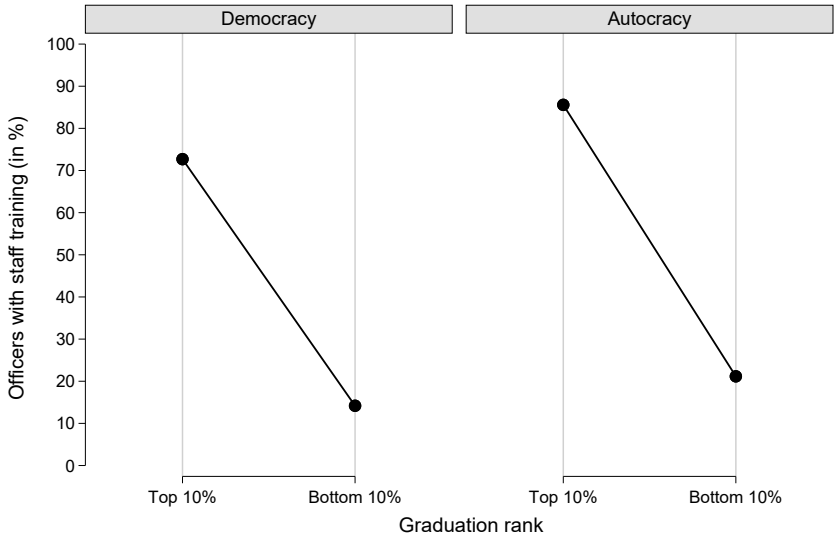
[15]The constraints on German defense policies and foreign training missions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles did not end the military cooperation between Argentina and the Weimar Republic, even if military advisors could no longer act officially on behalf of the Weimar Republican government. Despite significant opposition toward the strong German influence from within parts of the Argentine officer corps, the Argentineans continued to rely on German expertise and personnel because their military equipment and armament originated from German manufacturers. Interestingly, the bilateral cooperation and mutual assignments of officers gradually faded out after the Nazis acceded to power, who considered "Argentina to be of peripheral military and diplomatic importance" (Atkins and Thompson 1972, 272).

[16]As Nordlinger (1977, 43) notes, in professional military organizations "[p]romotions are consistently based on achievement criteria, which include relative standing in one's graduating class from the military academy, [and] attendance at advanced training centers."

[17]For example, in the 1950s education for staff officers at the Higher War School included courses on national defense, military maneuver, mechanized units, air and naval operations, artillery, intelligence, communications, engineering, history, transportation, and rations, among others.

turn, significantly lowers officers' prospects of making it to the prestigious general ranks.[18] Moreover, Figure 3.9 once again demonstrates that the strong relationship between officers' early career achievements and subsequent access to Argentina's Higher War School has existed independent of the regime in power. If anything, individual merit has played an even more important role in gaining access to staff training under autocratic governments than under democratic ones.

Figure 3.9: Importance of early career performance and access to advanced training across Argentina's regimes



Note: Graph shows the importance of graduating at the top of one's class to gain access to command and staff training at the *Escuela Superior de Guerra*. Data samples contain officers who graduated from the military academy at the time when Argentina was governed by an autocratic or democratic regime, respectively.

Taken together, the visualized patterns paint a clear picture of the Argentine Army: Merit has been and still is the number one ingredient for officers' professional advancement in the military pyramid. Regardless of the regime in power, early career performance determines the power, prestige, and influence that officers can obtain in the army organization. To become a general, officers must have managerial training, which they only get access to by showing their aptitude right from the start. Officers who eventually make it to the general ranks typically demonstrated very good performance at the academy and then underwent advanced training at the staff school. In light of these clear career requirements, the big question is: What does this mean for those who failed at the first career step, i.e., those with a bad graduation rank at the Colegio Militar? What about those officers who knew they were unlikely to make it to the higher ranks? Under how much pressure are they?

[18]The strong relationship between officers' early career performance at the military academy and subsequent access to advanced training at the staff college is corroborated by results from regression analysis. Graduation rank is a very strong predictor of participation in staff training.

3.4 Career Pressure in the Officer Corps

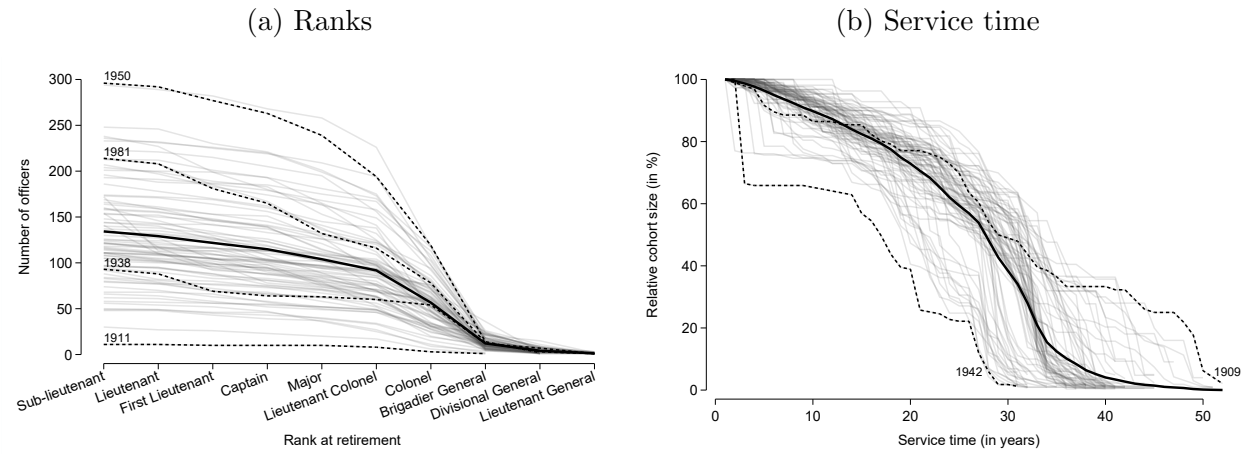
In merit-based organizations like the Argentine Army, individuals without demonstrated aptitude and proven skills have little chance of climbing up the hierarchy. Put simply, in merit-based systems underachieving officers are under career pressure—and this pressure is quite severe. Understanding why this is the case, and how strongly career pressure weighs on the shoulders of underperforming officers, who graduated at the bottom of their cohort, demands a closer look at the promotion system and also at historical shocks. Like many other militaries, the Argentine Army is based on an up-or-out promotion system. At each career level, a significant share of officers have their professional careers ended and are forced out of the organization. This also means that simply sitting it out and remaining on a given rank is not a viable long-term option for officers. After a certain amount of time, they will be sorted out to make room for the following cohorts.

The strong pressure on underachieving officers in the officer corps is visible in Figure 3.10. The graph depicts the attrition, i.e. the number of forcibly removed officers, across the military hierarchy. To ease interpretation, the hierarchy has been rotated 90 degrees and is on its side. On the one hand, as can be seen in Panel (a), the Army's up-or-out promotion system reduces the number of officers (y-axis) at each rank (x-axis). While the number of forcibly retired officers is less severe for some cohorts (e.g., 1911), others experience a significant loss in numbers as officers right from the start (e.g., 1950). Officers in the army therefore not only face strong institutional bottlenecks in their competition for higher posts but those on the losing must fear for their professional survival when lacking the credentials to move up. In simple words, underachieving officers are most likely to be sacked.

On the hand, as shown in Panel (b), year after year the up-or-out system mercilessly shrinks each cohort (y-axis) as the service time of its officers is increasing (x-axis). Each year officers are forced to leave the organization, and in some cohorts, this exodus occurs earlier rather than later (e.g., 1942). Specifically those officers with more than 25 years of service in the army risk going over the professional cliff. For underachieving officers, this means that they are especially likely to see their career being ended once they have made it to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The up-or-out system puts double weight on the shoulders of officers with weak performance at the academy—those who graduated at the bottom of their cohort. Not only are these officers unlikely to become generals, but they run a constant risk of being forcibly removed from the organization, at the latest when they have painstakingly made it to the mid-level ranks.

Apart from the up-or-out system, which intensifies the bleak career outlook of officers with poor graduation results, contextual factors and political dynamics may further exacerbate career pressure. Figure 3.11 shows that both after coup attempts and new regimes coming

Figure 3.10: Institutional bottlenecks in the army



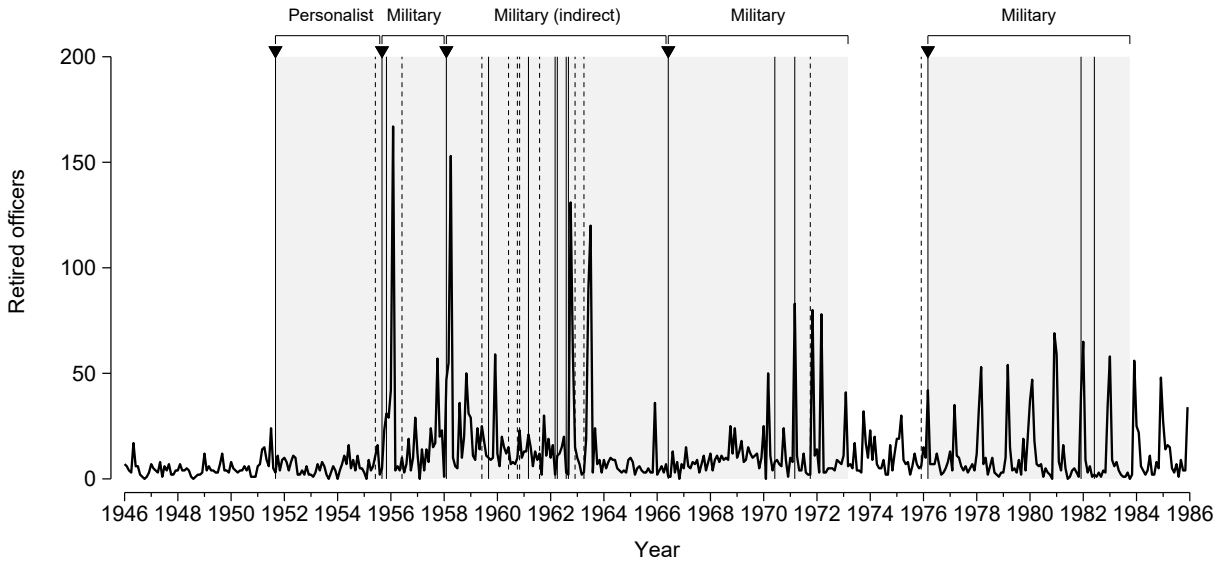
Note: Graph shows the army's up-or-out promotion system at work after its professionalization by Prussian military advisors. Panel (a) visualizes the number of officers sent into retirement at each rank. Panel (b) visualizes the corresponding shrinkage of cohorts over time. Gray lines denote individual cohorts, dotted black lines indicate specific cohorts and thick black line gives the average cohort.

to power often an excess number of officers are sent into retirement.[19] For example, the number of forcibly retired officers spiked after the successful coup against Eduardo Lonardi in November 1955, and after the general elections in February 1958, when the military ruled through the civilian president Arturo Frondizi. The graph visualizes how successful coup plotters and new governments in Argentina often purged officers in the hope of cleansing the army from elements deemed dangerous or dispensable. In Argentina, as in other countries, such purges not only followed a "better safe than sorry" approach to prevent future internal revolts but also to free up slots in the military hierarchy for loyal comrades-in-arms (CITE). Such purges are likely to disproportionately target underachieving officers as they lack formal skills that they could lend to the new regime.[20] Political changes in combination with the importance of early career performance and the ruthless up-or-out promotion systems generate tremendous career pressure on those officers that graduated at the bottom of their respective cohorts. In the next two chapters, we study the strategies underachieving officers can pursue to remedy their careers and nevertheless make it to the top.

[19]Studies show that purges are a draconian tool of authoritarian punishment, which is costly for those removed but also for those using it (Montagnes and Wolton 2019). Leaders often have difficulties identifying those who might pose a threat or actively plot against the regime (Woldense 2022). Moreover, the anticipation of a purge may motivate potential targets to oust the regime first (Sudduth 2017*b*). Purges may target higher-ranking members and those who hold strategic positions in the state apparatus (Bokobza et al. 2022), but they can also focus on lower-ranking officers (Montagnes and Wolton 2019). Leaders may imprison rather than kill purged individuals to prevent backlash by those not targeted (Goldring and Matthews 2023). Moreover, studies show that purges are more likely to occur in response to failed coup attempts (Bokobza et al. 2022), but also when leaders are particularly strong (Sudduth 2017*b*).

[20]As we have argued in Chapter 2, career-pressured officers might also resent a regime for blocking their careers. This might motivate the regime to preemptively purge such officers in order to lower its coup risk.

Figure 3.11: Officer retirement across Argentina's regimes



Note: Graph shows how new regimes and coup attempts proceed with higher numbers of officers being sent into retirement. Black lines with triangles indicate the start of an autocratic regime spell. Gray lines give successful (solid) and unsuccessful (dashed) military coup attempts. Data on regimes stem from Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2018), and data on coups from Chin, Carter and Wright (2021).

3.5 Summary and Outlook

Based on the theoretical insights into the inner workings of authoritarian regimes, this chapter empirically dissects an entire security organization into its constituent components. We bring to bear comprehensive individual-level career data of every single officer who has ever served in the Argentine Army to gain a deeper understanding of the organization's anatomy and the key stages in the professional careers of its members. It allows us to provide readers with an inside view of the architecture and the career patterns of the organization in order to uncover patterns in training, promotion, and retirement. Since its creation, the army has played a key role in Argentina's modern history, marked by the rule of both autocratic and democratic governments, economic booms and busts, revolutionary uprisings, as well as civil and interstate wars. However, despite these phases of political turmoil, the promotion system within the Argentine Army has been remarkably stable. In short, individual performance has been the most important ingredient for successful military careers. Since the professionalization of the Argentine Army by Prussian military advisors, the final grade at the academy and an officer's relative graduation rank within the own cohort strongly influence how high he can climb up the military pyramid.

The in-depth study of the promotion system delivers a clear picture of which officers come under career pressure and for which reasons. The analysis in this chapter reveals that merit is a core pillar in the architecture of Argentina's security pyramid. Officers who underperform

at the first career step—those who graduate at the bottom of their cohort—lack the entry ticket to advanced training. Without the skills that qualify them for higher posts, officers are not only stuck in the lower ranks but also fundamentally threatened in their professional existence. Underachievers are likely to fall victim to the merciless up-or-out promotion system. In the Argentine Army, like in many other security organizations, each year officers are forcibly sent into retirement. As a result, in this system, where professional advancement is first and foremost based on performance, officers with poor grades are under tremendous career pressure.

This raises the big question of what choices career-pressured individuals have left. Is there a way to remedy their career problem? How can they become competitive again and make it to the upper ranks despite their poor past performance? The next two chapters address these questions empirically by tracking the unorthodox pathways of underachieving officers within the security system. This will help us to find out whether merit-based promotion systems indeed fuel career pressure that leads to extreme officer behavior. Informed by the book's theory, Chapter 4 studies the detouring strategy of underachieving officers. To this end, we focus on Argentina's most violent period. Between 1975 and 1983, a secret police unit spearheaded a ruthless terror campaign that killed and disappeared thousands of civilians. If our theoretical expectation is correct, career-pressured officers should have willingly joined this unit in the hope that by zealously executing the regime's dirty work they would be able to demonstrate their value and in return be rewarded with promotions.

Having assessed the extreme loyalty of career-pressured officers, Chapter 5 scrutinizes the forcing strategy of underachievers. It empirically focuses on the two coups against President Juan Domingo Peron that occurred in June and September 1955. Despite Peron's autocratic rule, his populist style of politics generated ample support within the Argentine society and also allowed him to co-opt significant parts of Argentina's military, shaping Argentine politics for the next 50 years. Our theory suggests that underachieving officers should have been willing participants in the 1955 coups hoping that replacing the Peronist regime would eventually undo their career deadlock.