

# The Harbinger of Collapse: A Diagnostic Analysis of State Changes in the 20th Century

**Introduction:** In the past 125 years, numerous nations have undergone radical state changes, from revolutionary upheavals to the complete collapse of governing structures. By applying the diagnostic framework of the "Agency Calculus 3.0," a pattern emerges in the 20 years preceding these transformations: a significant and often accelerating erosion of individual and collective agency across multiple domains. This analysis examines four distinct case studies—the 1973 Chilean coup, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the 1994 Rwandan genocide—to illustrate how the "forcible reduction of agency" served as a critical precursor to state failure.

The "Agency Calculus 3.0" posits that the health of a society is determined by the net flow of "agency," defined as the "sum of opportunities, capabilities, resources, and freedoms". A state change is often the violent culmination of a prolonged period where agency is systematically diminished for a significant portion of the population. This decline is observable across five core domains: Economic, Health, Political, Social, and Educational.

## Case Study 1: Chile (1953-1973) - The Erosion of Economic and Political Agency

The two decades leading up to the 1973 military coup in Chile were marked by economic stagnation and intense political polarization. While Chile had a history of democratic rule, underlying issues steadily eroded the agency of its citizens.

**Economic Agency:** The period was characterized by chronic high inflation, which disproportionately impacted the working and middle classes, diminishing their purchasing power and economic control. An average annual inflation rate of 26.8% between 1940 and 1970 surged to an average of 126.7% between 1970 and 1973, with a peak of nearly 1,000% in 1973. This rampant inflation, coupled with widespread price controls, created significant economic instability and reduced the ability of individuals to plan for their future.

**Political Agency:** The political landscape became increasingly fractured. The 1970 election of Salvador Allende, a Marxist, with a narrow plurality of the vote, led to a period of intense political conflict. Both domestic and foreign actors, including the United States, worked to undermine his government. This political polarization escalated to the point where, in August 1973, the Chamber of Deputies charged the Allende government with unconstitutional actions, setting the stage for the military's intervention. This demonstrates a severe decline in the ability of the political system to mediate conflict and a loss of faith in democratic institutions.

**Social and Educational Agency:** While Chile had made strides in education and social welfare, the economic and political turmoil of the early 1970s began to strain these systems. Social mobility, which had been gradually increasing, was threatened by the economic crisis.

Following the coup, there was a significant reduction in higher education enrollment as the Pinochet regime cut public funding.

## **Case Study 2: Iran (1959-1979) - The Paradox of Development and Repression**

The 20 years preceding the Iranian Revolution saw rapid economic modernization under the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. However, this development was uneven and accompanied by severe political repression, creating a fertile ground for dissent.

**Economic Agency:** The "White Revolution" of the 1960s brought about significant industrialization and land reforms. Iran's GNP grew at an impressive annual rate of 13.2% between 1964 and 1978. However, the benefits of this growth were not widely shared. The agricultural sector, where a majority of the population was employed, was largely left behind. This created a growing gap between a wealthy elite and a frustrated lower and middle class who saw their economic opportunities limited.

**Political Agency:** The Shah's regime was an autocracy. Political freedoms were severely curtailed, and dissent was brutally suppressed by the secret police, SAVAK. The "Agency Calculus 3.0" identifies such suppression as a "forcible reduction of another sentient agent's agency". This lack of political avenues for expressing grievances created a wellspring of opposition that united secular and religious groups.

**Educational and Social Agency:** While literacy rates and access to higher education, particularly for women, saw significant improvements, this very progress may have contributed to the revolution. A more educated populace was better able to articulate its frustrations with the lack of political freedom and economic inequality. Socially, the rapid Westernization and secularization pushed by the Shah created a cultural backlash, particularly from the powerful clerical establishment, leading to the formation of an "Othering Barrier" between the Westernized elite and the more traditional segments of society. This dehumanization of a group is identified as a "critical moral event" in the "Agency Calculus 3.0."

## **Case Study 3: The Soviet Union (1971-1991) - Stagnation and the Collapse of a Superpower**

The two decades before the dissolution of the Soviet Union were defined by the "Era of Stagnation." While the state provided a basic level of social welfare, the systematic denial of fundamental aspects of agency ultimately led to its implosion.

**Economic Agency:** From the early 1970s, the centrally planned Soviet economy began to falter. The "guns versus butter" dilemma, prioritizing military spending over consumer goods, led to chronic shortages and a decline in living standards. The lack of economic freedom and opportunity stifled innovation and productivity.

**Political Agency:** The Soviet Union was a one-party totalitarian state where any form of political dissent was harshly punished. The "Agency Calculus 3.0" would classify this as a near-total reduction of political agency. The signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975, which included human rights provisions, ironically highlighted the state's failure to uphold these principles and emboldened dissident movements.

**Health Agency:** The period saw a worrying decline in public health indicators. Notably, the infant mortality rate, which had been decreasing, began to rise in the 1970s. This reversal in a key indicator of societal well-being pointed to deep-seated systemic problems.

**Epistemic Debt:** A crucial factor in the Soviet collapse was the accumulation of what the "Agency Calculus 3.0" terms "Epistemic Debt"—the societal cost of perpetual, institutionalized lies. The state's constant propaganda and suppression of truth created a profound sense of cynicism and alienation among the populace. When Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness) began to reveal the extent of the state's failures, the entire system's legitimacy crumbled.

## **Case Study 4: Rwanda (1974-1994) - The Deadly Culmination of Dehumanization**

The Rwandan genocide was not a spontaneous event but the horrific outcome of decades of systematically building an "Othering Barrier" between the Hutu and Tutsi populations.

**Political and Social Agency:** Following the "Hutu Revolution" of 1959-1961, the Tutsi minority was systematically marginalized and subjected to periodic violence. The regime of Juvénal Habyarimana, who took power in a 1973 coup, reinforced anti-Tutsi discrimination. Tutsis were largely excluded from political power and positions of influence, a clear reduction of their political and social agency. The introduction of ethnic identity cards in the colonial era, which were maintained post-independence, formalized this division.

**The "Othering Barrier" and "Epistemic Debt":** The creation of an "Othering Barrier" was central to the Rwandan case. Hutu extremist media relentlessly portrayed the Tutsi as a dangerous and alien group, a "preparatory act for a future, forceful reduction of agency". This dehumanizing rhetoric, a form of "Epistemic Debt," laid the psychological groundwork for the genocide. The "Agency Calculus 3.0" would identify this as a primary warning sign of impending systemic evil.

**Economic, Health, and Educational Agency:** While Rwanda was a poor country, the distribution of its limited resources was often dictated by ethnic affiliation, further disadvantaging the Tutsi population. The genocide itself led to a catastrophic collapse in all domains of agency, with a study showing a significant negative impact on the educational attainment of children exposed to the violence.

**Conclusion:**

The 20 years preceding major state changes in Chile, Iran, the Soviet Union, and Rwanda reveal a consistent pattern of eroding agency. Whether through economic mismanagement, political repression, systemic lies, or the cultivation of ethnic hatred, the "forcible reduction of agency" served as a powerful catalyst for instability and collapse. The "Agency Calculus 3.0" provides a valuable framework for understanding these historical events, not as sudden cataclysms, but as the predictable outcomes of a sustained assault on human potential. By monitoring the flow of agency across its various domains and remaining vigilant for the creation of "Othering Barriers" and the accumulation of "Epistemic Debt," it may be possible to identify and address the warning signs of state fragility before they culminate in tragedy.