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# Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats

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Why do some autocrats survive for decades, and others fall soon after taking power? The authors argue that when authoritarian rulers need to solicit the cooperation of outsiders or deter the threat of rebellion, they rely on political institutions. Partisan legislatures incorporate potential opposition forces, giving them a stake in the ruler's survival. By broadening the basis of support for autocrats, these institutions lengthen their tenures. An analysis of all authoritarian rulers in power during the 1946-1996 period provides evidence of the effect of nominally democratic institutions on their political survival.

**Keywords:** *authoritarianism; autocracy; dictatorship; leaders; survival*

Some autocrats rule so long that they are feared even after their deaths, and others fall almost immediately. Sobhuza II reigned over Swaziland 62 years; Haile Selassie, over Ethiopia for 47 years. Even those without royal blood can hold onto power for ages: Kim Il Sung died in 1994 after 47 years in power. Yet for every Kim Il Sung, there is a Léon Cantave, the first of many who tried to take power in 1957 in Haiti: He lasted 5 days. Why do some nondemocratic leaders survive for decades, and others fall soon after taking power?

The force of tradition or legitimacy from religious or other sources may play a role in the survival of some rulers, particularly monarchs. But then again, it was not enough to save Libya's King Idriss, Egypt's King Fuad II, or Iraq's King Faisal II from being deposed in military coups. Similarly, charismatic or personalistic leadership is frequently evoked to explain the maintenance of power in sub-Saharan Africa (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982, 1984). Yet along with Southeast Asia, the

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Middle East, and North Africa, this region has one of the highest turnover rates of dictatorial rulers.

Alternatively, the long tenure of some autocrats is attributed to their overwhelming monopoly of force. It is certainly true that many long-surviving autocrats headed some of the most repressive regimes on earth: Stalin remained in power for 31 years, Mao ruled over China for 33 years, and each was responsible for millions of deaths. Yet brutality is not enough: Having killed more than 2 million Cambodians, Pol Pot was ousted after only 3 years in power.

We know that for any ruler, authoritarian or democratic, the ability to navigate among various political forces and to build crucial coalitions is important for staying in power (Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 1999). But although democratic leaders have properly constituted institutions and rules by which they form coalitions, the channels through which autocrats consolidate support remain opaque (Bienen & van de Walle, 1991). The purpose of this article is to illuminate them.

Autocrats face two types of threats to their rule: those that emerge from within the ruling elite and those that come from outsiders within society. Authoritarian rulers often establish narrow institutions, such as consultative councils, juntas, and political bureaus, as a first institutional trench against threats from rivals within the ruling elite. But we claim that when they need to neutralize threats from larger groups within society and to solicit the cooperation of outsiders, autocrats frequently rely on nominally democratic institutions. Specifically, partisan legislatures incorporate potential opposition forces, investing them with a stake in the ruler's survival. By broadening the basis of support for the ruler, these institutions lengthen his<sup>1</sup> tenure.

To test this argument, we proceed as follows. First, we discuss the threats to autocrats and the institutions they use to deal with them. We focus on the ruler's use of legislatures to solicit cooperation and to neutralize the threat of rebellion from forces within society. Using proxies for autocrats' need for cooperation and the strength of the potential opposition, we are able to show that these nominally democratic institutions exist for systematic reasons. Then we analyze whether using these institutions as instruments of co-optation affects the survival in power of nondemocratic leaders.<sup>2</sup> We conclude with an argument that authoritarian institutions are not just "window dressing": Because they are the result of strategic choices and have an impact on the survival of autocrats, they should also have effects on policy outcomes.

## Why Authoritarian Institutions?

Discontent with the authoritarian regime can come from different segments of society. In Algeria, for example, Islamic organizations spearheaded the opposition before the military government banned the Front Islamique du Salut and closed the legislature. In Ecuador, business leaders and chambers of commerce organized general strikes against the military regime that in 1963 declared its "intention to guarantee capital and labor in an atmosphere of reason and patriotism" (Needler, 1964, p. 49). Poland's communist regime, in contrast, faced its strongest challenge from workers who organized under the banner of Solidarity. To neutralize the threats to their rule that emerge from within society, autocrats attempt to co-opt or, in the language of O'Donnell (1973), "encapsulate" the potential opposition (see also Linz, 1973).

Yet nondemocratic rulers must do more than just avert rebellion. Even if the rulers act merely in their own interest, if they are "predatory," up to a point they benefit when the economy functions well and the country is militarily secure (Levi, 1988; McGuire & Olson, 1996). Unless they can rely on exporting mineral resources, they need to solicit economic cooperation (Robinson, 2000; Wantchekon, 2002). And to obtain cooperation, they must provide incentives for people to reveal their private information, to work, and to save. Hence, autocrats must share the spoils of cooperation.

The spoils available for distribution—monetary rewards, perks, and privileges—increase when more people cooperate with the regime. Yet authoritarian regimes differ in their need for cooperation: Those who can extract rents from mineral resources need little of it, whereas those who must rely on bankers to loan them money, peasants to produce food, and scientists to research need extensive cooperation. In turn, dictators are dictators because they cannot win competitive elections, because their preferences diverge from those of the majority of the population. Hence, autocrats may face a threat of rebellion, and the magnitude of this threat is again not the same for different rulers.<sup>3</sup>

Autocrats may certainly use force to impose cooperation and to eliminate threats of rebellion. But the use of force is costly and may not always be effective. Writing of military dictatorship in Latin America, Cardoso (1979, p. 48) observes that the "state is sufficiently strong to concentrate its attention and repressive apparatus against so-called subversive groups, but it is not as efficient when it comes to controlling the universities, for example, or even the bureaucracy itself." As a result, the ruler may find it useful to rely on other strategies to elicit cooperation and avert rebellion.

The instruments by which nondemocratic rulers solicit cooperation and thwart threats of rebellion include policy concessions and distribution of spoils. Because some people will cooperate with the regime if it offers policies more to their liking, autocrats generate cooperation and, if need be, thwart the threat of rebellion by making policy concessions. Alternatively, autocrats can prevent threats to their power by sharing spoils.

Co-opting by distributing spoils and co-opting by making policy concessions entail different institutional mechanisms. Spoils—perks, privileges, or direct monetary rewards—can be disbursed directly by the autocrat. Decisions to allocate spoils are particularistic: They concern transfers of particular goods to specific individuals or groups. Such transfers need not, even if they may, assume a legal form (Collier, 1982; Zolberg, 1969). In turn, although not necessarily universalistic, policy concessions must be formalized as legal norms. Hence, we believe that although spoils can be distributed directly out of the autocrat's pocket, working out policy concessions requires an institutional setting: some forum to which access can be controlled, where demands can be revealed without appearing as acts of resistance, where compromises can be hammered out without undue public scrutiny, and where the resulting agreements can be dressed in a legalistic form and publicized as such.

Legislatures are ideally suited for these purposes. The ruler can select the groups to be granted access and control the flow of information about negotiations, all while building the basis of support for the regime. King Hussein of Jordan, for example, offered the Muslim Brotherhood, a moderate Islamic group, influence over educational and social policies in exchange for cooperation with the regime (Schwedler, 2006). Polish communists repeatedly sought participation of some Catholic groups: In a 1990 interview, the former first secretary of the Polish United Workers' (Communist) Party, Edward Gierek, revealed that he "intended to introduce to the Sejm [Parliament] a significant group of 25 percent of Catholic deputies. It would have permitted us . . .," Gierek continued, "*to broaden the political base of the authorities*" (italics added; translated from Rolicki, 1990). For the opposition, in turn, participation in legislatures provides an opportunity to pursue its interests and values within the framework of the regime. The mere existence of a legislature implies that there are some internal rules that regulate the prerogatives of power: At least, the ruler must announce his current wishes.

In turn, as Friedrich and Brzezinski (1961, p. 29) observe, "It is the role of the party to provide a following for the dictator." Members of a single party mobilize popular support and supervise behaviors of people unwilling

to identify themselves with the ruler. A single party is an instrument by which the regime can penetrate and control the society (Gershenson & Grossman, 2001). It is, in Mussolini's phrase, the capillary through which the blood of the dictatorship diffuses through the society. In exchange, the party offers individuals willing to collaborate with the regime a vehicle for advancing their careers within a stable system of patronage. The party also extends access and legitimacy to particular groups in making demands on the government. The workers' movement in Poland, for example, was able to mobilize in the first place because it had standing within the Communist Party.

Sometimes, however, a single party or a front does not suffice. When the opposition sees a possibility to overthrow an autocrat, it must be given more to desist, namely, legislative representation of autonomous political parties. Hence, some authoritarian regimes hold elections, which they tightly control to obtain the intended result.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the presence of autonomous parties is a double-edged sword. They may not behave in ways favorable to the ruler. Brazilian military rulers, for example, established within the legislature what they thought would be a pro-government party, *Aliança Renovadora Nacional*, and an official opposition party, *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*. In 1967-1968, however, these parties rejected a government-sponsored tax bill, an international trade bill, and an effort to lift the immunity of a parliamentarian whom the military wished to prosecute for insulting the armed forces during a speech. Co-optation, therefore, is not costless. Institutions that facilitate policy concessions run the risk of generating outcomes that run counter to the ruler's policy preferences.

In the end, the Brazilian example is somewhat of an aberration, and autocrats still manage to get more than 96% of their initiatives passed in the legislature (Gandhi, Gochal, & Saiegh, 2003). Although this figure does not capture the extent to which groups are able to amend legislation before it reaches the floor, it does reflect the degree to which the opposition is encapsulated by institutions. Participation in the legislature absorbs their activities into the institutional framework of the regime, according to the rules established by the ruler. Legalized opposition becomes domesticated opposition.

In sum, our argument runs as follows. Authoritarian rulers may need cooperation and may fear a threat from various segments of society. Cooperation can be induced and the threat can be reduced by sharing spoils or by making policy compromises. Nondemocratic leaders who need more cooperation and who face greater threats to their rule must make more extensive concessions in terms of spoils and policies. Although the former can be distributed directly by the ruler, policy compromises entail an institutional setting, typically legislatures. The degree to which assemblies are

organized along partisan lines in turn influences the extent to which authoritarian rulers must make compromises. If rulers counter the threat with an adequate degree of institutionalization, they survive in power.

## Predicting Dictatorial Institutions

If autocrats, in fact, behave systematically, we should be able to predict their institutions. The data include 3,518 country-year observations of authoritarian rule in 139 countries from 1946 to 1996.<sup>5</sup> Our dependent variable is LPARTY, which takes the value  $j = 0$  where there are no parties<sup>6</sup> or when there are multiple parties but no legislature;  $j = 1$  where there is one party, even if there is no legislature;<sup>7</sup> and  $j = 2$  where there is more than one autonomous party in the legislature. Note that we are not counting parties, but only putatively ranking different types of legislatures according to the extent of co-optation:  $j = 0$  represents the cases in which legislation, if any, does not include parties,  $j = 1$  the instances in which it is a prerogative of one party, and  $j = 2$  those in which at least one party is allowed to voice its views independently of the government. Parties are considered autonomous when they present themselves separately in elections, as distinct from “fronts” in which they are forced to join a single electoral list. Parties existing outside the legislature are ignored because these parties are not instruments of co-optation.<sup>8</sup>

To test the predictions derived from the model, we need to find indicators of the need for cooperation and of the threat originating from the opposition. Within the limits of the available data, we consider such indicators in turn.

The need for cooperation depends on the existence of ready-made institutions capable of organizing rule. Although the authoritarian zoo exhibits bewildering diversity—autocrats bear titles of emperors or kings, presidents, leaders (*führer*; *caudillo*), chiefs (*jefe*), first secretaries, leaders of faith, Councils of National Salvation, Supreme Commands of the Nation, administrators of the state of emergency, and simply dictators—we distinguish among three types of authoritarian leaders:<sup>9</sup> monarchs,<sup>10</sup> military,<sup>11</sup> and non-royal civilians (hereinafter simply *civilians*). Both monarchies and military regimes have by their nature a ready-made institution to organize their rule. Monarchs have the royal family or, more broadly, the court. Military rulers have the armed forces. Civilian leaders of nondemocracies, however, do not have preexisting organizations on which to rely. They must create their own organization, as observed by Lenin (1921) when he claimed

that only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of . . . guiding all the united activities of the whole of the proletariat, i.e., of leading it politically, and through it, the whole mass of the working people. Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible. (para. 7)

To rule the country, to supervise the state bureaucracy, they must rely on a political party, "government party," unique or not.<sup>12</sup> Hence, we expect that civilians face a higher need for cooperation than monarchs and military rulers.

The variation in the frequency of legislatures across types of leaders indicates a similar pattern. Monarchs coexisted with legislatures during 59.3% of the years during which they ruled and the military during 60.1% of their period of rule. Civilians, however, almost always—92.5% of their time—ruled with legislatures. To capture these differences, the variables in the statistical analysis are CIVILIAN and MILITARY, and MONARCH is the omitted dummy.

The need for cooperation is lower in economies that can rely on mineral exports—"enclave economies" in Cardoso and Faletto's (1978) terms.<sup>13</sup> In such economies, the ruler does not need the cooperation of broad sectors of society to maximize state revenue. Moreover, resource wealth makes it easier for autocrats to maintain their rule by sharing spoils in exchange for political acquiescence.<sup>14</sup> To measure mineral resource endowments, we use a dummy variable, RESOURCE, coded 1 if the average ratio of mineral exports to total exports exceeds 50%.<sup>15</sup>

The threat presented by the opposition depends on its chances to overthrow the dictator and the stakes entailed in being violently defeated. We assume that the success of a rebellion and its aftermath will depend on the organization of the opposition, on the ability of the autocrat to repress dissent, and on external factors. We use various proxies to characterize the strength of the opposition, as discussed below.

In authoritarian regimes that have inherited co-optive arrangements, some segments of society are already organized and capable of using the preexisting structures. Banning existing parties is a more difficult task than simply not allowing new parties to form: Rulers who inherit them may be unable to prevent the opposition from being organized in parties even when it is otherwise weak. A variable called INHERIT indexes the institutional arrangements inherited by the particular ruler from either the previous democratic regime or his immediate predecessor. INHERIT is the value of



LPARTY during the last year of the spell of the previous ruler, invariant during the spell of the current leader.<sup>16</sup> We expect that the opposition is stronger when it can rely on previously existing networks, resulting in more institutional concessions from the current ruler.

Past turnover among rulers in a particular regime indicates whether the regime is stable. Under stable regimes, much of society may already have been co-opted, and if not, the ruling elite is united in repelling any challenges. A variable called ACCHEAD counts the accumulated number of leaders within an authoritarian spell excepting those rulers who died naturally.<sup>17</sup> The fewer the past changes of leaders, the more stable the regime. In this case, opposition strength is likely to be low, resulting in less extensive institutional concessions.

The external pressure for countries to liberalize may help the opposition mount a challenge and create obstacles for regimes trying to answer with repression. This pressure increases when more other countries are democratic, so that the remaining ones are isolated. We use a variable we call ODWP (other democracies in the world, as a percentage) to serve as a proxy for external conditions that may strengthen the threat posed by the opposition.<sup>18</sup> More democracies throughout the world should increase opposition strength and dampen the autocrat's enthusiasm to repress, leading to more institutional concessions.

To summarize, we indicate the ruler's need for cooperation by his type and the availability of mineral exports. The strength of the potential opposition is captured by the number of preexisting parties, the frequency of past leadership changes, and the proportion of other democracies in the world.

All these variables are exogenous. The type of a leader is invariant during his spell (it is coded at the beginning of a leader's spell, so that a general who takes off his uniform remains a military; for details, see footnote 11); the numbers of inherited parties and of previous leaders characterize the past; and the proportion of democracies is an aggregate state of the world.

To determine the effects of these factors on the number of legislative parties under dictatorship we estimate an ordered probit model.<sup>19</sup> The results are presented in Table 1a.

The predicted number of parties tracks observations very closely (Table 1b). All coefficients have the predicted signs and are statistically significant. Availability of mineral resources reduces the need for parties. Monarchs (the omitted dummy variable) are less likely to have parties than the military, who in turn have fewer than civilians. Having inherited parties induces the dictator to tolerate more of them. When regimes have experienced more leadership turnover and are surrounded by more democracies, they make institutional concessions.

**Table 1a**  
**Number of Legislative Parties, as a Function of the Need for  
 Cooperation and the Strength of Opposition**

Variable	Coefficient	SE	Pr $ t  \geq z$
Constant	-1.9709	0.1151	0.0000
RESOURCE	-0.3888	0.0511	0.0000
MILITARY	0.2579	0.0738	0.0005
CIVILIAN	0.8236	0.0703	0.0000
INHERIT	0.7028	0.0296	0.0000
ACCHEAD	0.0700	0.0083	0.0000
ODWP	3.0652	0.2322	0.0000
$\mu$	1.2315	0.0290	0.0000

Note: RESOURCE = mineral resource endowments (1 = the average ratio of mineral exports to total exports exceeds 50%); MILITARY = military effective head; CIVILIAN = civilian effective head; INHERIT = inherited political parties; ACCHEAD = accumulated number of changes in effective head of government during an authoritarian spell; ODWP = other democracies in the world, as a percentage.

**Table 1b**  
**Frequencies of Actual and Predicted Outcomes**

Actual	Predicted			Total
	0	1	2	
0	583	297	164	1,044
1	190	845	271	1,306
2	87	291	790	1,168
Total	860	1,433	1,225	3,518

We are far from certain that our empirical implementation accurately captures the theoretically relevant variables: The constraint of data availability is very tight. But it is evident that autocrats establish and maintain political institutions for systematic reasons.

## The Impact of Institutions on Survival of Rulers

Autocrats leave power in many ways. Some die quietly in their sleep, to be succeeded by their sons or other handpicked successors. Many monarchs leave power in this way, although Kim Il Sung and Hafez Assad prove that royal blood is not necessary to carry out familial succession. Some are

forced into political oblivion under the formal rules of the regime: The case in point is the Mexican presidency (Castañeda, 2000). Some are overthrown by a popular revolution, like Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, or are forced to flee under an imminent threat of one, like Ferdinand Marcos. Some are removed by a decision of their closest collaborators: This was the normal modus operandi of communist regimes after the death of Stalin. Some die at the hands of their most trusted lieutenants. President Park Chun-Hee was assassinated by the head of the Korean intelligence services; several African dictators, most recently Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of Congo, were shot by their own bodyguards. When Garcia Marquez's dictator in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1976) checks several times that all doors and windows to his palace are bolted from the inside or when Rafael Trujillo in Vargas Llosa's (2001) *The Feast of the Goat* orders his closest confidant killed, they appear paranoid. But if so many nondemocratic leaders are paranoid, it is for good reasons: Their enemies are many, both within the ruling elite and among outsiders in society.

As proof that autocrats have much to fear from those within their own ruling coterie, one need only look at who succeeds whom (see Table 2). Monarchs are most often threatened by their family members, who are the only people legitimately qualified to succeed them. In 1995, for example, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani of Qatar, the 45-year-old son of the ruling emir, Sheikh Khalifa, ousted his father, who was vacationing in Switzerland. Military dictators, in turn, have mainly other military to fear. In Guatemala, power has changed hands between various military factions 13 times since World War II. The relatively frequent replacement of military leaders by democrats reflects the fact that the military often come to power without intending to establish permanent rule: as "arbitrators" or "guardians" (Finer, 1976; Nordlinger, 1977; Perlmutter, 1977). Finally, civilian rulers must fear almost everyone: the military and leaders of their own party who are only too eager to replace them, as well as democrats.

To mitigate the threats stemming from within the ruling elite, autocrats frequently set up inner sanctums where real decisions are made and potential rivals are kept close. Monarchs rely on consultative councils to give advice and on family members to staff key governmental posts. Khalifa in Qatar, for example, reshuffled his cabinet in 1992, installing his sons as ministers of defense, finance and petroleum, interior, and economy and trade; his grandson in charge of defense affairs; and his nephews in public health and Islamic affairs. In Oman, the Consultative Council includes only elites suggested by local "dignitaries" and "people of values, opinion and expertise" (Banks, Day, & Muller, 1993, p. 623).

**Table 2**  
**Replacement of Dictators by Type**

Type of Current Dictator	Type of Successor				Total
	Monarch	Military	Civilian	Democrat	
Monarch	11	6	4	1	22
Military	0	89	38	52	179
Civilian	2	53	103	29	187
Total	13	148	145	82	388

Note: Excludes dictators who died of natural causes while in office or who were still in office as of 1996.

Among military dictators, real power typically lies within the governing junta. A collegial body is necessary to incorporate key members of the armed forces, usually heads of the various branches, who may be peers of the dictator and who can guarantee the support of those they command.<sup>20</sup> Civilian rulers typically rely on a regime party, and a smaller body within the party—executive committees or political bureaus—where real decision-making power lies.

Consultative councils, juntas, and political bureaus are the first institutional trench for autocrats. These narrower institutions neutralize threats from within the ruling elite. But their efforts to neutralize their closest competitors are not always successful, as demonstrated by the fates of Park, Kabila, and many others. Therefore, we should not expect rulers to retain power forever even if they are able to perfectly co-opt outsiders through their second institutional trench: partisan legislatures.

Autocrats may also err when attempting to neutralize threats from below. Although secret police—a distinctly authoritarian institution—are used to monitor the population, the strength of the potential opposition may still be imperfectly gauged. Or, as captured by Kapuściński's (1983) portrait of Haile Selassie, some insiders within the regime may know the true state of affairs, but the ruler will remain ignorant if he is surrounded by "yes" men unwilling to transmit bad news. Finally, some nondemocratic leaders may be overly optimistic or stubborn in believing that the opposition can be managed through force or legitimacy alone. For whatever reason, some autocrats do err, and as a consequence have institutions weaker or stronger than the threat from the opposition would require.

If our theory accurately characterizes institutionalization under authoritarian regimes, then two propositions follow:

*Proposition 1:* Rulers who institutionalize sufficiently, governing with either the optimal or greater amount of institutionalization, should survive in power longer than those rulers who underinstitutionalize.<sup>21</sup>

*Proposition 2:* Rulers who institutionalize optimally should maintain power for similarly long lengths of time regardless of the severity of the threat they face.<sup>22</sup> In other words, autocrats who face weak opposition and institutionalize little should survive in power for as long as rulers who institutionalize more because they confront stronger opposition.

To test these propositions, we identify rulers who have overinstitutionalized, underinstitutionalized, and optimally institutionalized by comparing the number of legislative parties that rulers should have had given the strength of the opposition<sup>23</sup> with the number with which they governed in fact.<sup>24</sup>

Table 3 divides the sample of autocrats with completed spells by their actual and predicted values of LPARTY. Within each cell is the average duration in years of rulers in that category.<sup>25</sup>

Almost 30% of the cases are located on the diagonal, where the actual number of parties matches their predicted number. Altogether, 108 autocrats ( $47 + 32 + 29$ ) have institutionalized optimally. Below the diagonal lie 166 ( $59 + 16 + 91$ ) cases in which rulers overinstitutionalized, in that they have more parties than they need to neutralize opposition strength alone, either because of their need for cooperation or because they are risk averse. Finally, 79 rulers ( $57 + 22$ ) did not have institutions sufficient to thwart the threat of rebellion.

To test the first proposition, we compare average durations on or below the diagonal with those above the diagonal.<sup>26</sup> That is, we compare the tenures of rulers who have either overinstitutionalized or optimally institutionalized with those of rulers who underinstitutionalized. On average, autocrats who institutionalized sufficiently survived for 8.38 years ( $SD = 8.77$ ) in contrast to those who underinstitutionalized and survived for only 3.30 years ( $SD = 3.19$ ).<sup>27</sup> The difference of 5.08 years ( $SE = 0.64$ ) is significant at the .01 level.<sup>28</sup> Overinstitutionalizing does appear to provide some benefits for rulers. The 108 rulers who optimally institutionalized survived on average for 6.88 years ( $SD = 8.52$ ), whereas the 166 who overinstitutionalized lived for 9.36 years ( $SD = 8.82$ ). The difference in tenure that results from overinstitutionalizing is statistically significant.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it remains true that autocrats who underinstitutionalize do so at their own risk.

These results indicate that our first proposition defends itself well. Rulers who underinstitutionalize survive in power for a significantly shorter

**Table 3**  
**Average Tenure (in Years) of Dictators With Completed Spells, by the**  
**Number of Legislative Parties They Should and Do Have**

Actual Value of LPARTY	Predicted Value of LPARTY			All
	0 (None)	1 (Single)	2 (Multi)	
0 (none)				
<i>M</i>	6.34	3.61	1.86	4.33
<i>SD</i>	9.03	3.04	1.49	6.11
No. observations	47	57	22	126
1 (single)				
<i>M</i>	10.05	9.13	—	9.80
<i>SD</i>	8.99	9.29	—	9.04
No. observations	59	32	—	92
2 (multi)				
<i>M</i>	10.06	8.79	5.28	8.19
<i>SD</i>	8.27	8.86	6.25	8.40
No. observations	16	91	29	136
All				
<i>M</i>	8.62	7.21	4.06	7.23
<i>SD</i>	9.03	7.96	5.34	8.14
No. observations	122	180	52	354

Note: LPARTY = number of political parties in the legislature.

time than those who institutionalize sufficiently. In addition, overinstitutionalizing provides an extra gain in tenure above those who have optimally institutionalized. Given these findings, it seems that nondemocratic rulers have good reason to allow for the formation of somewhat autonomous political parties if they can be incorporated within a legislature. And although semicompetitive elections are often used to allow multiple parties into the assembly (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Schedler, 2006), the increase in tenure associated with a partisan legislature should not be attributed to these “legitimizing” elections. Multiple parties get into legislatures through elections, but so do members of single parties and candidates forced to run as independents. Because authoritarian rulers use elections to fill legislatures no matter how many parties they allow, we do not believe that the relationship between multipartism and survival is a spurious one, hiding the effect of elections. Multiple parties within a legislature have an independent effect on the tenure of autocrats, stabilizing their rule (Huntington, 1968).

According to our second proposition, rulers who institutionalize correctly should equally neutralize threats to their rule from below. Assuming

that threats to their rule from within the elite are equal, their expected tenures should thus be similar. In fact, autocrats who permit multiple parties survive in power for almost as long as those who have no parties. Yet authoritarian leaders who correctly institutionalize with a single party survive in power significantly longer—9.13 years. The pairwise differences in tenure between having a single party and having either no parties or multiple parties are statistically significant.<sup>30</sup>

The exceptional durability of leaders who rule with single parties could be the result of several factors. One could think it is communism, in which the tenure of leaders in particular countries depended to a large extent on the dictates of an external power. Yet rulers in noncommunist one-party systems survive equally long.<sup>31</sup> One-party systems are unique in the degree to which they extend their tentacles to absorb a panoply of organizations: trade unions, youth organizations, women's organizations, and sport clubs, even stamp collectors' associations (Bienen, 1970; Duverger, 1969; Huntington & Moore, 1970). Consistent with our account of co-optation, we speculate that this permeation of society facilitates fine-tuning of the policy concessions. Yet it may also be the case that the party's infiltration of society serves a coercive function that helps rulers to maintain power (Slater, 2003). Finally, single parties may confer exceptional longevity to autocrats by processing intraelite disputes and thus providing elites with guarantees that their interests would be served by supporting the incumbent even during times of crisis (Brownlee, 2004; Geddes, 1999; Smith, 2005). In the absence of a means of adjudicating among these accounts, a puzzle remains open.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Clearly, our intention was not to write a survival manual for autocrats. It was to elucidate the perplexing phenomenon of authoritarian institutions. Blinded by ideological antagonisms of the Cold War, we paid little attention to the institutional structure of authoritarian regimes. Announcing their plan for a seminal analysis of "totalitarianism," Friedrich and Brzezinski (1961, p. 18) refused to bother with institutions: "The reader may wonder why we do not discuss the 'structure of government,' or perhaps 'the constitution,' of these totalitarian systems. The reason is that these structures are of very little importance." Institutions, students of authoritarianism often claim, are but "window-dressing." But why would some autocrats care to dress their windows?

Autocrats maintain institutions to solicit cooperation or to extend their tenure in power. In either case, most autocrats construct several institutional trenches. The first trench may be a royal family council when the threat to the incumbent originates from his family, a junta when the threat comes from other high-ranking military, or a party committee when it comes from civilian rivals. But when the danger germinates from civil society, authoritarian rulers need a second line of trenches: a legislature that encapsulates some opposition, a party that mobilizes popular support for the dictatorship, or even multiple parties. Hence, whenever they need to, autocrats govern with political institutions.

The decision to institutionalize is an important one for rulers in non-democracies. They must accurately perceive the strength of the threat and respond with a sufficient degree of institutionalization. If they err—as a result of misinformation, idiosyncratic beliefs, or hubris—and underinstitutionalize, their tenure is drastically curtailed. When autocrats evaluate their conditions and institutionalize correctly, they defend themselves regardless of the intensity of the threat. And if these institutions do matter for their survival in power, they must entail policy compromises and thus have consequences for other outcomes. Hence, there is a reason to think that institutions do matter under authoritarian regimes.

## Appendix A

### Censored Autocrats

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For the 85 nondemocratic leaders who remain in power as of the end of the sample, we do not know their fates after the end of the observation period. In addition, 31 autocrats died of unnatural causes while in power, and we cannot know how long they would have remained in power had they not passed away. These tenures are right-censored, and because we do not know the length of their completed spells, we treat them separately from those 354 rulers who completed their tenures and remained alive during our period of analysis.

Table A1 divides the censored rulers by their actual and predicted number of legislative parties. For those autocrats who changed their institutional arrangements during their tenure, the value of LPARTY during their last full year in power indicates their actual institutional arrangement. Each tenure spell is indicated by the total number of full years in power. Within each cell, these durations are averaged to provide expected tenure in office.

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**Table A1**  
**Average Tenure (in Years) of Dictators With Censored Spells, by the**  
**Number of Legislative Parties They Should and Do Have**

Actual Value of LPARTY	Predicted Value of LPARTY			
	0 (None)	1 (Single)	2 (Multi)	All
0 (none)				
<i>M</i>	13.29	6.14	4.11	9.27
<i>SD</i>	11.76	3.98	3.44	9.66
No. observations	17	7	9	33
1 (single)				
<i>M</i>	13.50	8.56	34.00	13.32
<i>SD</i>	10.88	5.41	5.66	10.94
No. observations	8	9	2	19
2 (multi)				
<i>M</i>	15.60	14.79	10.18	11.97
<i>SD</i>	10.36	8.27	10.70	10.13
No. observations	5	19	40	64
All				
<i>M</i>	13.73	11.46	10.04	11.42
<i>SD</i>	10.97	7.75	11.00	10.15
No. observations	30	35	51	116

Note: LPARTY = number of political parties in the legislature.

## Appendix B

### Data and Sources

Countries were classified as democracies and nondemocracies (a term we use interchangeably with *autocracies* and *authoritarian regimes*) for each year between 1946 and 1996 according to rules spelled out in detail in Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2000).

The following variables, used in the statistical analysis in Table 1a, are defined in greater detail with their sources here:

**ACCHEAD:** Accumulated number of changes in effective head of government during an authoritarian spell. Included are rulers who emerged midyear but did not survive until December 31, along with autocrats who died in office from unnatural causes. (Sources: Banks, Day, and Muller, 1973–1997; Bienen & van de Walle, 1991; Lentz, 1994; Zárate, n.d.)

**CIVILIAN:** Civilian effective head. Dummy variable coded 1 if the effective head is a civilian (neither a monarch nor a military ruler). (Sources: Banks et al., 1973–1997; Beck, Clarke, Groff, Keefer, & Walsh, 2000; Lentz, 1994.)

**INHERIT:** Inherited political parties. The number of political parties inherited from the previous ruler regardless of whether that leader was democratic or authoritarian. Created from **LPARTY**.

**LPARTY:** Number of political parties in the legislature. Coded 0 if there are no political parties or if there are multiple political parties but no legislature, 1 if one party exists even if there is no legislature, and 2 if two or more political parties exist in the legislature. When multiple parties present themselves to voters as a single list, **LPARTY** = 1. (Sources: Banks, 1996; Banks et al., 1973–1997; Beck et al., 2000; Di Tella, 1993; McDonald & Ruhl, 1989; Nohlen, Krennerich, & Thibaut, 1999; Przeworski et al., 2000; Tachau, 1994.)

**MILITARY:** Military effective head. Dummy variable coded 1 if the effective head is or ever was a member of the military by profession, 0 otherwise. Note that retired members of the military are coded as 1, as the shedding of a uniform is not necessarily enough to indicate the civilian character of a leader. Also note that we do not consider rulers who come to power as head of guerilla movements as military. (Sources: Banks et al., 1973–1997; Beck et al., 2000; Lentz, 1994).

**ODWP:** Other democracies in the world, as a percentage. Percentage of democratic regimes (as defined by **REG**) in the current year (other than the regime under consideration) in the world. (Sources: Cheibub & Gandhi, 2004; Przeworski et al., 2000).

**RESOURCE:** Mineral resource endowment of countries. This is a time-invariant variable coded 1 if the average ratio of mineral exports (including oil) to total exports exceeds 50%. (Sources: International Monetary Fund, 1999; World Bank, 2000.)

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## Notes

1. The gender is not accidental. Except for women who have served as interim leaders—Queens Dzeliwe and Ntombi in Swaziland in the early 1980s, Ertha Pascal-Trouillot in Haiti in 1990, and Ruth Perry in Sierra Leone in 1996—authoritarian rulers have been men.

2. We do not discuss the question of whether institutions also matter for the durability of authoritarian regimes rather than of individual rulers. With very few exceptions, as long as particular rulers remained in power, so did the regimes. Hence, whatever props individual autocrats also props autocratic regimes. But the converse need not be true: Rulers can change while the regime survives. There are *prima facie* indications that a more frequent turnover of authoritarian rulers shortens the life of authoritarian regimes: Using the Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2000) data shows that the probability of an autocracy dying in a particular year increases when the moving average of the number of rulers in the life of a regime is larger. But the causal effect of turnover must be evaluated in a broader context of factors that drive regime transitions, a task that cannot be undertaken here.

3. The argument in this section is based on a formal model in Gandhi and Przeworski (2006).

4. The father of authoritarian regimes in the modern era is the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon in France, 1851–1870. For the devices through which this regime controlled elections, see Zeldin (1971).

5. The operationalization of authoritarian regime is taken from Przeworski et al. (2000).

6. We also experimented with coding in which nonpartisan legislatures were coded as  $j = 1$ , to allow for legislatures that represent functional groups rather than parties, such as the Spanish Cortes under Franco. The results, however, are qualitatively the same. We thank Paloma Aguilar for directing our attention to this issue.

7. The reason is that in these cases some party bodies act as legislatures. Such cases are rare ( $N = 183$ ).

8. There are 260 country-year observations in which there are multiple parties but no legislature. Most of them fall into two transitional categories: Either the authoritarian regime emerges from democracy and the autocrat did not yet get around to formally banning parties or multiple political parties are allowed to form on the eve of opening the legislature; the latter pattern is particularly prevalent in the African "national conferences" as discussed in Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and Mbaku and Ihonvbere (1998). Other instances of this kind occur when the autocrat temporarily closes the legislature.

9. Recent alternative classifications include Geddes (1999), Slater (2003), and Wintrobe (1998).

10. Note that we are classifying effective heads of government: the people who in fact rule. Constitutional monarchs of the European variety or the Emperor of Japan are not effective rulers. Monarchs must both bear a royal designation such as *king* or *emir* and have been either preceded or followed in power by another family member. Therefore, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, an army colonel in the Central African Republic who seized power and later designated himself "Emperor Bokassa I" is not considered a monarch because a family member neither preceded nor followed him in office. In contrast, Reza Khan of Iran also seized power as an army officer and took the royal designation of Shah. He and his son Reza Pahlavi are considered monarchs because succession did occur successfully.

11. We consider the effective head of government to be a military ruler if he is or ever was a member of the professional armed forces. Retired members are considered military rulers, as the shedding of a uniform is not necessarily enough to indicate the civilian character of a leader. In contrast, leaders who come to power as heads of guerilla movements are not considered military leaders. Many of them, such as Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale, belonged to the civilian wings of guerilla movements and did not actively participate in fighting. Furthermore, not all guerilla leaders designate themselves heads of the military once they take power. After removing Fulgencio Batista in 1959, Fidel Castro became leader of Cuba, but not of the armed forces. His brother, Raoul, occupies that post. We also tried to distinguish personal from institutional military regimes, coding the military rank of a ruler when he came into power. Our intuition was that coups led by generals are institutional, whereas those staged by lower ranking members are personalist, as they violate military hierarchy. This distinction turned out, however, to be irrelevant in empirical analyses.

12. Clearly, this does not imply that each civilian dictator must create a party anew. Most civilian rulers inherited a party organization; indeed, many were placed in power by the party. All we are saying is that to control the state apparatus, civilian regimes must rely on an organization created specifically to organize their rule, as distinct from the armed forces or the monarchical court, which exist independently of their role vis-à-vis the state bureaucracy.

13. "Enclave" economies require few labor inputs, as distinct from "plantation" economies, which also export primary commodities but are labor intensive.

14. The literature on the rentier state is extensive, including works by Karl (1997) and Ross (2001).

15. We also experimented with several alternative measures that distinguish between fuels and mineral ores: two dummy variables, each coded 1 if the average ratio of oil and mineral ores, respectively, exceeds 50% (data from International Monetary Fund, 1999); ores and metal exports as a percentage of merchandise exports (data from World Bank, 2000); fuel exports as a percentage of merchandise exports (data from World Bank, 2000); ores, metal, and fuel exports as a percentage of gross domestic product (constructed from World Bank [2000] data); and crude oil and natural gas production in thousand barrels per day (data from Energy Information Administration, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). They all have the same sign and are all significant. Given that the qualitative results do not depend on the particular operationalization of the need for cooperation, we stick to our cruder measure to minimize the loss of observations. See Appendix B for the definitions of all the variables.

16. At least 37% of autocrats changed the number of parties—"at least" because this count is based on the comparison of the number inherited and the number during the last year of the leader, not including changes back and forth during the tenure of particular autocrats.

17. Because authoritarian rulers who died of natural causes while still in office neither stepped down nor were removed by others, their exit from power says little about the stability of the regime. Therefore, we exclude them both from the construction of ACCHEAD and from the analysis in general. In addition, because it is impossible to determine whether plane and helicopter crashes are truly accidents or "accidents," we do not consider any deaths of this nature to be natural. Results, however, do not depend on the exclusion of these autocrats.

18. Because the number of independent states increases over time, we use the percentage, rather than the absolute number, of other democracies.

19. We included controls for level of economic development. Per capita income is statistically insignificant. Because its inclusion has no theoretical basis and does not change other coefficients, we exclude it from the analysis.

20. For fascinating accounts of the rules governing the Argentine junta from 1976 to 1983 and the Chilean junta under Pinochet, see, respectively, Fontana (1987) and Barros (2002).

21. We assume that dictators who deviate from the optimal degree of institutionalization predicted by our model made mistakes. One might think, however, that dictators know things we, as observers, do not know, and the errors are ours, not theirs. If this were true, however, dictators would survive for equally long periods independently of what we consider to be their optimal degree of institutionalization, as long as the assumption spelled out in footnote 22 holds. They do not.

22. Here we assume that the challenges posed by the ruling elite and by outsiders from society are independent of each other.

23. Because what matters here is only the extent of institutionalization that is required to neutralize the threat of being overthrown, rather than institutionalization necessary to induce cooperation, we base the predicted number of parties only on those variables that proxy the threat posed by the opposition (i.e., INHERIT, ACCHEAD, and ODWP).

24. We take the value of LPARTY during their last full year in power as an indicator of their actual institutional arrangement. For the vast majority of autocrats within the entire sample (censored and uncensored), their institutional arrangements do not change so that matching their actual and predicted values of LPARTY is unproblematic. The number of legislative parties changes in less than 20% of cases. For these authoritarian rulers, we tried the analysis taking the actual number of parties they had for the longest period during their tenures. As it turns out, these autocrats typically had in place by their last year in office the institutional arrangement with which they governed the longest. Because very few autocrats with completed

spells changed to a multiparty system in their last year, we use the actual and predicted number of parties from the last year of all autocrats.

25. Some authoritarian leaders in the sample have multiple spells, that is, reappear after losing power. There are 17 such cases, notably Pierre Buyoya in Burundi, Oswaldo Lopez Arellano in Honduras, Ne Win in Myanmar, and Wladyslaw Gomulka in Poland. (They reappear as autocrats, in contrast to the 9 authoritarian rulers during this period who returned to power as democrats—e.g., Inonu in Turkey, Obote in Uganda, and Duarte in El Salvador.) Each spell is treated as if belonging to a new head. Altogether, 354 autocrats, or three fourths of all autocrats for whom we have data during this period, have completed spells. Authoritarian rulers still in power as of the end of the sample are right-censored, as are those autocrats who died while in office of unnatural causes. We analyze the censored leaders in Table A1 of Appendix A. The results are qualitatively similar to those shown here for authoritarian rulers with completed spells.

26. This procedure is equivalent to a survival model without time dependence. Let the probability that an autocrat survives  $t$  periods be  $S_t$ , the variables indicating the threat to the autocrat be  $X_t$ , and the actual degree of institutionalization be  $I_t$ . Then the survival model is  $S_t = f(I_t, X_t) + u_t$ . Now, the degree of institutionalization predicted by the threat indicators is  $\Pi_t = \sum_k \beta_k X_{kt}$ , where the betas are given by the ordered probit. Then the model becomes  $S_t = f(\Pi_t, I_t) + u_t = f(\Pi_t - I_t) + u_t$ . Note that there is nothing to control for here, as all the potential exogenous variables are included in  $\Pi$  or  $u$ . The only issue concerns the assumption of conditional mean independence,  $\rho(\Pi, u) = 0$ .

27. Aggregate numbers reported here and elsewhere in the text are the result of averaging the tenures of autocrats located in the appropriate individual cells in Table 3.

28. The same qualitative findings emerge with pairwise comparisons from Table 3. Among authoritarian leaders who should have a single party, for example, the difference between autocrats who have no parties and those who have a single party is 5.52 years ( $SE = 1.69$ ); the difference between autocrats with no parties and those with multiple parties is 5.18 years ( $SE = 1.01$ ).

29. The difference is 2.48 years ( $SE = 1.07$ ).

30. Among autocrats who have correctly institutionalized, rulers with a single party survive in power 2.79 years longer than those without parties ( $SE = 2.11$ ) and 3.85 years longer than those with multiple parties ( $SE = 2.01$ ).

31. There were 55 communist rulers, of whom 20 are not included in the analysis because of natural death while in office or lack of data. After removing the remaining 35 communist leaders, the results are similar to those found in Table 3.

32. For a similar point, see Kalyvas (1999).

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