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Are There Types of Dictatorship?

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Abstract and Keywords

The idea of different kinds of dictatorships can be traced back to Aristotle. In contemporary thinking, three classifications are common: tinpot vs. totalitarian, personal/military/single-party or civilian/military/monarchy, and short vs. long time horizon. This chapter argues that classification is useful if it can be theoretically grounded, the types can be distinguished empirically, and especially if they behave differently. It concludes with an analysis of seemingly “unclassifiable” regimes such as Chinese totalitarian capitalism, Putin’s Russia, and North Korea.

Keywords: dictatorship, authoritarian, typology, repression, loyalty, totalitarian, tinpot, democracy

15.1 Introduction: Why Classify Dictators?

THE idea that there are different kinds of dictatorships is an old one. It goes back at least to Aristotle (in his *Politics*). So does the idea that while many dictatorships are “bad” (“deviant,” in Aristotle’s words) as a form of government, some are “good.”¹ In Aristotle’s view, tyranny and oligarchy were bad, but monarchy and aristocracy were deemed to be good.

Modern political scientists often use classification as a theoretical tool. Economists do not typically do this, but some do so explicitly and others implicitly, as we shall see. Both have made important contributions to the contemporary understanding of dictatorship, but sadly, even in the twenty-first century, scholars in neither discipline read the works of those in the other very often. In this chapter, I depart from this unfortunate practice and look at contributions from both economics and political science, as well as from some other disciplines (history and philosophy). However, I do pay special attention to rational choice and especially public-choice contributions. I do not survey all the recent literature

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on dictatorship, but only those works that either contain a classification or from which a classification can easily be inferred.²

A large number of classifications have been done, but I think they fall into three types:

- A. Tinpot vs. totalitarian (based on *how much* power the dictator has over his people)
- B. Personal/military/single-party or civilian/military/monarchy (based on *who has* the power)
- C. Short vs. long time horizon (based on *how long* the power is expected to last)

(p. 287) What is the point of classifications and in what sense can one be said to be better than another? In my view, classification is illuminating if it can be shown that the different types behave differently. For example, in the tinpot vs. totalitarian classification, one can show that a tinpot responds to a favorable event such as an improvement in economic performance (which increases the people's loyalty to his regime and therefore his power) by lowering political repression, while a totalitarian does so by raising it. The reason is the degree to which the dictator pursues power: the tinpot needs only enough power to maintain himself in office and collect the fruits thereof, while *the totalitarian can never get enough power.*

Because the responses of the two types are so different, it is easy to see that the distinction is crucial in analyzing the dictator's behaviour in response to events such as an uprising against his rule, a defeat in war, or an increase in economic growth, as well as to policy questions for the democracies such as whether to provide aid to or trade with a dictator or to impose sanctions.

Another way different types of dictators behave differently is in their expected longevity. This is the explicit basis for the third classification given. To some degree, it can also be the basis for the other two descriptors. Thus, "military" dictatorships (also a subspecies of tinpot) have been shown in several empirical studies to have the shortest life, even when measured in different ways and using different data sets. "Single-party regimes" (totalitarian) are the longest.

The issues to be discussed with respect to these three main classifications are as follows:

1. How *good* is the classification?
2. How *different* are the classifications? Do they really boil down to one type, especially given the limitations of the data and the difficulties of distinguishing them empirically?
3. Can we really judge some dictatorships to be "good" (i.e., apply standard economic welfare criteria to dictatorships?) For example, the rate of economic growth is sometimes nowadays used to measure economic performance and therefore the "goodness" of the regime. Is this appropriate?
4. How *useful* are the classifications for understanding the workings of a regime?

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The meaning of the first two questions is clear enough. The third is related to Aristotle's question about good versus bad dictatorships. In the contemporary context, one is tempted to suggest, as is often done in the literature, that the length or stability of a regime is an indicator of how much support it has and therefore is a measure of its goodness. However, how long a regime lasts is also a result of how successful it is at repressing opposition. We address this issue in section 15.5.

In turning to the forth question, I see classifications as often a very useful tool for understanding dictatorships. The point of a classification is to move beyond the idea that all dictatorships are alike in their behavior, so it is effective if it correctly isolates the different behaviors of regimes. Of course, even a good classification system (p. 288) sometimes doesn't tell you the real *modus operandi* of the regime compared to the understanding one gets from modeling the specific institutions of a dictatorship. In section 15.6, I explore this idea with some brief analyses of some apparently "unclassifiable" regimes.

The outline of the chapter is as follows: section 15.2 discusses the theoretical basis for the first category (how much power? has the tinpot vs. the totalitarian), section 15.3 discusses the two variants on the second category (what is the source of the power—military, personal, civilian, monarchic, or single party?), and section 15.4 explores the third category (how long does the regime expect to remain in power?). Section 15.5 then discusses problems common to all the categories. Section 15.6 turns to some examples of "unclassifiable" regimes, which I suggest are not easily classified despite their importance, but can be understood further with insights from specific rational-choice models: Putin's Russia, China, North Korea, and the different responses of dictators in the Arab world to the Arab Spring. Section 15.7 then concludes the chapter.

15.2 How Much Power? Tinpots and Totalitarians

The seminal work on totalitarian regimes is probably Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Her arguments are complex and difficult to summarize briefly, but the following themes are essential. First, totalitarianism, as exemplified by Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, was a new kind of dictatorship, different from traditional kinds of authoritarianism. Second, despite the vast differences between these two regimes, she regarded them as fundamentally the same, in a certain sense: both behaved as power-maximizing juggernauts, attempting to maximize the power of the state over the individuals in it. In this specific sense, the two regimes can be classified under the same label: totalitarian. Third, there are really two aspects to the power of the state: (a) the power of the state over the individual—the idea that under totalitarianism individuals either are or become "atomized," with few or no connections with each other so that their only connection with each other is via the state; (b) the power of the state over the bureaucrats who labor for the regime. The famous phrase "the banality of evil" comes from this last point; it refers to the behavior of ordinary bureaucrats in the regime, of

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whom Adolf Eichmann was the exemplary figure, as mere “cogs in a wheel.” They committed monstrous acts (Eichmann was the transportation “coordinator” of the Final Solution to the “Jewish problem”), but in doing so they were just “following orders” from superiors. So, evil was “banal”—something committed not by heinous figures but by completely ordinary people in the simple course of carrying out their duties. The argument was used by many Nazi defendants (but not accepted by the judges) at the Nuremberg trials (and by Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem) to suggest that they could not be found guilty of their crimes.

(p. 289) Rational choice cannot capture many of the subtleties of Arendt’s work, but it does yield insights of its own, and is capable of shedding light on where her theories may not capture reality. Thus, the idea that individuals joined the Nazi Party as the result of “atomization” in Weimar Germany (the idea that there was a paucity of intermediate links or interest groups there, leaving individuals vulnerable to Nazi propaganda) has been shown to be incorrect with respect to the Nazi regime, in particular by the historians Larsen et al. (1980). Instead, people joined the regime via the interest groups of which they were members. Thus, doctors joined the party *as a group*, and the same appeared to be true of other interest groups. This fits in with a rational-choice analysis of the role of individuals in politics: the free-rider problem limits individual participation while groups facilitate it.

Nor did the bureaucrats under the regime behave simply as robotic servants of the master. This picture of bureaucracy in totalitarian states, with the accompanying idea that everyone just obeys orders, has been questioned by Breton and Wintrobe (1986). They show that Arendt’s own account of Eichmann, and that of other standard historical sources, revealed that Eichmann did not merely follow orders. Indeed, he was an entrepreneur, competing with other bureaus with his own ideas and schemes for addressing the “Jewish issue,” which of course was central to the Nazi government’s concerns. The Nazi bureaucracy in general was competitive, with bureaucrats in different bureaus competing to implement their own versions of the Final Solution. New historical evidence by Stangneth (2016) corroborates this picture of Eichmann in particular. And for that reason, it is easy to find him guilty.

I will return to this point about competition among subnational units of government in the discussion of the Chinese economic system. For now, it is worth emphasizing that this picture of the Nazi regime as a competitive bureaucracy does not mean the concept of the banality of evil should be discarded. That evil is done as the result of competition does not make it any less banal or ordinary. And, in this age of groups like ISIS, the concept would appear more relevant than ever. Despite the gruesomeness of the acts done by ISIS, which recall the Nazi regime in their barbarity, the people committing them appear utterly ordinary. Indeed, a scholar who met some of them was shocked to discover that they appeared to be quite “sweet boys.”³ Their appears to be one difference, and it is a chilling one: the Nazis hid the full extent of their barbarity from the world, whereas ISIS

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trumpets their executions, films them over and over to get them just right, and uses them as a recruiting tool.⁴

There are, of course, many other works on totalitarianism by historians and political scientists—for example, Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956) and Kirkpatrick (1982). But the basic dichotomy is the contrast between this type of regime and other, milder forms of dictatorship (authoritarians or tinpots).

An economic or rational-choice model that tried to capture the distinction between the two regime types was developed in Wintrobe (1990, 1998). A totalitarian regime can be modeled as one that maximizes power over its citizens. The question, then, is what is the constraint? Do they really achieve absolute power over their citizens, as Arendt claimed, so that, as one Nazi official suggested, “The only time an individual has a private moment is when he is asleep”?

(p. 290) In order to address these issues, Wintrobe’s model began with the “dictator’s dilemma”: the problem facing any ruler of knowing how much support he has. The dictator’s use of repression breeds fear on the part of his subjects, and this fear makes them reluctant to criticize him or his policies. In turn, this breeds fear on the part of the dictator, since not knowing what the population really thinks gives him reason to fear them. The paradox is that the more the dictator uses his repressive apparatus to stifle opposition, dissent, and criticism, the more reason he has to be afraid, because the more opposition is stifled, the less he knows how much support he really has. Dictators who wish to remain in office for a long time, therefore, do not usually rule by repression alone. Instead, they find ways to build their long-term support or loyalty.

It follows from this that dictators do not survive through repression alone but use two instruments to stay in power between power and consumption: repression and loyalty.⁵ Repression and loyalty can thus be thought of as instruments for producing power. The dictator also faces a trade-off between power and consumption: the more he consumes, the fewer resources are available for producing power.

What else constrains the dictator? He can always get more resources by using his power to raise taxes, applying simple confiscation, borrowing, or other means. And if he can always get more resources, he can use those resources to increase repression or attract more loyalty, and thus build more power.

So, is his power unlimited? Not necessarily. What this reasoning neglects is the likelihood of **diminishing returns**. In the case of loyalty, initially it is easy to build with those who are predisposed to support the regime. But then it gets harder, and it obviously gets particularly hard to obtain loyalty from those who are fundamentally opposed to the regime. Similarly, a little bit of repression can be imposed at relatively small cost by using the police and the army to put down dissent. But at higher levels, these resources get exhausted and people who are unsuited for this purpose (postal workers? bank clerks?) have to be employed to keep the population down. Finally, it is relatively easy to convert

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power into resources by imposing small taxes, but as these taxes get steeper or broader, resistance can be expected to mount.

As long as there are diminishing returns to the accumulation of power by spending resources converting money into power, and diminishing returns to using power to get more resources (power into money), then ultimately there is a limit to both power and the resources available to the dictator. So, dictators, even ones like Hitler, Stalin, or Kim Il Sung, never obtain absolute power over their subjects. Instead, there is a finite quantity, an equilibrium of power and resources available to the dictator, that can be shown to vary in predictable ways.

One can solve this model and obtain equilibrium levels of repression and loyalty, as well as equilibrium levels for power and regime budget. This leads to the second implication of this way of thinking: a fourfold classification of dictators, instead of the twofold (tinpot vs. totalitarian) one in Arendt or in Wintrobe (1990). A **totalitarian dictatorship** is implied when equilibrium repression and loyalty are both high, and a **tinpot** when they are both low. Then, there are two intermediate cases: **tyranny** (high repression, low loyalty), and a possibly mythical case of **timocracy** (low repression and high loyalty).

(p. 291) Tyranny (high repression, low loyalty) is the most ancient category, used by the Greeks and Romans to describe certain regimes, but it does cover modern regimes like Saddam Hussein's Iraq or Syria's Bashar al-Assad, whom while very repressive, do not strive for a new type of man or for absolute control over their people's behavior as do totalitarian regimes, and they are not short-lived like tinpots.

Thus, unlike most political science classifications (e.g., Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956; Geddes 1999), but like most economic ones (Olson 1993, 2000; Acemoglu and Robinson 2004), these are not utterly different kinds of regimes but, rather, special cases of a general model of dictatorship. And the point is not just to classify dictatorships but, instead, to derive predictions about their behavior. It turns out that the different types behave differently. One simple implication is their expected longevity: totalitarians should last the longest, followed by tyrannies, and then tinpots. Another, more subtle implication is that they respond differently to shocks. A totalitarian regime maximizes power over its citizens. A tinpot, on the other hand, is interested mainly in consumption, so he tries to obtain just enough power to stay in office and uses any surplus for his own consumption (living in the palace, driving the Mercedes, sporting a Rolex watch). For example, in response to an improvement in economic performance or a victory in war that raises the loyalty of the citizens to the regime, the tinpot will decrease repression and use the resources saved to consume more. A totalitarian, on the other hand, maximizes power. Either of these developments gives him an opportunity to increase his power. Because he maximizes power, he takes this opportunity. Alternatively, looking at one example of the reverse situation (an unfavorable development), we see that the decline in economic performance in the 1970s to 1990s in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe caused a relaxation in repression, as would be predicted by this model. This culminated in

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Gorbachev's attempt at *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and in the end repression fell so far that the regime collapsed.

One particularly interesting prediction of the model concerns military regimes (Wintrobe (1990 862–864; 1998, 56–58). Political scientists have long thought that they represent a special kind of regime and they are formally part of the classification systems of Geddes (1999) and Cheibub et al. (2010), discussed in the next section. The evidence indicates that they are the least stable form of dictatorship. Now, this is a paradox. If any kind of dictatorship should be good at repression, it is the military kind. Why are they so short and unstable? Why do they typically end by voluntarily handing power over to civilian regimes?

To understand this phenomenon, we ask what can be expected to happen when a military regime replaces a civilian dictatorship. A military regime should have a comparative advantage at repression: it can increase it at lower cost than a civilian one. But the military is a closed hierarchy, with its own codes of behavior, networks, and ways of doing things. This in turn has two consequences: (1) career opportunities for military personnel outside the army, navy, and the like tend to be limited. So military bureaus, unlike others, tend to be budget maximizing in Niskanen's (1968) sense of that term, and indeed, military dictatorships have famously expanded the budget of their military whenever they have taken power. (2) Military regimes do not demand or even easily (p. 292) tolerate the participation of the masses in politics the way totalitarian regimes do, and few military regimes have built mass parties.

It follows that the price of repression tends to be lower, and the price of civilian loyalty higher for the military, and military dictatorships typically do govern using more repression and receiving less loyalty than civilian regimes. But as budget maximizers, after they obtain power, their main objective is to raise the military budget and the salaries of military personnel. However, increases in the wages of the military means that the price of repression rises, since a large part of this "price" is military salaries. Moreover, raising some military salaries and not others engenders jealousy and competition within the military and therefore further pressure for wage increases from those who have not been favored. It follows that once the military have been in power and have raised military salaries and the military budget, *the price of repression rises*, and the military regime loses its comparative advantage over a civilian regime.

Thus, military rule has a peculiar feature: in the process of governing, it acts to destroy its own comparative advantage at governing. Put another way, **it tends to sow the seeds of its own destruction!** Initially, repression is relatively cheap under this rule, but in the process of rewarding supporters by raising the wages of the military, it systematically destroys its advantage.

This explains the paradox: that military regimes tend to be unstable. The history of military coups in Latin America, and even in South Korea, is testament to this proposition: countercoups are twice as likely in military regimes as in others. And the typical response of a military regime to these difficulties is for the military to exit after a few years in

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power and turn the power over to civilians, having obtained guarantees against prosecution and being assured of protection for their military budget. And this explains why military regimes on average tend to be short, 11 years on average as estimated in one study (Hadenius and Torrell 2007).

At the same time, this raises a puzzle: some military regimes are not unstable. For example, the regime of North Korea has survived for over 60 years. This paradox of North Korea is addressed in section 15.6, on “Unclassifiabiles.”

Some of the implications of this general model have been tested by Islam and Winer (2004). They used a large sample of both nondemocratic and democratic countries. Countries were classified into different regime types (tinpots, tyrannies, and totalitarians) using the combined values of the **Gastil indices of political freedom and civil liberties**. Hypotheses concerning the relationship between economic growth and the combined value of the Gastil indices were then tested for the period 1967 to 1992. The results indicate that the relationship between an index of civil and political freedoms and economic growth varies significantly across the three regime types.

The theory of repression has been extended in Philip Verwimp’s (2003) article on the tragic genocide in Rwanda. The article applies Wintrobe’s model in a new way, by using the price of coffee as an index of the capacity of a dictatorial regime to generate loyalty, and it extends the model to explain genocide. Verwimp suggests that the Habyarimana regime, frustrated by its loss of power, attempted to split the population along ethnic **(p. 293)** lines and set one group against the other, culminating in rewarding the Hutus for exterminating the Tutsis. Thus, the genocide is interpreted as the attempt by the regime to remain in power by accentuating the ethnic split, ultimately singling out one group for extermination by the other.

Another extension was made to theocracy, specifically the Papal States (Padovano and Wintrobe (2013). Popes during the whole history of the temporal power of the papacy are classified into tinpot, totalitarian, and tyrant types. Two hypotheses are tested. The first is that tinpot popes are weaker and therefore should have shorter-lived regimes compared to tyrannical and totalitarian popes. The second is that totalitarian popes pose a more serious threat to, and are thus more likely to be opposed by, other political powers, like the empires of the Middle Age and the nation-states in more recent times. As the election of an anti-pope is probably the most serious challenge to the legitimacy of a pope, the model predicts that the probability of having an anti-pope is higher during totalitarian papacies than during tinpot or tyrannical ones. The evidence generally supports both hypotheses.

15.3 Who Has the Power?

Juan Linz made many contributions to political science, but one of those that he is best known for is his considerable expansion of the classification of authoritarian regimes (Linz 2000). Perhaps the central goal for his classification system was to describe the

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locus of power as accurately as possible. In this vein, he distinguished between “traditional” and “bureaucratic-authoritarian” military regimes, and he added subtypes like *sultanism*, *caudillismo*, and *caciquismo*. He also explored five types of military rule, drawn from Samuel Finer’s (1962) influential typology of military governments, which were based on how constrained the military was by civilian forces.

Modern work in this tradition of classification that focusses on *who rules*—that is, on where the control over access to power and influence lies—begins with Geddes (1999), who replaced the traditional distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian (or tinpot) with three categories of ruler: personalist, military, and single-party. Her purpose was to explain the differences in democratization experienced in different regions in the period 1946 to 1998. Using a new data set that includes 163 authoritarian regimes, her evidence shows that survival rates for different types of regime differ markedly. Thus, only about 11% of the military regimes that have existed since 1946 still existed in 1998. The proportion of surviving personalist regimes is not much higher (15%). In contrast, 50% of single-party regimes continued to exist.

Cheibub et al. (2010) use a different classification system in this tradition, based on *where the threat to the regime’s survival comes from*. Their reasoning seems to be that the way governments are removed from power drives the difference between different types of democracy, and they reason that the same thing should hold true for different types of dictatorship.

(p. 294) The major threat usually comes from the ruling elite. Thus, regimes in which the executive comes to and maintains power on the basis of family and kin networks are classified as “monarchies.” Regimes in which the executive relies on the armed forces to come to and stay in power are “military.” All other dictatorships, many of which are characterized by the presence of a regime party, are “civilian.” The classification system thus drops the category for “totalitarianism” or “single-party regimes” (its successor under Geddes’s classification system).

Note that with either of these systems, one can sharpen the concept with various forms of the “dictator’s dilemma”, the problem (discussed above) facing any ruler of knowing how much support he has and what plots might be hatching against him. So, under the monarchy, the dictator is primarily worried about his kin, including his sons, and this could be termed the “Monarch’s dilemma”; under the military, it would be the “General’s dilemma,” and under civilians, we might just retain the general category of the “Dictator’s dilemma.” The reason for doing so is to highlight the possible solutions: as long as the king can keep his kin in check, he is safe and need not worry about others; the same is true for the generals with respect to other members of the armed forces, and so on.

Cheibub et al. (2010) use this classification system combined with polity data to examine: (1) the effect of the political regime on the country’s economic growth; (2) the relationship between political regimes and civil wars; and (3) the impact of economic growth on democratization. Previous studies had found unambiguous results for these

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topics. But using these new definitions and adjusting the cut point for democracy in the polity data, Cheibub et al. cast doubt on these results. Thus, with one cut point, democracies are more likely to suffer from civil war than do dictatorships, while with a different one, democracies are less likely to suffer from civil war than do dictatorships (95). Similar ambiguities prevail with respect to whether democracy promotes economic growth and whether economic growth promotes democratization. Minor adjustments in coding and the definition of democracy and dictatorship produce different results.

Gandhi (2008) explores the effects of different kinds of institutions under dictatorship. She defines “institutionalized” dictatorships as ones with more than one political party in the legislature. She categorizes legislative institutions as “appointed,” “elected,” or “nonexistent” in each country per year, and counts the number of political parties. She then creates a measure of political institutionalization that is highest for a legislature with multiple parties, medium for a legislature in which the regime party occupies all seats, and low for all other situations. Her data include monarchies in the Middle East, military rulers in Latin America and Asia, autocratic socialist regimes in Europe before 1991, and autocratic regimes that emerged out of the Soviet Union’s breakup after 1991. She looks at the number of years each country has been under dictatorship during the period 1946 to 2002. She finds that institutionalization tends to be highest under civilian dictators and lowest under monarchs. But her main result is that dictatorships with more institutionalization defined in this way tend to be more stable, have more economic growth, and are more tolerant of civil liberties.

(p. 295) 15.4 How Long-Lived? Short vs. Long Time Horizon

Another classification system, Related to the previous two but in different ways is a system that is not explicitly developed but implicit in Olson’s (1993, 2000) and Olson and McGuire’s (1996) theory of dictatorship, based on Olson’s well-known idea of the dictator as “stationary bandit.”

Dictators are like bandits because they steal, but their “stationarity” makes them superior to “roving bandits” from the point of view of their subjects. That is, the stationary bandit has an incentive to maintain and even enhance his people’s wealth so he can continue to steal from them. In the model, public goods enter as a factor input that increases the output of private goods. The longer the dictator’s time horizon, the greater his incentive to both preserve their wealth and enhance it with public goods. No formal classification system is presented in Olson’s model, but we can easily infer an essential distinction—one that differentiates between those dictators with a relatively short time horizon and those with a long one.

There have been some tests of the implications of this model. Deacon (2009) compares levels of public-goods provision under dictatorship versus democracy. He provides evidence that dictatorial governments provide public schooling, roads, safe water, public

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sanitation, and pollution control at levels far below those of democracies. But he does not classify the dictatorships in his sample into those with long or short time horizons.

Wright (2008) does do this and also asks whether short or long time horizons lead to more economic growth. He tests a version of the model in the context of the advisability of a country or the UN giving aid to dictators. He points out that from 1960 to 2002, two-thirds of all aid-recipient countries were authoritarian regimes. Even in 2005, 53 of 120 aid-recipient countries were authoritarian regimes. His basic hypothesis is that giving aid to dictators with long time horizons should be positively associated with economic growth, whereas aid to dictators with short time horizons (high probability of failure) should be associated with zero or negative growth.

Wright argues that the time horizon a dictator faces affects his incentives to use the aid in three ways. First, following Olson, he suggests that dictators have a greater incentive to invest in public goods when they have a long time horizon. Second, dictators with a short time horizon often face a threat from challengers to their regimes; this in turn leads them to forgo investment and instead consume state resources in two forms that are harmful to growth: repression and private payoffs to political opponents. Third, dictators with a short time horizon have a strong incentive to secure personal wealth as a form of insurance against future regime collapse.

He argues that the predicted probability of authoritarian regime failure serves as the best proxy for measuring time horizons, instead of the age of the regime or the number of coups. When the probability of regime failure is zero (a very stable regime), the impact of aid on growth is positive. In general, foreign aid is associated with positive (p. 296) growth when dictators face long term horizons and with negative growth when time horizons are short. He concludes that there is a case for giving aid to dictators with long time horizons:

The real abusers of aid, it appears, are dictators with short time horizons. This suggests that there is considerable variation within authoritarian regimes over how they use aid, which means that simply giving aid to democracies may miss a valuable opportunity to spur growth in some types of authoritarian regimes. (Wright 2008, 992)

For democratic countries wondering how to deal with dictatorships, it seems that here, the objective of economic growth has completely replaced considerations for reducing repression or fostering political freedom. I address this issue in the next section.

15.5 Problems/Issues

15.5.1 Are They All Really the Same Classification?

It might seem that, in the end, the different systems of classification may all be boiled down to one. It is easy to see this point theoretically: *how much* power is positively related to *who* has the power and *how long* he can be expected to exercise it. For example, a totalitarian (“how much”) or a single-party regime (“who”) can be expected to have more power and to stay in power longer (“how long”) than a tinpot or a personal or military regime. And given the crudeness of the data, with its inherent difficulty of distinguishing the different types of regimes empirically, boiling the systems down to one simple distinction might be more sensible than endless tinkering with and refinement of the different systems. Empirical tests do generally show that tinpots tend to be less stable than totalitarians (e.g., Islam and Winer (2004), and military regimes are the shortest of all (Geddes 1999; Hadenius and Torell 2007), followed by personal regimes, monarchies, and single-party regimes.

However, the fact that they are related does not mean they are the same. And this leaves some classifications as outliers—those that do not fit any picture. For example, tyranny appears to be an important special type of dictatorship, not just in ancient Greece but also today (Syria’s Assad is the most obvious example). Recently, a literature has arisen on the growth of a new type—“hybrid” regimes, which appear to combine some of the institutions of democracy and dictatorship, e.g., dictatorships which hold elections or democracies with authoritarian elements (see Diamond (2002) for an overview). Wintrobe (forthcoming) shows that these regimes can be incorporated into his general theory of dictatorship. Monarchies might appear to be another special case because of their institutionalized resolution of the succession problem. This resolution might be expected to lessen the Dictator’s dilemma. Indeed, an entirely different branch (p. 297) of politico-economic theory is devoted to the monarchy. The main proposition of this model is the “paradox of absolutism.” Too much power can mean difficulties in raising revenue. Thus, the more power the monarch has, the harder it is for him to get a loan, because having more power makes it less likely he can be forced to repay; (see North and Weingast 1989).

However, monarchies do not always solve the succession problem. Consider the different fates of King James I and II in England and James III in Scotland. And sometimes they solve it in bizarre ways—for example, the Turkish sultans’ shackling of the boys who were potential successors to the throne and therefore the greatest source of danger to the incumbent ruler. But the heir to the throne always possesses a certain legitimacy and security that autocrats under other regimes might long for.

15.5.2 “Good” vs. “Bad” Dictatorships

Economists have long favored a certain kind of dictatorship. The concept is implicit in some versions of the “social welfare function,” in which a “benevolent planner” implements the economic policies that are ideal from an economic point of view. To many economists, democracy cannot be counted on to do this, but perhaps the “right” dictator could! This is perhaps the most common scientific vision of the mythical “timocracy” referred to earlier—a dictator who is so liked by his people (perhaps because his policies are so beneficial) that he can remain in office without substantial repression. Some examples might be Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore and Augusto Pinochet in Chile, both of whom created economically dynamic dictatorships. However, under both regimes, repression was substantial, casting some doubt on the label of “timocracy.” But both leaders have had and continue to have their share of admirers among economists. Like other scientists, economists often long for their ideas to be put into practice.

One question worth asking here is whether any of the classification systems mentioned earlier can differentiate “good” from “bad” dictators. On the first classification (tinpots vs. totalitarians), there is an obvious inference: totalitarians are worse than tinpots. The reasoning here is simply that the level of political repression is larger in totalitarian regimes. Whether this leads to good or bad economic policy is ignored, since the welfare criterion used here is the level of political freedom.

Some other classification systems identify dictatorships that will implement good economic policies, whether repressive or not. The most common indicator of “goodness” used here is economic growth and the issue of repression is simply ignored.

In the Olsonian way of thinking, there is a clear normative distinction between dictators with short time horizons and those with long ones. The notion is that aid should be given to dictators with long time horizons because they promote economic growth. But this neglects the fact that some of these regimes have been among the most oppressive in human history. Stalin’s Russia is the most obvious example, and although the Nazi regime burnt itself out in World War II, the idea governing it was always the “1000-year Reich.” Cambodia’s Pol Pot is another example. And it was precisely *because* (p. 298) these leaders had a long time horizon that they felt capable of putting into place policies that would create “a new man” or “a new society.”

Another way of looking at this is to examine the implicit assumption that stable or long-lasting regimes are those with the support of the people. But what this neglects is that the people’s support is often “bought” with repression.⁶ Both Hitler and Stalin were popular. The writer Milan Kundera (1995) puts this point about totalitarianism best: “That [totalitarian] world is not the gulag as such; it’s a gulag that has poems plastering its outside walls and people dancing before them” (157). Alternatively, one can ask, using Olson’s language, “Wouldn’t the victims of Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, or Bashir al-Assad have preferred that their bandits were a little less stationary?”

15.5.3 The “Unclassifiabiles”

Consider the regimes in North Korea, China, and Russia. All are important to understand today, not least because they are widely viewed as among the greatest threats to the security of democracies. But each is also the kind of regime that escapes easy classification. In each case, the regime had to solve a particular problem, and it has survived because it has invented a new way of doing so. How should North Korea be classified? It is a military regime, so the standard classification schemes imply it would not last long—yet it has been around for over 60 years. What about Putin’s Russia? Vladimir Putin is widely viewed as a kleptocrat. Yet the economy has prospered under his rule, and he appears to be popular among the people. What about China? It is easy to agree that China is a totalitarian state. It certainly is a single-party regime. But how has it managed its spectacular economic growth for so long?

Yet another issue is the different responses of various dictators to the Arab Spring. Why did some of these Middle Eastern dictatorships respond by ceding power, while others sharply increased repression and used violence to attempt to remain in power? Can the classifications mentioned earlier shed light on this question?

15.6 Analysis of Some “Unclassifiable” Regimes: Russia, China, North Korea, and the Arab Spring

15.6.1 Russia Under Putin

Russia is, first of all, an example of a resource-rich dictatorship. A well-known proposition suggests that countries that are rich in natural resources are more likely to be ruled by an authoritarian government. This is obviously the case for countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia. Wright et al. (2013) provide evidence that ample resources themselves are (p. 299) not a cause of authoritarianism, but they are a difficulty in transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy. In contrast, Haber and Menaldo (2011) provide empirical evidence that resources are not a cause of authoritarianism at all.

These kinds of disparate results, which come from the practice of simple hypothesis testing, unguided by theory, show one place where public-choice theory can contribute to our understanding. For example, Hodler’s (2015) article on the Arab Spring provides one explanation for why oil-rich countries might not all behave in the same way.

But let us return to Russia. Russia is definitely resource rich. Is it a dictatorship? Some suggest that, at the moment, Russia, in the words of McFaul and Stoner-Weiss (2008), is “neither fish nor fowl, neither a democracy nor a dictatorship” (70), and they ask, in effect, “Which way is it moving?” For others (e.g., Caryl 2015), Russia has already crossed the threshold into dictatorship. But in Russia, the oligarchs, not the state, control

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many of the resources. For these reasons, it is worth examining the situation in more detail.

If Putin's Russia is a dictatorship, it does not seem to fit very well into the classifications given earlier. Putin is certainly no tinpot. He is too popular to be a tyrant. And the regime is not totalitarian, either. Putin does not seek to impose an all-encompassing ideology or to control the everyday life of the population. The regime may be kleptocratic, but unlike other kleptocracies, Russia has prospered under Putin, particularly in the 2000s. Putin's Russia is probably a personal dictatorship, though, and that is useful (in that it predicts the dictatorship may not survive him), but it doesn't say much about the workings of the regime.

Among the most popular descriptions of Russia are that it is: (1) a KGB state (e.g., Laqueur 2015), (2) a Mafia state (Naim 2012), and (3) a kleptocracy (Dawisha 2014). I contend that it is all three. It is a mafia state because Putin appears to run a particular version of a "protection racket" (described later, following Gaddy and Ickes 2011). It is a kleptocracy, because Putin appears to profit very handsomely from this arrangement. And it is a KGB state, because of Putin's past connections with and extensive use of the KGB (in particular, the KGB's control of classified information to run the protection racket).

In general, Putin's success rests mainly on two factors: the first was the steeply rising demand for oil and gas in the 2000s and the corresponding improvement in Russia's finances during that period. The second source of Putin's success is how he dealt with the oligarchs who emerged from the 1991 assets privatization.

Before Putin, when Russia was under Yeltsin's government, it was widely thought that the oligarchs controlled the state and kept it weak. The government's ability to collect taxes deteriorated markedly, and its ability to set policy independent of the oligarchs declined over time (Laqueur 2015). Power was dissipated as the various contenders engaged in rent-seeking. As the production of Russian wealth was highly concentrated, it was easy for those with access to wealth to fuel this anarchic situation and prevent the state from collecting more wealth.

However, the oligarchs suffered from a particular dilemma.⁷ They were effective at protecting their rents from the state, but they were at greater risk from each other and from a potentially hostile public. They engaged in rent-seeking via offensive and defensive tactics against each other to maintain and advance their positions. And they were (p. 300) vulnerable to the public because the process by which they obtained control of oil and gas reserves and other resources was widely despised by the public, especially the "loans for shares" scheme. The result was that every oligarch had skeletons to hide.

Consequently, it was easy to dig up evidence on other oligarchs, but it was very difficult to protect oneself against the same type of aggression. The only protection available was to dig up evidence on others, and the result was a state of mutual blackmail. The oligarchs also feared that the state would be captured by one of their rivals. And they

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feared empowering the state, since a powerful state could recapture their wealth through “re-nationalization”.⁸

Into this political vacuum stepped Vladimir Putin. The weapon Putin used to consolidate his position is a unique version of what Gaddy and Ickes (2013) call a “rent management system” (RMS), which was a way of controlling the wasteful rent-seeking competition among the oligarchs. What Putin did was to acquire all the compromising information on the oligarchs himself and create a monopoly on acquiring new information. He shut down or took over rival agencies that had been involved in collecting the information (and then selling it to the warring oligarchs). This monopoly of financial information could then be used to blackmail the oligarchs.

With this monopoly of information, Putin could protect each oligarch against attacks from others, and could credibly threaten any oligarch who broke his rules. Of course, the system is also a kleptocracy. Putin provides protection to the oligarchs from each other and pockets a share of the rents in return. The oligarchs are protected in two ways: from the protector (that is, protection against re-nationalization by the state) and against each other.

It has to be emphasized that there are other bases to Putin’s power: overt repression (the exile of Mikhail Khodorovsky, the well-known allegations that Putin organized the murders of Boris Beresovsky, Alexander Litvinenko, Anna Politkovskaya, and others), his rekindling of nationalism by strengthening the Russian state, and his foreign interventions. And there is no reason to think that any of these policies are broadly unpopular. But the RMS is what makes the system unique. In turn this derives from the fact that it is the only dictatorship, at least in recent times, and possibly longer,⁹ in which the power elite is the Secret Service.

15.6.2 The Arab Spring

Why did some countries respond with violence to the uprising known as the Arab Spring while others survived peacefully? The standard classifications can predict part of the answer. In the Cheibub et al. (2010) classification system, monarchies are isolated as a separate type, which tends to be relatively stable. So, the monarchies in Jordan and Saudi Arabia survived intact. Another possibility is that the tyrannies were the ones to respond with violence (most obviously, Syria). A third possibility is that the oil-rich countries could afford to buy off the protesters and their supporters, while the oil-poor ones could not. However, these arguments only take us part of the way.

(p. 301) Hodler (2018) develops a model that incorporates oil revenues and in which ethnic politics and religious divides also play a role in the response of the ruler to such an uprising. In his model, there is a dictator and two ethnic or religious groups, and the dictator may come from either the minority or majority ethnic group. There is an uprising, and the dictator has two ways to respond: either a peaceful or a violent means to prevent democratization and stay in power. In the peaceful option, he can try to bribe all the citizens to stop protesting—in other words, buy their loyalty. In the violent option,

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he chooses repression and relies on members of his own group to squash the protests and fight, if necessary.

The model offers the most clear-cut predictions with the assumption that the citizens expect democratic institutions to be noninclusive—that is, they expect few checks and balances on the majority group if democracy is implemented. In this case, a dictator from the majority group never chooses the violent option, as it is very expensive for him to buy the violent support of the members of his group who know that they would benefit heavily from a democratically elected majority government. Instead, the dictator chooses to bribe all citizens if the country is sufficiently oil rich, but he has no means to avoid democratization and to stay in power if the country is oil poor. For a dictator from the minority group, it is easy to buy the violent support of the members of his own group, who expect few benefits if a democratically elected majority government were to be elected. Therefore, a dictator from the minority group is likely to choose the violent option.

The dictators of Saudi Arabia and the small Gulf states of Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were all from their countries' religious majorities. And these countries are all very oil rich. So, Hodler's model correctly implies that the dictators of Saudi Arabia and these small Gulf states would use parts of their oil revenues to bribe their citizens so that they would not protest.

The dictators of Egypt and Tunisia were also from their countries' religious majorities. However, since these countries are oil poor, the dictators would have to concede power. Again, this seems correct. In the three countries in which the dictators came from a religious minority group (Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria) and which were also oil poor, the model predicts a repressive or violent response. This implication is also consistent with the observed violent repression of Shia protestors in Bahrain, the long-lasting civil war in Syria, and the chaos and civil conflict in Yemen (Hodler 2018).

The argument is only suggestive, and awaits empirical testing, but it is an interesting incorporation of both oil revenues and ethnic and religious divides into the theory of dictatorship.

15.6.3 China

In one sense, China is easily classified. It is definitely totalitarian in our first classification system, a single-party dictatorship in our second system, civilian in our third, and its leaders certainly appear, today as well as historically, to have long time horizons.

(p. 302) However, none of these classifications, by themselves, take us very far. For example, North Korea would be grouped with China on most of these classifications, yet it is different. China has had spectacular economic growth for almost 40 years, while North Korea is, in Eberstadt's (2011) phrase, "the world's first and only industrialized economy to lose the capacity to feed itself."

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The next section discusses North Korea; here, the question to be addressed is how China has successfully managed a capitalist economy while remaining totalitarian.

It is certainly totalitarian. On press freedom, China ranks almost dead last, 176th out of 180 countries in 2016. (North Korea ranks 179th, just above Eritrea.) A single party rules the country, and no other party is permitted to operate. The party's tentacles reach throughout the society, and even within this single-party framework, there are no free elections except some at the village and township level.

But economically, China is capitalist.¹⁰ How does competition thrive under totalitarian rule? Does Chinese capitalist totalitarianism stand as a rival to democratic capitalism as a model of economic growth? And will increasing economic freedom ultimately lead to democratization?

An interesting answer to the first question has been proposed in a literature largely originated by Barry Weingast and others (Weingast 1995, Qian and Weingast 1996), and pushed forward especially by Chenggang Xu and Juzhong Zhuang (2011). This literature is very large, and there are considerable differences, but the essence of the argument is that while China remains a political dictatorship, the economy is largely decentralized and to a considerable degree managed by state and local governments, which compete against each other. Successful experimentation by provinces or township or village governments is rewarded in a number of ways and is also imitated by other subnational governments. In addition, the various subunits compete for labor and for domestic and foreign capital.

Thus, a new form of economic organization has been developed in modern China, in which competition among subnational governments to a considerable degree replaces the competition among private firms typical of democratic capitalism.¹¹ Weingast (1995) calls this federalism "market preserving" in that authority and primary regulatory responsibility over the economy are delegated to subnational governments (4). Market-preserving federalism fosters competition among local governments. It permits experimentation by local governments, and sorts out successful economic experiments from unsuccessful ones. The Chinese system in particular rewards those provincial governments whose economy prospers with greater revenue. The system also fosters learning and imitation, as well as labor mobility and competition for foreign capital (Qian and Weingast 1996). More controversially, the authors also argue that in the advanced regions, many officials no longer care to be promoted to posts in higher levels of government, thus reducing party control over them (70).

Chenggang Xu's work on Chinese economic decentralization offers a different assessment of the importance of central political control (e.g., Xu and Zhuang 1998; Xu 2011). He does not regard the Chinese system as a true federal state but, rather, as what he calls a "regionally decentralized authoritarian (RDA) regime": a combination of (p. 303) political centralization and economic regional decentralization. In his view, the main instrument of control used by the central government is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which grants appointments of subnational government officials. In Xu's view, the appointment

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and promotion of subnational government officials serve as powerful instruments for the national government to induce regional officials to follow the central government's policies (Xu 2011).

The basic mechanism for the promotion of economic growth, and the key to China's success, is still held to be the decentralization of most of the economy to subnational governments. When a region has a higher growth rate than others, it will obtain greater resources, and most important, the head of the region will enjoy greater power and will be more likely to be promoted. The Chinese Communist Party controls the personnel matters of subnational governments, and also commands "high" economic sectors (e.g., banking, energy, telecommunication, railway, etc.), as well as managing ideology and the mass media. But the central government directly controls only a small proportion of the Chinese economy.

Again, one of the most important features of the Chinese system is the way it encourages experimentation by subnational governments. The political risks of advancing reforms are substantially reduced, and political opposition to reform is significantly weakened in this way. Indeed, almost all successful reforms in the past three decades were introduced through local experiments, including the Household Responsibility System in land reform, the Special Economic Zones, and the Town and Village Enterprises.

The regime is not without its problems, of course. One huge problem appears to be the environment. And China's human rights record is abysmal. Do these models offer any guidance as to what policies should be pursued by Western countries concerned about human rights in China? Interestingly, the models seem to diverge on this question. In the Weingast framework, trade with China (which improves the Chinese economy) should strengthen the subnational governments and therefore reduce the power of the center. In Xu's framework, this conclusion is less obvious, since the center is completely in charge of the subnational governments, and greater prosperity would not necessarily weaken its power over them.

There is some intriguing evidence that China could benefit more from elections. Li Han (2014) provides evidence that the introduction of competitive elections at the village level does increase the rate at which incumbents lose power. This suggests that elections do enhance local governance. Perhaps the push for improvement in human rights in China should start small.

But the paradox remains that, taken from the standard economic view of what kind of institutions maximize a crude target like economic growth or reduce poverty, China should perform very badly. China is inevitably regarded as having poor institutions: poor legal protection of property rights, poor corporate governance, a lack of democratic accountability, and the absence of the rule of law. The standard prediction of economic models is that, with these institutions, the Chinese economy will perform badly. However, this is hardly the case in terms for economic growth, raising the (p. 304) standard of living

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of the Chinese people, or lifting its people out of poverty. In all these cases the predictions have been wildly off the mark.

As in the Russian case, one cannot judge the institutions by some abstract yardstick; we must try to understand how they fit into the specific logic of the regime in order to understand their workings. And perhaps both the Chinese and the Russian illustrate how dictators can use the principle of competition in new ways that overcome the economic problems characteristic of authoritarian regimes.

15.6.4 North Korea

What kind of regime is North Korea? Until the end of the 1980s or so, North Korea's economic performance appeared comparable to South Korea's. But in the early 1990s, the regime received four shocks: the collapse of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, China's turn toward capitalism, South Korea's economic takeoff, and a succession crisis when Kim Il Sung died in 1994 and was eventually succeeded by Kim Jong Il.

Using the Wintrobe (1990, 1998) model,¹² we see each of these events as presumably producing a fall in loyalty to the old regime. It would seem that the only way to stay secure in office would be to increase repression. But if North Korea was totalitarian, it was already using the power-maximizing level of repression. To increase repression and not decrease power, it would be necessary to make some change in its institutional structure. One way to do this is to bring the military into the governance of the regime, and this is what Kim Jong Il did.

But as we have seen, military regimes are typically unstable. Indeed, the instability of military dictatorships is perhaps the most striking and best documented finding in the literature on classifications of dictatorships. How did North Korea solve this problem? It has been stable for over 60 years. Kim Jong Il's solution was unique: he militarized the entire society! Although the military had always played a prominent role in resource allocation, Kim Jong Il went much further when he assumed office in 1995, with the introduction of *Songun*, or "military first politics." This action sidelined various civilian institutions, including the Central People's Committee, which had been central to Communist Party rule, to instead assert the primacy of the Korean People's Army.

This change not only guaranteed the loyalty of the army but also ensured the loyalty of the people. In a sense, the army and the people are one. As Park (2010) puts it, "with a 10 year compulsory military service and a large contingent of the military population (in excess of one million), *virtually every family has at least one soldier in uniform* (101; italics added). And North Korea today has the world's fourth-largest army and the largest per capita army in the world: one-fifth of its working-age population, and the largest proportion of GNP devoted to military purposes in the world (Haggard and Noland 2007).

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Along with the militarization came the doctrine of *Juche*—“self-reliance”—an autarkic/nationalistic element to justify the new role of the military. One can argue that there were external, defense-related reasons for militarization, but the point here is that (p. 305) the logic of the militarization is internal—that is, to stabilize the regime against internal threats, not external ones.

Should the rest of the world try to engage with North Korea or continue to impose sanctions? It is not obvious how the rest of the world can engage a regime like this. One way to think of it is that the regime is a marriage of three elements: totalitarian, military, and a bit of theocracy (*Juche*). Each of these is relatively hard to engage with compared to its opposite classification: totalitarian vs. tinpot, military vs. civilian, theocratic vs. secular.

The essence of the regime seems unchanged with the ascent of Kim Jong Un. Indeed, the general pattern of provocations have intensified under his rule—for example, the launch of three missiles in May 2013, a bomb (2015), a satellite (spring 2016), submarine-launched ballistic missiles that he claims could hit the continental United States (August 2016), and, most recently, its fifth and largest nuclear test (September 2016). North Korea today may be the only society that is completely “blocked” in terms of the people’s access to information (though as of the fall of 2018, they have access to a Netflix-like service called “Manbang,” providing “propaganda on demand”).¹³ Meanwhile, there has been no economic liberalization: the most obvious interpretation of this is that the military is afraid of *any* kind of liberalization—economic or political. It appears to prefer to keep the people repressed and miserable as a strategy for fending off revolution.

15.7 Conclusion

The questions addressed in this chapter have been about what way and how effective it is to classify dictatorships. The main reason for doing so is to see if it is possible to isolate types that behave differently. For example, dictatorships might behave differently in terms of longevity, repressiveness, rate of economic growth, or their responsiveness to engagement with the world (through trade or from the imposition of sanctions). That is, classification is effective if not all dictators behave in the same way and the classification captures the relevant dimension for explaining different behavior.

There is a large literature on this question, but there is no agreement about the best classification system. The classic distinction is that between “totalitarian” and “traditional authoritarian” regimes developed by Hannah Arendt (1951) and others, in an attempt to understand the great threats to world order from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century. Wintrobe (1990) built an economic model to understand the workings of these regimes from the point of view that their dictators were rational, and as a way to develop systematic predictions about their behavior. He later (1998) expanded this to a more general model of dictatorship, and this resulted in four types rather than two, the additions being tyranny and the possibly mythical category of

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timocracy. Importantly, each of these four “types” represents a particular solution combination (levels of loyalty and repression) to the general model.

(p. 306) Some contemporary political scientists have departed from this tradition, which had focused on *how much* power or *how repressive* the different types could be expected to have or be. Barbara Geddes (1999) asked instead the question *Who has the power?*, focusing on differences between personal dictatorships and military or single-party regimes. Her purpose was to explain the different rates of democratization experienced by different regime types during the last half of the twentieth century. This view was then modified by Cheibub et al. (2010), who asked, *Where does the power come from?* and developed the categories of monarchy, military, and civilian. All the evidence using either of these category systems has pointed to military regimes being the least stable type, with either monarchies or single-party regimes the most stable.

An economic model of dictatorship was also developed by Mancur Olson (1993, 2000), with his well-known idea of a dictator as a “stationary bandit,” or kleptocrat. No formal classification was presented, but one can easily be inferred, based on the distinction made between bandits with short time horizons and those with long time horizons—that is, *how long* the regime might be expected to last. This model stresses the incentive for dictators with long time horizons to provide public goods for their subjects, so that they can continue to tax them and live off the revenue. Empirical work based on this classification has shown differences in economic growth between the two types, but a broad comparison between dictators and democracies has suggested evidence that democracies provide public goods at much higher levels than dictators in general do.

These different classifications have all enriched our understanding of dictatorships in various ways. This paper has explored a number of issues about them. First, to what degree are they the same? After all, how much power is clearly related to a dictator’s time horizon and to who has the power and where it comes from. The more power a dictator has, the longer his expected time horizon. Single-party regimes or monarchies can typically be expected to remain in power longer than personal dictatorships or tinpots. But the classifications are not exactly the same, and in addition, there are two types that appear to escape these simple classification systems: tyrannies and monarchies. And there might also be a case for classifying military regimes separately.

Moreover, even though the classification systems may be similar in a positive sense, it is striking that the normative implications drawn are often completely opposed. What is a *good* dictatorship? In the tinpot vs. totalitarian framework, the long-lasting regimes (totalitarians) are the most repressive and presumably the last candidates for aid or trade. In the short vs. long time horizon framework, long-lasting regimes tend to promote economic growth, and on this ground, they are those where aid or trade agreements from the democracies should be directed.

Finally, there appear to be unique regimes, where classification is difficult but whose workings can be understood with additional modeling and more attention to their peculiar institutions. In the last section of this chapter, I attempted to understand four of

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these “unclassifiable” cases: Putin’s Russia, North Korea, China, and the divergent responses of different regimes to the Arab Spring. In the case of Putin’s Russia, the regime is kleptocratic but unaccountably popular, given that classification. I summarized (p. 307) Gaddy and Ickes’s (2013) analysis that stresses the unique “rent-management system” introduced by Putin for controlling the Russian oligarchic economy’s resource rents. On the Arab Spring, Hodler’s (2018) article suggests one explanation for the different responses of Middle Eastern regimes to the uprising. For example, even oil-rich countries did not react to the uprising in the same way. Even oil-rich countries might find it difficult to buy off enough people, and Hodler also shows that the ethnic composition of the country, and whether the ruling elite comes from the ethnic majority or an ethnic minority, are crucial to understanding whether the response was peaceful or violent.

North Korea is a military-style regime that has unaccountably lasted for over 60 years, despite continuing to impoverish its people. I explained this through the unique institution of *Songun*, in which Kim Jong Il, in effect, militarized the entire society. And the best way to understand China’s spectacular growth is that it developed a unique brand of totalitarian capitalism—called “market preserving federalism” by Barry Weingast (1995) or “regionally decentralized authoritarianism” by Chenggang Xu (2011) polity remains totalitarian but the economy is decentralized mainly to subnational governments, who are free to innovate and compete against each other for resources in much the same way private firms do in democratic capitalist countries.

Rational-choice modeling, in my view, has provided an enormous service to our understanding of the workings of dictatorships; among other things, it has shown that there is no substitute for the principle of rationality in understanding what sometimes looks like the crazed behavior of dictators. And the basic two-dictatorship classification system, in most of its variants, is extremely useful for many purposes and for understanding the workings of most dictatorships. At the same time, something is always left out in any classification scheme, and one can expect new dictatorships to develop in mysterious ways. So, my preference remains for a classification scheme that is grounded in broader rational-choice theory, one that can incorporate unique forms and be used to understand such cases. Classification schemes are an excellent tool for understanding dictatorships, especially if they are not used mechanically but, rather, as a starting point.

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Notes:

(1.) Aristotle also distinguished between good ("constitutional") and bad ("extreme") democracies, but the question of differentiating democracies will not concern us here. See Liden (2014)

(2.) I have surveyed these other contributions elsewhere (Wintrobe 2007).

(3.) Reference to a comment by a colleague of Amanda Rogers, described by her at her 2016 seminar at the Munk Institute in Toronto.

(4.) Rogers (2016).

(5.) Similar arguments have been subsequently made by Geddes (1999) and Gandhi (2008).

(6.) In the tinpot-totalitarian framework, the supply of loyalty is positively related to the level of repression over the relevant range.

(7.) This material summarizes Gaddy and Ickes's (2013) analysis.

(8.) Putin has re-nationalized and continues to re-nationalize oil and gas companies, lately at an increasing rate. The result is that the state's share in 2015 was over 50% (up from 20% in 2007; see Aron 2013).

(9.) Laqueur (2015) suggests that it is the first such regime in history.

(10.) I use the word "capitalist" to refer to free markets, which China has largely embraced. The extent of private ownership is another question, and estimating the degree to which firms are privately owned and managed in China is not a simple matter.

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The OECD estimates that 70% of the Chinese economy is “private.” However, there are many firms in which the state does not own the majority of assets of a company, but it can exert substantial influence on its management through State Owned Enterprises that own part of the capital of the supposedly nonstate company. Huang (2008, 16) concludes that the private sector excluding these firms would comprise only 40% of industrial revenue, not 70%.

(11.) Brennan and Buchanan (1980), Breton (1996) and Salmon (1987, 2015) have long argued that competition among governments is also a feature of democratic government in federal countries. Salmon (1987) in particular introduced the idea of “yardstick (or horizontal) competition” among governments. To my knowledge, Weingast originated the concept of “market-preserving federalism” and was the first to think of China in this kind of framework.

(12.) I use this model to discuss North Korea specifically in Wintrobe (2013). The section here summarizes that discussion.

(13.) *New York Times*, August 26, 2016.

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