Authoritarian Power Sharing: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Strategies

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Abstract

We provide a unified language for studying power sharing in authoritarian regimes. In our conceptualization, power-sharing deals entail not only sharing spoils between a ruler and challenger, but also an enforcement mechanism. An arrangement does not truly share power unless it reallocates power to make it costly for the ruler to renege. Institutions can, in principle, become self enforcing with appropriate norms or by delegating agenda control over policy decisions. However, weak institutions disable credible commitment. Alternatively, leaders can provide challengers with coercive means to defend their spoils. However, coercive power sharing is perilous because challengers can leverage their coercive capabilities to overthrow the ruler. Given these tradeoffs, a strategic dictator shares power only under specific conditions: challengers can credibly punish an autocratic ruler, challengers willingly forgo exercising their outside option if the ruler shares power, and the ruler willingly acquiesces to diminished power and rents.

Keywords: authoritarian politics, civil wars, commitment problems, coups, power sharing, institutions

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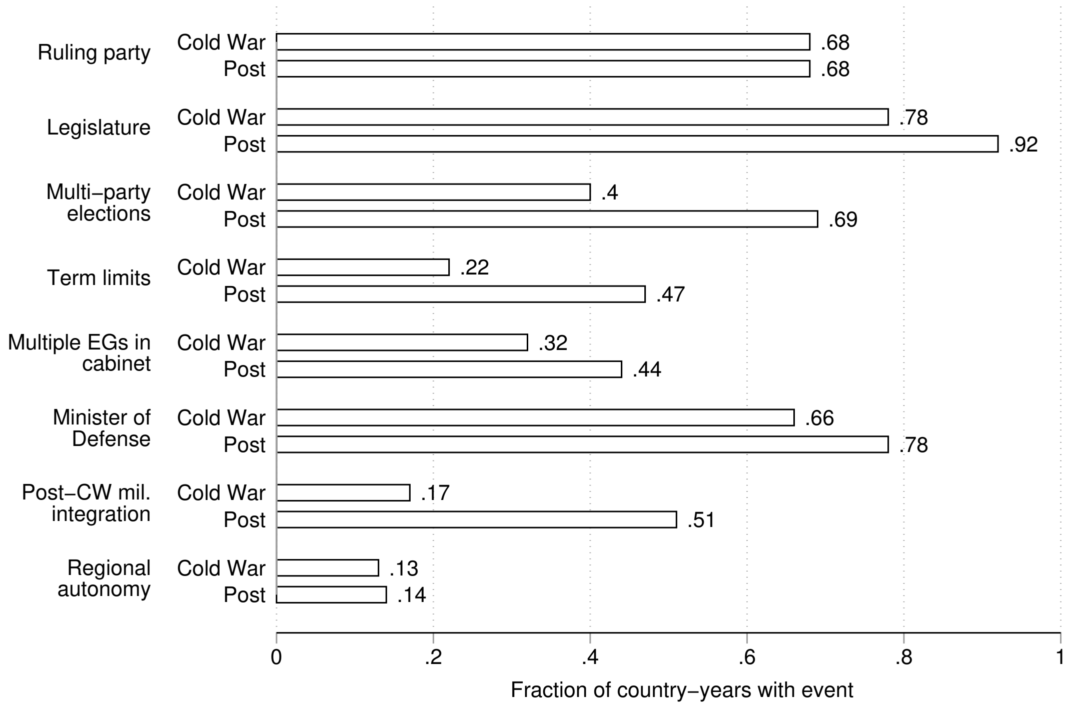
1 Introduction

No dictator is inherently secure in office. Autocrats face threats of removal from their own regime elites, opposition groups, and other societal actors. A central idea in recent research is that rulers must *share power* to retain the support of actors beyond their inner circle. Empirically, contemporary dictators use a wide array of institutions to distribute spoils and make policy concessions. Figure 1 shows the fraction of authoritarian regimes with each of the following arrangements: a ruling party, a legislature, multi-party elections, executive term limits, members of multiple ethnic groups hold cabinet positions, a Minister of Defense appointment, a civil war settlement that distributes cabinet positions or integrates rebels into the state military, or a regional autonomy deal. In Table 1, we provide citations for recent research on these varied institutions.

In this review article, we provide a unified language for studying authoritarian power sharing. We agree with the general premise in recent research that understanding the role of these institutions (broadly speaking) is essential for comprehending authoritarian survival. However, we contend that three foundational questions remain underspecified. (1) **Concepts**: What is power sharing? (2) **Mechanisms**: How do leaders commit to power-sharing deals? How can these deals backfire on the ruler? (3) **Strategies**: Under what conditions do leaders share power? Throughout, we analyze the interaction between a *ruler* that makes a proposal and a non-ruling actor, denoted as a *challenger*, who decides whether to accept. The challenger(s) is conceptually broad and can encompass members of the ruling coalition, opposition groups, other ethnic groups, or military officials—anyone who can potentially challenge the ruler's authority.

First, we conceptualize a power-sharing deal between a ruler and challenger as meeting two distinct requirements. The arrangement not only must *share* spoils, but also reallocate *power* to make it costly for the ruler to renege. Existing empirical work on power sharing in dictatorships focuses mainly on the first criterion. However, deals that entail pure spoils transfers without a credible enforcement mechanism do not reallocate power, and therefore do not constitute *power* sharing. The stakes of this conceptual distinction are high. Two deals can entail similar spoils-sharing provisions, but carry very different consequences depending on their self-enforcement mechanisms, or lack thereof.

Figure 1: Empirical Frequency of Authoritarian Institutions



Notes: Each fraction in the figure is an average across all global authoritarian regimes (according to Boix, Miller and Rosato 2013) of a particular indicator variable, with time periods disaggregated by 1945–89 and 1990–. RULING PARTY: Existence of a ruling party (Miller 2020*a*). LEGISLATURE: At least one legislative chamber (V-Dem *Legislature bicameral*). MULTI-PARTY ELECTIONS: Any national elections within the previous five years with multiple legal political parties (value of "Yes," "Almost," or "Constrained" on V-Dem *Elections multiparty*; Coppedge 2018). TERM LIMITS: Constitution contains executive term limits (Elkins and Ginsburg 2021). MULTIPLE ETHNIC GROUPS IN CABINET: At least two ethnic groups with a power access status of "Junior Partner" or higher (Ethnic Power Relations, EPR; Vogt et al. 2015). We omit Latin American countries from this average. MINISTER OF DEFENSE: Indicates whether an individual (besides the executive himself) is appointed to the Ministry of Defense post (Europa Publications 1960-2005; Nyrup and Bramwell 2020; Central Intelligence Agency 2006–2017). POST-CIVIL WAR MILITARY INTEGRATION: Fraction of civil war settlements that include provisions for military integration (Hartzell 2014). REGIONAL AUTONOMY: Country in which at least one ethnic group has a regional autonomy deal (EPR).

This conceptual distinction motivates our second contribution. We identify two broad types of enforcement mechanisms for power-sharing deals: institutional and coercive. Institutional enforcement comes in various forms: norms, third-party enforcers, or delegating agenda control over policy decisions. However, institutional power sharing can backfire by conceding too few or too many rents to a challenger. If institutions are weak, then norms are insufficient to constrain behavior and promises to delegate policy influence lack credibility. In other circumstances, initial institutional concessions create a slippery slope and eventually yield more rents and influence for challengers than the ruler desired. In either case, anticipation of an adverse outcome can prevent a deal from ever gaining traction.

When institutions are weak, self-enforcing power sharing requires that the leader provide challengers with coercive means to defend their spoils. Coercive enforcement can entail permitting communication, which enables challengers to coordinate violent punishments against autocratic transgressions. Related, the ruler can give away guns by allowing rivals to control high-ranking positions within the state security sector or permitting rebel groups to retain their arms. Yet coercive enforcement is a dangerous substitute for weak institutions. Challengers can leverage their coercive means to go on the offensive and overthrow the ruler, rather than simply to defend their prerogatives against autocratic transgressions.

The overall effect of sharing power on leadership survival is ambiguous because of these countervailing *commitment* and *threat-enhancing* effects. On the one hand, extensive scholarship on authoritarian stability usually stresses how sharing power facilitates regime survival by making the ruler's promises to distribute spoils to elites and social groups more credible. On the other hand, most research on conflict and civil-military relations views power sharing as dangerous. They assume that concessions such as delegating control over parts of the security apparatus confer minimal commitment. Instead, they emphasize how such actors become dangerous and capable usurpers that can overthrow the ruler via a coup. In most real-life scenarios, both mechanisms are at work. Thus, we need more theoretical guidance about the causes and consequences of power-sharing deals.

This gap motivates the third key takeaway, in which we address how rulers strategically navigate the dilemma of power sharing. We describe three conditions that facilitate the strategic creation of power-sharing arrangements. (1) *Challenger credibility*: the challenger must be able to credibly exercise an outside option if the ruler does not share power. (2) *Challenger willingness*: if the ruler shares power, the challenger must willingly forgo their outside option. (3) *Ruler willingness*: the ruler must willingly accept the constraints and lost rents imposed by a power-sharing deal.

We conclude by discussing two points. First, how do we distinguish whether a particular power-sharing deal is enforced by institutions or coercion? Second, how does our framework illuminate considerations about power-sharing institutions in democracies?

Table 1: Sample of Existing Research on Authoritarian Institutions

Institution	**Selected references**
General	Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005); Acemoglu and Robinson (2006); Acemoglu, Egorov and Sonin (2008, 2012, 2015); Myerson (2008); Svolik (2009); Boix and Svolik (2013); Ansell and Samuels (2014); Dower et al. (2018); Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2018); Meng (2020*a*); Paine (2021*a*, 2022); Powell (2020); Gieczewski (2021)
Ruling party	Geddes (1999); Smith (2005); Magaloni (2008); Gehlbach and Keefer (2011); Levitsky and Way (2013); Morgenbesser (2016); Reuter (2017); Miller (2020*a*)
Legislature	Bates and Donald Lien (1985); Gandhi (2008); Malesky and Schuler (2010); Blaydes and Chaney (2013); Cox (2016); Truex (2016); Gailmard (2017); Ochieng' Opalo (2019); Kenkel and Paine (2022); Gandhi, Noble and Svolik (2020); Weipert-Fenner (2020); Gerzso and van de Walle (2022)
Elections	Przeworski (1991); Blaydes (2010); Levitsky and Way (2010); Chacón, Robinson and Torvik (2011); Fearon (2011); Hyde and Marinov (2014); Little, Tucker and LaGatta (2015); Luo and Rozenas (2018); Miller (2020*b*)
Constitution	North and Weingast (1989); Weingast (1997); Elkins, Ginsburg and Melton (2009); Ginsburg and Simpser (2013); Albertus and Menaldo (2018); Fearon and Francois (2020)
Succession and term limits	Brownlee (2007); Kokkonen and Sundell (2014); Abramson and Rivera (2016); Ma (2016); Frantz and Stein (2017); Konrad and Mui (2017); Acharya and Lee (2019); Meng (2020*b*); Versteeg et al. (2020); Zhou (2021)
Courts	Moustafa (2007); Solomon Jr (2007); Varol (2014); Moustafa (2014); Wang (2015); Shen-Bayh (2018); Gailmard (2019)
Cabinet positions	Arriola (2009); Cheeseman (2011); Roessler (2011, 2016); Roessler and Ohls (2018); Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug (2013); Francois, Rainer and Trebbi (2015); Paine (2019); Beiser-McGrath and Metternich (2020)
Military and police	Acemoglu, Ticchi and Vindigni (2010*a*,*b*); Besley and Robinson (2010); Svolik (2013); McMahon and Slantchev (2015); Greitens (2016); Sudduth (2017); Harkness (2018); Scharpf and Gläßel (2020); Meng and Paine (2022); Paine (2021*b*)
Civil war settlements	Sisk (1996); Hartzell and Hoddie (2003); Roeder and Rothchild (2005); Glassmyer and Sambanis (2008); Jarstad and Nilsson (2008); Mattes and Savun (2009); Martin (2013); Matanock (2017); Nomikos (2021); White (2020)
Regional autonomy	Chapman and Roeder (2007); Walter (2009); Cederman et al. (2015); Carter and Hassan (2020); Germann and Sambanis (2020)
Counter-majoritarian democracies	Lijphart (1977); Alberts, Warshaw and Weingast (2012); Graham, Miller and Strøm (2017); Ziblatt (2017); Albertus and Menaldo (2018); Helmke, Kroeger and Paine (2022)

2 Conceptualizing Power Sharing

In our conceptualization, a power-sharing deal between a ruler and challenger must meet two distinct requirements: (1) *sharing* spoils between the parties and (2) reallocating *power* in a way that makes it costly for the ruler to renege.

2.1 Sharing Spoils

The first requirement is that a power-sharing deal *shares* spoils among the parties. Existing work agrees that this criterion is a key aspect of sharing power. In his work on authoritarian institutions, Svolik (2012, 89) describes "agreements over the sharing of the spoils from joint rule as authoritarian power-sharing." Analyzing the allocation of cabinet positions, Cheeseman (2011, 339) asserts that "Power-sharing refers to the creation of an inclusive government in which cabinet posts, and hence executive power, are shared by the major parties (although not always all of the parties) in a given conflict." In the context of civil war settlements, Nomikos (2021, 249-50) "define[s] post-conflict power-sharing as a political arrangement following the end of a civil war according to which former combatants agree to share executive policymaking responsibilities at the state-level."

Formal institutions provide an opportune forum for distributing patronage. Autocrats often use cabinet appointments as a means of distributing spoils to elites from their own ruling coalition, opposition parties, or various ethnic groups (Arriola 2009; Arriola, DeVaro and Meng 2021; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015). Cabinet ministers are paid lucrative salaries, and often receive private luxury cars, houses, first-class travel, and control over government contracts that they can reward to family members and their own supporters.

Ruling parties also enable rent distribution. "A party offers individuals willing to collaborate with the regime a vehicle for advancing their careers within a stable system of patronage" (Gandhi 2008, 77). In his analysis of United Russia, Reuter (2017, 159) notes that "For elites, the party provides access to spoils and lobbying opportunities and, importantly, reduces uncertainty over how those spoils are to be distributed." In 2006, for instance, "special party commissions" were created to determine the allocation of oil-funded social development projects. These National Projects and the Special Purpose Programs directed hundreds of billions of federal budget dollars were toward local districts and clienteles (pp. 167).

Similarly, authoritarian legislatures provide a venue for "controlled bargaining" in which the leader or ruling party can provide incremental policy concessions and rents to opposition parties. In Jordan, "once King Hussein offered the Muslim Brotherhood some influence over educational and religious policies, the group shifted from denouncing the regime on the streets to articulating its demands within the legislature" (Gandhi 2008, 80). Analyzing legislative elections in Jordan, Lust-Okar (2006, 460) argues that "elections are primarily an arena of patronage distribution."

Civil war termination settlements frequently include provisions for rebels to access spoils via institutions such as state-level offices. For instance, quotas for different ethnic groups in the legislature ensure that "election results reflect some demographic balance and groups are not excluded from political power. In other cases, there are quotas for ministry positions in a shared government, though all groups are not guaranteed the ability to veto policies made by the chief executive" (Nomikos 2021, 250). The Dayton Peace Accord were constructed so that the Bosnian Croat leaders extended some executive power to Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs (pp. 252). Regional autonomy deals are also common in post-conflict settings. These arrangements often enable residents to control a disproportionate share of regional production, such as proceeds from natural resource exports, and to control local language policies.

2.2 Reallocating Power

The second requirement is that a power-sharing deal reallocates *power* between the ruler and challenger. Thus, power sharing requires a credible enforcement mechanism that makes it more difficult or more costly for the ruler to renege. In the following sections, we provide examples of enforcement mechanisms, which typically enable challengers to participate in institutions that reduce the ruler's discretion over how to allocate spoils, or put actors in positions that enhance their capabilities to coerce the ruler.

By contrast, deals that entail pure spoils transfers without a credible enforcement mechanism do not reallocate power, and therefore do not constitute power sharing. To illustrate this conceptual distinction, consider Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2005) selectorate model of coalition formation. In our conceptualization, the actions in this model constitute pure spoils transfers rather than power sharing. An incumbent ruler and a challenger each offer private and public goods to members of a selectorate. Each seeks to outbid the other to build a larger winning coalition. If the incumbent succeeds, then their policies are implemented and they start the next round as the leader. A new challenger is randomly selected, and the interaction repeats. Crucially, given our distinction, the actions a ruler takes in one round to secure support *do not constrain* how they can attempt to buy support in the next round. Members of the winning coalition in one round do not gain any sources of de facto power that would prevent the ruler from replacing them in future rounds.

Empirically, many oil-rich states in the Arabian peninsula offer a clean example of pure spoils transfers that do not constrain the ruler. The core of the state-society bargain in countries such as Saudi Arabia is that citizens gain lucrative public sector jobs in return for forgoing political organization (Gause 1994). Similarly, in emerging democracies and electoral authoritarian regimes, political parties often hand out goods to voters in return for political support, but these transfers do not empower voters to challenge the regime (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Stokes et al. 2013).

The stakes of our conceptual distinction are high. Two deals can entail a similar division of spoils, but operate very differently in practice depending on their mechanisms of self-enforcement, or lack thereof. Although most existing conceptualizations of power-sharing center on allocating spoils, few explicitly require an enforcement mechanism.

Enforcement is a critical component of power-sharing deals, but how can leaders credibly commit to a promised deal? In the following sections, we describe two general types of enforcement mechanisms: institutional and coercive.

3 Institutional Enforcement

Institutional channels provide one means for enforcing power-sharing deals. We distinguish among norms, third-party enforcers, and delegating agenda control. Yet enforcing power sharing via institutions can be problematic. Institutions may be too weak to make power-sharing credible. Alternatively, initial concessions can potentially snowball such that the ruler makes much larger concessions than originally intended.

3.1 Enforcement Mechanisms

Norms and third-party enforcers. True institutional stability requires actors to internalize norms of behavior consistent with upholding institutional rules. That is, actors must actively believe in the value of upholding institutional rules. Thus, they voluntarily comply with the agreed-upon rules rather than do so out of fear of retribution. Within well-established institutions, recognized third-party enforcers such as judges and voters can sanction politicians, and recourse to violence is not feasible.

Consolidated democracies, by definition, entail institutional power sharing. By contrast, these conditions are rare in authoritarian regimes. Yet presenting several examples is useful to highlight ideal types. In Mexico under the rule of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the incumbent president would personally choose the candidate who would succeed him. According to this norm, referred to as the *dedazo* ("big finger"), the incumbent handpicked his successor, who would then formally be introduced as the presidential candidate at the party convention (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Various episodes from the United States provide additional examples. A major goal of the framers at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was to roll back democratic gains in the states over the previous decade. However, they nonetheless accepted republican principles as the bedrock of American government, and thus few at the Convention questioned the need that at least one legislative chamber would be elected (Dahl 2003). Over a century later, in the "Solid South," Democratic politicians enacted laws that ensured widespread disenfranchisement and one-party rule (Mickey 2015). However, they nonetheless complied with rules mandated by the federal government, such as constitutional election requirements and Supreme Court directives (e.g., striking down white primaries in 1944).

Delegating agenda control. Given the general weakness of institutional norms and third-party enforcers in dictatorships, leaders generally need to provide challengers with a direct means to guarantee control over spoils, such as delegating control over policy choices. Participation in institutions such as legislatures or a ruling party can achieve this aim. Alternatively, holding regular elections and enacting term limits delegates, in expectation, some control to challengers. Institutional concessions reallocate power by making it costly for the leader to renege on the deal. After giving away agenda-setting control within an institutional body, the *leader* must pay a cost to take it back. This contrasts with a non-institutional setting in which the *challenger* must pay a cost to gain spoils, for example, by mobilizing for a revolt to compel the leader to offer spoils. Consequently, sharing decision-making influence over certain policies enables challengers to routinely gain rents, even at times they do not impose an imminent coercive threat.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) model this mechanism as follows. A rich elite that governs the country faces periodic unrest and the threat of revolution by the poor masses, who desire more redistribution. Under an unconstrained dictatorship, elites cannot commit to high levels of redistribution in any period in which the masses cannot mobilize a revolutionary threat. Elites can gain commitment ability only by sharing power, specifically, by extending the franchise to incorporate the masses. Under a mass franchise, the masses gain agenda-setting power over policy because their numerical superiority enables them to win elections. This enables them to enact high redistribution in every period—even in periods in which they are unable to mobilize for a revolution.

Acemoglu and Robinson also model the possibility that elites can renege on a power-sharing deal by staging a coup against democratically elected leaders. However, after giving away agenda control to the masses, the elites have to pay the cost of violence to reverse the deal. A high enough cost makes institutional power sharing self enforcing.

Others build upon this framework to allow for partial electoral concessions within authoritarian regimes, as opposed to the all-or-nothing concession of full agenda control for the masses. In Dower et al. (2018), power-sharing deals consist of elites specifying the frequency of periods in which the masses can set policy. They apply their model to explain Russia's Great Reforms in the mid-nineteenth century. In response to periodic unrest in multiple provinces, the Tsar "devolved substantial authority to previously excluded actors. Key among these reforms was the creation (over most of European Russia) in 1864 of the *zemstvo*, an institution of local self-government with the authority to assess taxes and allocate revenues to local public goods" (pp. 126). In Ansell and Samuels (2014), capitalist elites can pressure landed elites. Partial franchise expansion enables capitalist elites to protect their assets against expropriation and to target government spending toward public goods needed for industrial development.

England following the Glorious Revolution is a well-studied case in which members of a formal institution gained agenda-setting powers that constrained the ruler. After 1688, Parliament reaffirmed old, and gained new, privileges that disabled the Crown from financing the government unless it cooperated with Parliament. Specific provisions included one-year budgets that did not default to the previous year's budget, embedding spending bills into statutes, regular parliamentary meetings, and parliamentary control over military funding (Cox 2016).

3.2 Drawbacks

Institutional power sharing can backfire by conceding too few or too many rents to a challenger. If institutions are weak, then promises to delegate policy influence lack credibility. In other circumstances, challengers might be able to leverage their position within an institutional body to achieve more rents and influence than the ruler desires. In either case, anticipation of an adverse outcome can prevent a deal from ever gaining traction.

Catch-22 of weak institutions. Once a ruler makes institutional concessions, what prevents him from taking them back in the future? Challengers may face insurmountable obstacles to punishing transgressions. In most dictatorships, institutions are always vulnerable to reversal because of the absence of long-standing norms or credible third-party enforcers. Leaders can shut down the national legislature and replace it with a body filled with lackeys. They can fire party leaders and turn the party into a personalist vehicle. Promises to hold elections can be undone by massively rigging them or simply canceling them, and rulers can override term limits by dubiously legal means. In sum, a ruler anticipates a low cost to reneging if *institutions are weak*.

Consequently, rulers that seek to make institutional concessions may confront a Catch-22: delegating institutional control is not credible precisely because institutions are weak. Powell (2020) illuminates how institutional power sharing can fail. He conceptualizes power sharing as deals that enable the challenger to permanently consume a portion of the budget in future periods—but only if the deal goes through. A moral hazard problem generates a friction. During any period in which the ruler proposes and the challenger accepts a power-sharing deal, the ruler cannot commit to refrain from exerting costly effort to prevent the deal from taking hold in the next period. In equilibrium, the challenger will not accept a power-sharing deal if the probability that such an effort succeeds is sufficiently high, which Powell interprets as weak institutions. Sudan's regime change in 2019 provides an example of weak institutions. The military promised to hold elections within 39 months, but the lack of institutional constraints on the military (which, as of early 2022, has ruled the country since 1989) impedes the credibility of the proposed power-sharing deal.

Empirically, many authoritarian institutions are not strong enough to impose a meaningful cost for reneging, which we discuss in the context of ruling parties. Earlier research highlighted the durability of regimes governed by a dominant party (Geddes 1999; although see Smith 2005). However, many autocratic ruling parties lack an independent institutional basis and fail to outlive the death of the founding leader. Following the first leader's death or departure, 61 percent of ruling parties collapse within a year. Even among cases in which the first leader experienced a nonviolent exit from power, 52 percent of ruling parties do not survive the peaceful departure of the founding leader (Meng 2021). When a party's existence relies on the leader, it seems unlikely that the party can punish the ruler for reneging on deals or facilitate inter-temporal spoils sharing.

Recent research identifies more specific conditions under which authoritarian parties tend to be strong. Typically, parties created by an incumbent president are mere personalist instruments whereas parties created before a regime takes power comprise an independent power base. In the latter case, the institution constrains the ruler's decision-making autonomy, but not in the former case. Hence, authoritarian regimes with ruling parties differ in the extent to which they truly share *power* (Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018; Miller 2020*a*; Meng and Paine 2022).

Slippery slope. Alternatively, institutional concessions might backfire on a ruler because institutions confer *too much* agenda-setting power to challengers. An initial institutional concession might lead the leader down a slippery slope whereby he eventually shares more power than desired.

Fearon and Francois (2020) apply a variant of this mechanism to study elite-led democratization. Similar to Acemoglu and Robinson, they examine the interaction between a ruling elite and the out-of-power masses. Fearon and Francois depart by assuming that elites can, upon relinquishing power to the masses, write a biased constitution that preserves key prerogatives for themselves (see also Alberts, Warshaw and Weingast 2012 and Albertus and Menaldo 2018). One factor that can, potentially, make the deal self-enforcing is that out-of-power elites can stage a coup if the in-power masses attempt to abrogate the biased constitution. However, this threat is toothless if elites lose too much influence within the coercive apparatus following long periods out of power. Consequently, the initial, limited institutional concession may create a slippery slope whereby the masses eventually gain more influence than the elites originally intended. If elites anticipate this outcome, they are unwilling to negotiate a transition in the first place.

Other scholars develop the slippery slope mechanism in a more general theoretical setting. Acemoglu, Egorov and Sonin (2008, 2012, 2015) study dynamic models in which, in each period, every member of a club votes on the membership for the club in the next period. Thus, decisions in one period carry consequences for the future because any members brought in now can vote on membership later. Suppose that the ruling elite prefers a franchise that includes members of the middle class over the autocratic status quo. Nevertheless, they might refrain from franchise expansion because of the slippery slope: members of the middle class may, in the future, leverage their position within the institution to broaden the franchise even more. However, a key assumption for these results is that the space of possible states of the world is discrete. When the state space is sufficiently smooth, the slippery slope effect is insufficient to deter rulers from making small initial concessions (Gieczewski 2021).

4 Coercive Enforcement

If formal institutions are themselves insufficient to constrain a ruler, self-enforcing power sharing is still possible if challengers possess coercive means to defend their spoils. This scenario is typical in authoritarian regimes. Svolik (2012, 2) posits two foundational premises in authoritarian regimes: "First, dictatorships inherently lack an independent authority with the power to enforce agreements among key political actors ... Second, violence is an ever-present and ultimate arbiter of conflicts in authoritarian politics." Coercive enforcement can entail permitting communication, which enables challengers to coordinate violent punishments against autocratic transgressions. Related, the ruler can give away guns by allowing rivals to control high-ranking positions within the state security sector or permitting rebel groups to retain their arms. Yet coercive enforcement is a dangerous substitute for weak institutions. Challengers can leverage their coercive means to go on the offensive and overthrow the ruler, rather than simply to defend their prerogatives against autocratic transgressions.

4.1 Enforcement Mechanisms

Communication and coordination. Why, specifically, would a ruler pay costs when trying to reverse institutional concessions? A commonly theorized mechanism is that challengers can use institutions to communicate, either directly within the institutional forum or indirectly by using the institution as a focal point. Either mechanism enables challengers to coordinate against and to coercively punish transgressions by the ruler. Words written on a piece of paper can constrain a ruler if they create self-enforcing beliefs about appropriate on-the-equilibrium-path behavior and off-the-equilibrium-path violent punishments. Existing research examines this mechanism within the context of promises to hold elections at fixed intervals, or constitutional provisions more broadly (North and Weingast 1989; Weingast 1997; Myerson 2008; Fearon 2011; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011; Boix and Svolik 2013; Ginsburg and Simpser 2013).

Myerson (2008) presents one way to formalize this mechanism of coercive enforcement. A ruler's survival hinges on agents exerting costly effort on behalf of the regime, such as to defend against invaders. Unconstrained rulers face a moral hazard problem because they are tempted to renege on promised payments after the agents perform their task. Because agents can anticipate reneging, an unconstrained ruler cannot induce agents to exert costly effort to protect the regime. Thus, rulers can benefit from constitutional constraints. In Myerson's model, this entails allowing agents to communicate via a court or parliament. Communication creates common knowledge among agents. Because of these institutional prerogatives, a transgression against a single agent is, in effect, a transgression against *every* available agent. Collective action enables agents to credibly punish transgressions by the ruler. The ruler can anticipate such punishments, which makes their promises to deliver promised payments self-enforcing. Consequently, sharing power induces agents to exert costly effort to protect the regime.

Giving away guns. More bluntly, rulers can permit challengers to enjoy direct control over guns to enforce a power-sharing arrangement. Within the central government, actors besides the ruler's cronies can control various branches of the security sector. For example, the ruler can name a separate Minister of Defense (MoD). Naming a MoD contrasts with eliminating the position, keeping it vacant, or the ruler naming *himself* as MoD (Meng 2020*a*; Meng and Paine 2022). Like other high-ranking cabinet ministries in dictatorships, the MoD gains numerous perks of office. Yet the MoD also gains the de facto means to prevent the ruler from transgressing upon these spoils in the future. This minister controls the armed forces and is the highest-ranking military position in the regime. The MoD determines the creation and implementation of military policy, which includes the appointment, management, and mobilization of all security forces. Consequently, the MoD has a credible threat to stage a coup if the ruler tries to displace them.

In the context of civil wars, ceasefires or peace treaties that permit rebel groups to keep their arms or attempt to integrate them into the state military constitute a coercive enforcement mechanism. Fearon and Laitin (2007) make the stark assumption that institutional concessions are inherently incredible, and therefore any power-sharing deal requires rebels to retain their arms. Glassmyer and Sambanis (2008) build on this premise by noting "the time-inconsistency of peace settlements in civil wars: once the rebels demobilize, they lose bargaining power and the government can renege on its promises . . . A self-enforcing agreement could prevent this, but it is difficult to create such agreements." This motivates their study of the effectiveness military integration provisions, whereby former rebels are integrated into a new national army. Such arrangements allow rebels to retain their guns, albeit within a centralized body rather than a non-state organization.

Francois et al.'s (2015) model provides an example of sharing power by giving away guns. A leader chooses how many cabinet ministries to give to members from various ethnic groups, and how much patronage to give to each minister. This institutional arrangement constitutes power sharing because including an actor in the government bolsters their coercive capabilities. Specifically, actors have a better chance to depose the leader as insiders (through a coup) than when out of government, which would require them to organize an insurgent movement to overthrow the government.

4.2 Drawbacks

Enhanced commitment ability for the ruler is not the only consequence of power-sharing deals backed by coercive enforcement mechanisms. The same means by which the challenger can prevent the ruler from reneging (i.e., defending their prerogatives) can also empower the challenger to renege. Challengers can leverage their enhanced coercive capabilities to go on the offensive and overthrow the ruler via a coup. Sharing power is a double-edged sword because of these countervailing *commitment* and *threat-enhancing* effects.

The threat-enhancing effect of power sharing has received less attention in existing research than the commitment effect. Yet the ideal-type case in which sharing power solely enhances the credibility of promises without also bolstering offensive capabilities would seem to be empirically rare. If elites can use a legislature or party to coordinate to punish transgressions by the ruler, then they may also be able to coordinate to overthrow the ruler. A Minister of Defense may be satisfied with the spoils that his post conveys, or he may leverage this platform to dethrone the ruler. To illustrate how shifting coercive capabilities makes sharing power a double-edged sword, we review theoretical considerations from research on ethnic conflict, regional autonomy, and leadership succession. This discussion also establishes that the core mechanisms developed in these disparate research agendas exhibit greater similarities than previously recognized.

In ethnically polarized societies, rulers trade off between preventing coups and preventing civil wars (Roessler 2011, 2016). If a ruler creates an ethnically exclusive regime, then members of excluded ethnic groups face incentives to organize a private army and rebel against the regime. To mitigate these incentives, rulers can co-opt the opposition by offering positions in the cabinet, legislature, and military. Yet sharing power also provides opportunities for violence specialists and other power brokers to construct a network of followers. Challengers can take advantage of their enhanced coercive capabilities to take offensive actions against the ruler. Coup conspirators "leverage partial control of the state (and the resources and matériel that comes with access to the state)." By contrast, "rebels or insurgents lack such access and have to build a private military organization to challenge the central government and its military." Consequently, "coups are often much more likely to displace rulers from power than rebellions" (Roessler 2016, 37). In Roessler's formulation, sharing power creates an internal security dilemma because neither the ruler nor incorporated elites can commit to not striking against the other.

Beyond sharing power in the *central* government, a ruler can grant *regional* privileges through autonomy deals or federalist institutions. These concessions can either lower or raise incentives for conflict over territory because of the countervailing effects highlighted here. On the commitment side, regional autonomy deals enhance the physical security of the challenging group over their territory as well as the survival of their ethnonational identity (Cederman et al. 2015, 355). Yet regional autonomy deals also enable rebel leaders to recruit along ethnic lines by reinforcing divisive ethnic identities, and provide groups with resources that they can use to pressure the state. For example, Iraqi governments have periodically struck regional autonomy deals with the oil-rich northern Kurdistan part of the country. The Kurds' Peshmerga militia raised the costs for the center to renege on the deal, hence enhancing credibility (Powell 2012, 627). However, at times when the central government was vulnerable (e.g., after 1991 and 2003 following wars with the United States), an already-established government and military in Kurdistan facilitated de facto secession.

A similar dilemma arises in the context of authoritarian succession (Kokkonen and Sundell 2014; Konrad and Mui 2017; Meng 2020*b*). Naming a specific successor helps to solve the coordination problem of who rules next. Diminished prospects for a costly contest over the throne results in greater total surplus, which in a sense enables the ruler to commit to delivering more spoils. However, naming a successor also creates a "crown prince effect." Creating the expectation that the designated successor will eventually take over, in effect, enhances his offensive capabilities. The crown prince might use his empowered position to strike preventively in anticipation that the ruler will retract his decision to name a successor. Alternatively, in the case of negative shocks about the leader's health or the quality of his policies, the crown prince is well-positioned to remove the ruler because the coordination problem entailed with deciding who will rule next is already solved.

5 Strategies of Sharing Power

Do rulers want to share power? The aforementioned drawbacks of sharing power make the answer non-obvious. We describe three conditions that induce a ruler to share power. (1) *Challenger credibility*: the challenger must be able to credibly threaten to exercise an outside option if the ruler does not share power. (2) *Challenger willingness*: if the ruler shares power, the challenger must be willing to forgo their outside option. (3) *Ruler willingness*: the ruler must be willing to accept the constraints and lost rents imposed by a power-sharing deal. These conditions draw from those in various formal models. Kenkel and Paine (2022) label these respective conditions as elite credibility, elite willingness, and ruler willingness. Paine (2022) refers to the failure of each respective condition as opportunistic exclusion, strategic exclusion, and greedy exclusion.

5.1 Challenger Credibility

To induce the ruler to share power, the challenger's threat of punishment must be credible. Punishment can entail either revolting or exiting. When challenger credibility fails, the ruler prefers to concentrate rents and decision-making power in his own hands. Why *not* marginalize the challenger if doing so carries no discernible penalty?

Revolt. In Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), the masses can credibly threaten to revolt against authoritarian elites when two conditions are met. First, if economic inequality is high, then the masses clamor for large-scale redistribution and greatly desire an expansive franchise. Second, if the masses are rarely able to mobilize within an authoritarian regime, then they frequently have to endure low-redistribution policies favored by elites. When both conditions are met, elites can prevent a violent revolution only by making a significant power-sharing concession: expanding the franchise to give away agenda control to the masses. By contrast, when challenger credibility fails, elites eschew institutional reform and instead prefer to buy off the masses with temporary policy concessions.

Others develop a related logic to explain why some dictators create personalist regimes whereas others enact institutionalized constraints. Meng (2020*a*) assumes that rulers are vulnerable early in their tenures. Absent intervention from other elites, de facto power will eventually shift toward the ruler over time as they consolidate their grip on power. Consequently, rival elites face an incentive to stage a coup early on to prevent power consolidation. If the ruler is initially weak, then he has no choice but to share power to prevent a coup attempt. Challenger credibility holds under these conditions, as exemplified by cases like post-independence Cameroon.

By contrast, if the ruler is initially strong, then elites pose a weak coup threat and challenger credibility fails in Meng's (2020*a*) theory. This emboldens the ruler to govern without constraints. A ruler can begin strong for various reasons. Some headed a mass independence movement and were viewed as "founding fathers" of their country, as in post-independence Cote d'Ivoire. Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2018, ch. 4) discuss the converse consideration: some rulers are born strong because the elites that comprise the ruler's seizure coalition are fragmented. This is often the case when regime elites, prior to gaining power, lacked a party or occupied low-ranking positions in the state military.

The size and location of the challenger's support coalition also matters. Roessler and Ohls (2018) posit that members of ethnic groups are well-positioned to revolt when they are numerically large and located close to the capital. By contrast, challenger credibility fails for many groups that lack favorable ethnic geography.

Exit. Another way that challengers can punish a regime for refusing to share power is to exit, which we conceptualize broadly. Exit can entail hiding productive assets from the state, forgoing potentially lucrative investments, or the physical migration of persons or capital. Thus, if the challenger's assets are mobile or hard to monitor, challenger credibility can hold because they will exit unless the ruler shares power.

Existing research considers how the exit option can induce power-sharing arrangements, both historically and in contemporary regimes. Bates and Donald Lien (1985) analyze the rise of parliaments in medieval Europe. Rising urban trade and populations engendered bargaining over communal rights and parliamentary representation, in return for permitting the ruler to collect trade taxes that could be "highly lucrative [but] easily avoided" (pp. 55). Gailmard (2017) studies the emergence of separation-of-powers institutions in the U.S. colonies. Settlers on family farms would not invest in intensifying their agricultural techniques absent protection against exploitative colonial governors. Alternatively, potential settlers could refuse to migrate overseas at all. Permitting settler representation in the lower house of colonial assemblies was a concession that mitigated this exit option. These institutional concessions were necessary to make the American colonies profitable to English corporations, proprietors, and the Crown.

Scholars apply similar ideas to explain contemporary reforms by the Chinese Communist Party. Gehlbach and Keefer (2011) propose that political reforms in the 1980s were needed to induce party cadres to make lucrative economic investments. Without the ability to communicate, and hence to coordinate against transgressions by higher-ranking regime elites, party cadres would exit in the sense of forgoing risky investments. Wang (2015) finds that the rule of law is better enforced in regions of China that are dominated by foreign rather than Chinese investors. Assets held by foreigners are more mobile, and hence subject to exit if rulers do not respect the rule of law. Thus, various forms of exit can facilitate challenger credibility.

5.2 Challenger Willingness

Challenger willingness poses the converse problem as challenger credibility. If the ruler shares power, are challengers willing to forgo exercising their outside option? This condition requires that sharing power bolsters the ruler's commitment ability significantly more than it enhances the coercive threat posed by the challenger. If challenger willingness fails, the ruler certainly will not share power. Doing so would simply empower challengers without enabling the ruler to buy them off. We illustrate this idea by presenting examples from contemporary Africa and historical Europe.

Does sharing power deter rebellions and stabilize regimes in post-colonial Africa? Roessler (2011; 2016) and Meng (2019; 2020*a*) share a core assumption that relates to our emphasis on enforcement mechanisms: sharing power bolsters the offensive capabilities of challengers by better positioning them to stage a coup. However, they impose divergent assumptions about the credibility of commitments, which yields differing implications about challenger willingness and prospects for stability. Roessler assumes low commitment, which yields an omnipresent internal security dilemma. Incorporating rival ethnic groups into the central government yields greater spoils for them, but these gains are inherently tenuous and not credible over time. Hence, in our terminology, challenger willingness fails. By contrast, according to Meng, sharing power eliminates the internal security dilemma by shoring up the position of challengers within the regime. By preventing the ruler from consolidating autocratic powers, challengers can capture a cut of future spoils. High commitment ability ensures that challenger willingness holds. Consequently, Roessler anticipates that power sharing breeds conflict, whereas Meng contends that power sharing ensures stability.

This debate raises a crucial question: under what conditions should we expect challenger willingness to hold in post-colonial Africa? Why is commitment ability higher in some regimes than others? This is largely unexplored research terrain, although Paine (2019) proposes one factor. He argues that commitment ability was typically low after independence in countries with any ethnic groups organized as a pre-colonial state, leading to failed power-sharing arrangements and conflict. By contrast, countries without pre-colonial states largely avoided the perils of weak formal institutions. Sharing power via cabinet positions yielded credible spoils sharing without triggering an internal security dilemma, and hence challenger willingness held.

Kenkel and Paine (2022) study the failure of challenger willingness within the context of historical European parliaments. During the Military Revolution (roughly 1500–1650), parliaments across the continent became less willing to fund wars proposed by their monarch. Standing professional armies became the leading form of military technology, yielding two major consequences. First, wars became more expensive relative to earlier periods. This created greater losses for elites if the ruler reneged on a spoils-sharing agreement. Second, the credibility of monarchs' commitments diminished. Rulers could use their standing army not only to prosecute external wars, but also to coerce recalcitrant elites for more funding, as occurred in Brandenburg-Prussia in the 1650s. Anticipating high prospects for reneging, many parliaments simply refused to provide funding. In response to the failure of challenger willingness, many monarchs across the continent stopped asking parliaments for tax grants or refused to call them at all, leading to the Age of Absolutism.

5.3 Ruler Willingness

The final condition needed to facilitate power sharing is ruler willingness, which is perhaps the most surprising condition. Even if sharing power is necessary and sufficient to prevent a challenger from exercising their outside option, the ruler nonetheless still might refuse to share power. This is particularly striking in cases where the outside option is revolt. Many theories presume that dictators prioritize survival above all other goals (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2010, 936; Magaloni 2008, 717; Roessler 2016, 60). However, simply surviving in office is not lucrative if the ruler is severely constrained from enjoying spoils. The drawback of sharing power is that the ruler constrains himself and bolsters the coercive capabilities of challengers, which necessitates giving away more rents. Under the premise that dictators maximize their expected lifetime stream of rents, rather than survival per se, we can see why ruler willingness might fail.

Paine (2022) analyzes a stark setting to isolate the tradeoff between rents and survival. For parameter values in which challenger willingness holds, the ruler can guarantee political survival *forever* upon sharing enough power with the challenger. If, additionally, the challenger is coercively strong, then challenger credibility holds. This implies that low power sharing will eventually breed conflict and the possibility of overthrow. Yet to maximize authoritarian rents, the ruler nonetheless might *still* choose low power sharing. Although the ruler cannot consume rents upon losing power, denying political access at the center and weakening the challenger as much as possible pushes the anticipated conflict far into the future. Consequently, the ruler may prioritize the rents accrued in the meantime despite eventually suffering the costs of conflict. In this circumstance, ruler willingness fails. Empirically, this logic may help to account for exclusionary authoritarian regimes that leave "no other way out" than social revolution for the opposition (Goodwin 2001). Yet rather than assuming strategic miscalculations by the ruler, this mechanism provides strategic underpinnings for why a dictator would *deliberately* pursue a policy that raises prospects for revolution.

In Acemoglu and Robinson's models, challenger willingness is always satisfied because they assume that franchise expansion grants full control over future policy decisions to the masses. However, ruler willingness may fail for precisely the same reason: the ruler has to give up so much to prevent revolution. Consequently, when challenger credibility is met, the ruling elite might choose to exert costly repression rather than to share power with the masses.

Alternatively, ruler willingness can fail because of agency problems within the ruling coalition. White (2020) studies military integration deals to end civil wars. Integrating former rebels into the state military co-opts and shares power with an external challenger. However, incumbent generals within the state military are typically opposed to incorporating former rebels because this would lessen their own influence and because they despise the idea of associating with individuals who killed their comrades. This resistance creates a barrier to implementing military integration provisions—even if challenger willingness is met, that is, the rebels can credibly commit to not leverage their new position in the state military to stage a coup against the regime. Instead, internal challengers play the role of veto players, which can undermine ruler willingness.

Veto players also impede power-sharing arrangements in countries where the ruling group is bolstered by a long-standing ideology of ethnic dominance. Individuals that believe in their cultural superiority and right to rule the country might tolerate costly civil wars as the price of maintaining ethnic dominance (Wimmer 2012). Even if the ruler himself would prefer to cut a deal to end a civil war, other members of the regime might block this action. Alternatively, the ruler may himself believe in the myth of cultural superiority, which provides another reason that ruler willingness can fail.

6 Directions for Future Research

This article surveys and reorganizes the literature to provide a unified language for studying authoritarian power sharing. We aim to help scholars from diverse fields to better comprehend core concepts, mechanisms, and strategies related to power sharing. We conceptualize power sharing as meeting two distinct requirements: the arrangement must share spoils *and* reallocate power to make it costly for the leader to renege. We identify two broad types of enforcement mechanisms for power-sharing deals: institutional and coercive. Institutions can enforce deals via norms, third-party enforcers, or by delegating agenda control over policy. However, institutional power sharing can backfire by conceding too few or too many rents to a challenger. Alternatively, enforcement can also be achieved by providing challengers with coercive power to defend their spoils. However, empowering challengers comes with a risk: they can use their coercive capabilities to overthrow the ruler, even if he has not transgressed. Given this double-edged sword of sharing power, we identify three conditions that facilitate power sharing: (1) the challenger must be able to credibly threaten the leader, (2) if the leader shares power, the challenger must be willing to forgo their outside option, and (3) the leader must be willing to accept the constraints imposed by a power sharing deal.

By disentangling the spoils-sharing and enforcement mechanism components of power-sharing deals, we highlight vital issues for future research. “Formal” and “informal” institutions for sharing power might work more similarly than realized. If the formal institutions of legislatures and elections provide a coordination mechanism to violently combat autocratic transgressions, then they feature a similar coercive enforcement mechanism as with informal power-sharing deals such as naming a Minister of Defense or permitting rebels to retain their arms. And among formal institutions, seemingly similar institutional arrangements can be enforced by drastically different mechanisms. Institutional stability can result either from actors internalizing the norms consistent with the institutional rules, or from the fear of coercive punishments against transgressions. Empirically, it is very difficult to disentangle these two possibilities. If the power-sharing deal is stable, then coercion lies off the equilibrium path. Overall, we encourage research on power-sharing institutions to scrutinize enforcement mechanisms.

A related question that remains unanswered is whether actors within autocratic regimes can transition from enforcing agreements primarily via armed threats to relying entirely on institutional rules themselves as sufficient to ensure credible commitment. Often, coercive power provides the foundation for credible power sharing when the regime or leader first takes power. Yet over time, expectations regarding institutional arrangements can stabilize. Under what conditions can peaceful power sharing become *institutionalized* over time? How do we know when institutions displace the barrel of a gun as the primary enforcement mechanism?

Finally, our framework may illuminate considerations about power-sharing institutions in more democratic settings in which leaders gain office by competitive elections. In contrast to the ideal type, many democracies distort majority rule in various ways. Countermajoritarian institutions, such as restrictions on voting rights, malapportioned or gerrymandered electoral distorts, or restrictions on the range of policies that elected officials can decide, usually bias toward economic or military elites (Alberts, Warshaw and Weingast 2012; Ziblatt 2017; Albertus and Menaldo 2018). Consociational institutions reserve seats or otherwise empower members of certain ethnic or other identity groups (Lijphart 1977). In all cases, these institutions ensure that a majority faction shares power with minority factions.

Scholars often ask whether power-sharing institutions in democracies promote democratic survival and prevent conflict recurrence. Existing research shows that these institutions, at best, have a mixed track record for achieving these goals (Graham, Miller and Strøm 2017). The factors we discuss for authoritarian regimes may help to explain why. Often, the dominant faction often cannot credibly commit to retain institutions that dilute their influence. This can lead to democratic breakdown via incumbent entrenchment, or can trigger disfavored factions to fight the government. Alternatively, actors who are privileged on countermajoritarian institutions may leverage their favored position to further tilt institutions in their favor (Helmke, Kroeger and Paine 2022). For these reasons, it may be fruitful in future work to jointly analyze power sharing in democratic and authoritarian regimes.

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