

STATE POWER AND STAYING POWER: INFRASTRUCTURAL MECHANISMS AND AUTHORITARIAN DURABILITY

Dan Slater and Sofia Fenner

The contemporary literature on authoritarian durability focuses more on democratic-looking institutions such as parties, elections and parliaments than the institution in which authoritarian regimes are most importantly embedded: the state itself. This article argues that state power is the most powerful weapon in the authoritarian arsenal. After clarifying the regime-state distinction and explaining why regime durability involves more than just duration, we discuss four “infrastructural mechanisms” through which authoritarian regimes stabilize and sustain their rule: (1) coercing rivals, (2) extracting revenues, (3) registering citizens and (4) cultivating dependence. Since state apparatuses are the institutions best geared for performing these tasks, their effectiveness underpins authoritarian durability in a way that no other institution can duplicate. And since state power is shaped by long-term historical forces, future studies should adopt the kind of historical perspective more often seen in leading studies of postcolonial economic development than of authoritarian durability.

“You should no more confuse the state with its government than you would confuse a fine Jaguar automobile with the person who drives it.”

Professor Robert Frykenberg¹

States and regimes are perennial yet largely parallel obsessions in political science.² When scholars study the state, they commit to exploring the extent rather than the form of government.³ Specialists on regimes undertake the inverse commitment, asking how and why the state’s power is constrained rather than extended and expanded. One conversation centers on whether and why regimes

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Acknowledgments: The authors thank Eva Bellin, Mary Gallagher, Ann Shola Orloff and Lynette Ong for their feedback as discussants on earlier versions of this article, as well as the Regime Practices reading group at the University of Chicago (Dominika Koter, John McCormick, Alberto Simpser and Lisa Wedeen) for their thoughtful suggestions on this article’s penultimate draft.

are democratic or authoritarian, while the other asks whether and why states are capable or incapable of effective governance. In this article we aim to bridge these parallel conversations by arguing that *state power* is the strongest institutional foundation for authoritarian regimes' *staying power*.⁴

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The intellectual division of labor between studies of regimes and states is both essential and unfortunate. Professor Frykenberg's pithy formulation distinguishing states from the governments that run them (or in authoritarian settings, the regimes that run them) proves useful for understanding why.⁵ The separation is essential because states and regimes are analytically distinct, but unfortunate because states and regimes are empirically intertwined. Though all metaphors have their limits, we find the notion of the

state as a kind of machinery that is linked but not reducible to the actors who operate it helpful in three respects.

First, states are apparatuses that vary considerably in their power to undertake political tasks and accomplish political ends. Where states exhibit substantial "infrastructural power," or the capacity "to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm," the regimes that run them are the most immediate beneficiaries.⁶ Where states look more like jalopies than Jaguars, the regimes that command them find themselves in an entirely different world when trying to assert control and establish domination.

Second, regime leaders are not usually the original architects of the states they operate. Drivers may customize, repair or "soup up" their cars, but they rarely build them from scratch or convert them into something that dramatically outperforms the original model. State apparatuses are typically inherited rather than originally constructed by the regimes that run them, particularly in the postcolonial world. A strong state is the best historical foundation for a durable authoritarian regime, not vice versa.

Third, even the strongest state apparatus cannot entirely protect a regime from catastrophic "operator error." Though states are institutions with considerable historical momentum, they must still be led by fallible human agents. Ironically, highly capable state apparatuses may be especially vulnerable to regime incompetence, since bad leadership is more damaging when the machinery responds readily to unwise top-down commands.⁷ Authoritarian rulers who control strong states are not so much prisoners of a Weberian "iron cage" as they are commanders of what Weber called "a power instrument of the first order—for the one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus."⁸

We largely set aside the leader-contingent character of state power in this essay, however, and focus instead on establishing that states are the ultimate institutional weapons in the authoritarian arsenal. After defining regime durability and state power more explicitly, we elaborate four infrastructural mechanisms through which strong states make for durable authoritarian regimes. These mechanisms illuminate why strong states are even better institutional backstops for authoritarian durability than ruling parties, despite the far greater attention paid to parties (and, relatedly, elections and parliaments) in the literature on authoritarianism.⁹ Since state power is shaped over the *longue durée* and not just by the regimes currently running the state, scholars of authoritarian durability should adopt the sort of historical perspective more often seen in leading studies of economic development than of political regimes.¹⁰

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WHAT IS DURABILITY?

By durability we do not simply mean duration. Rather, we follow Anna Grzymala-Busse in arguing that durability is “the vector of duration (temporal length) and stability (constant outcome).”¹¹ This suggests that “duration alone is not the best measure of regime durability since it tells us little about the stability of the regime, or its ability to meet and overcome potential crises.”¹² What is lost in a simple tally of the number of years a regime has endured is any sense of how that regime has endured, or how likely it is to continue enduring in the face of future strain. Authoritarian regimes in Myanmar and Singapore have exhibited similar endurance, for example, but assessing their durability requires that we also ask whether they have been similarly stable.

The answer is not as straightforward as it may appear. From one perspective, exemplified in field-defining recent work on “competitive authoritarianism,” we see stability whenever a regime survives a monumental challenge.¹³ We know that regimes in Myanmar and Zimbabwe are durable because they have repeatedly traversed the fires of political and economic crises and lived to tell the tale. This conceptualization seems consistent with the Grzymala-Busse notion of stability—that is, the ability to meet and overcome crises.

We propose a different perspective on stability (and hence durability), however. The ultimate form of stability does not entail *meeting* and *overcoming* crises, but *avoiding* and, when they cannot be totally avoided, *resolving* crises decisively in the regime’s favor. When a regime survives a crisis but fails to eliminate or at least mitigate the underlying factors that precipitated it, that regime should be considered less stable than one in which similar crises are fully resolved or never even

occur. What we see in cases like Myanmar and Zimbabwe is not the resolution of political crises but their perpetuation through implacable regime-opposition deadlock. Such regimes may be battle-tested, but they are not particularly stable. The endurance of unstable regimes almost inevitably dooms societies to chronic crises,

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institutional flux and policy failures, as seen in the utter economic collapse of Myanmar and Zimbabwe under military and party rule, respectively.

By contrast, the most durable regimes are those that either stay out of trouble or have a proven track record

of putting troubles behind them. Along with duration, they exhibit the “constant outcome” of institutional continuity. For instance, Malaysia’s and Singapore’s regimes are exceptionally durable not just because of their half-century lifespans, but because they have stably managed massive socioeconomic transformations without altering their most important institutional structures. Crises—whether political, economic or otherwise—have been few and far between. On the rare occasions when crises have emerged, they have been ably contained and effectively resolved. More unstable regimes like those in Myanmar and Zimbabwe get buffeted by recurrent crises of a much larger magnitude that require more drastic measures to manage. Yet even these drastic measures do not place the regime on solid, predictable footing.¹⁴

What kinds of institutions are responsible for the stability we see to a much greater extent in Malaysia and Singapore than in Myanmar and Zimbabwe? While most studies focus on ruling parties—and with good reason—we stress the stabilizing and strengthening role of what social scientists have long recognized as the consummate institution of political order, but which scholars of authoritarian durability tend not to give similar consideration: the state.

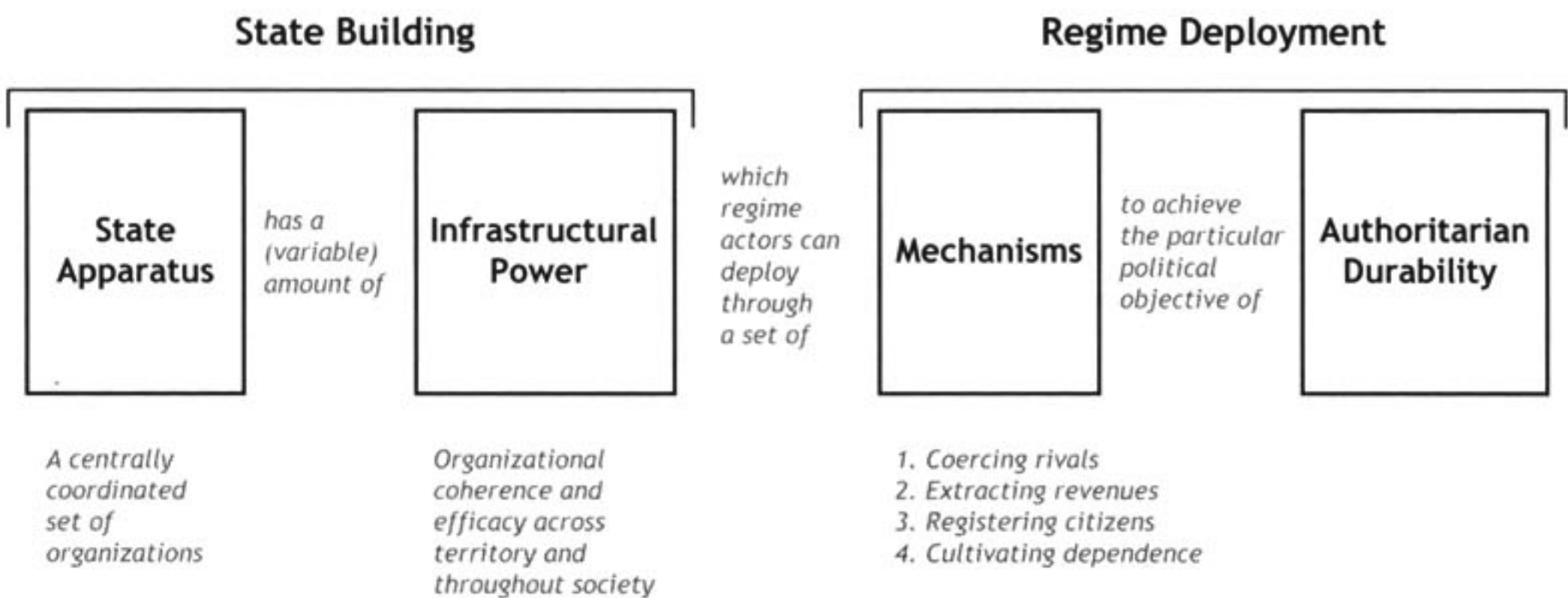
WHAT IS STATE POWER?

Though recent literature on regimes has incorporated the state as an influence on authoritarian durability, there is no consensus on what constitutes “the state.” Recent work has identified the state with the raw size of the public sector, the coercive apparatus, extractive and local government organizations and the sponsorship of private-sector growth.¹⁵ Accounts also vary as to what characteristics of the state support authoritarianism. Some authors see bureaucratized state apparatuses as less useful to authoritarian rulers than their more easily manipulated patrimonial counterparts.¹⁶ Others emphasize the cohesion produced by ideological or ethnic similarities among state employees, while still others see states bolstering authoritarianism to the extent that they are flush with natural-resource revenues.¹⁷

In our view, the state matters because state *power* matters. What shapes varia-

tion in regime durability is not so much roles the state plays as how capably it does so. It is not enough for the state to be *selective* in rewarding loyalists and punishing opponents; it is only if the state is *effective* in such practices that it will underpin highly durable authoritarianism. Rather than inventing a new concept to capture the kind of state power that authoritarian regimes will find most helpful in stabilizing and sustaining their rule, we essentially follow Michael Mann’s classic notion of “infrastructural power.”¹⁸ Infrastructural power helps regime leaders fulfill all kinds of political tasks, not just the maintenance of authoritarian rule.¹⁹ Successful penetration and coordination of society to pursue political objectives depends upon the institutional coherence and efficacy of state agencies themselves (see Figure 1).²⁰ Once gained, infrastructural power can be used for a variety of purposes, not all so narrowly partisan as regime survival. Further, any single political objective—in this case, authoritarian stabilization and survival—can be pursued through multiple “infrastructural mechanisms.” It is to these mechanisms that we now turn.

Figure 1: Influence of State Infrastructural Power on Authoritarian Durability



INFRASTRUCTURAL MECHANISMS

Many of the mechanisms through which authoritarian rulers assert control correspond quite closely with familiar dimensions of state infrastructural power. The core tasks of states have long been recognized to include the monopolization of coercion, the collection of taxes, the conducting of censuses, the policing and surveillance of various “public enemies,” the schooling and socialization of young people, the provision of economic safety nets and the legal adjudication of disputes. Such tasks are performed in democracies as in dictatorships and depend on infrastructural power for their effective and consistent enactment, regardless of regime

type.

This same state infrastructure can also be deployed by authoritarian incumbents to bridle opposition and consolidate regime supremacy. In our view, the most important infrastructural mechanisms sustaining and stabilizing authoritarian regimes include: (1) coercing rivals, (2) extracting revenues, (3) registering citizens and (4) cultivating dependence.²¹ All of these tasks are performed more effectively when state infrastructural power is high than when it is low, and their effective implementation enhances authoritarian durability in particularly powerful ways. These infrastructural tasks also tend to be mutually reinforcing, and the strongest states tend to be experts at them all.

COERCING RIVALS

Of the four mechanisms, coercion has received the most attention as a factor shaping authoritarian durability.²² Eva Bellin traces the extraordinary durability of regimes in the Middle East to their well-financed coercive apparatuses.²³ For Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, state power *is* coercive power; other state agencies matter only insofar as they can be redeployed for coercive purposes.²⁴ One strand in the literature on rentier states suggests that oil-fueled security spending helps forestall democratization.²⁵ The emphasis is typically on the raw size of security forces and the total amount of funding they receive.

We concur that to be effective, coercive state apparatuses must be well-funded and able to repress broadly when the time comes. Yet the state's coercive power involves more than crackdown capacity. Effective coercive apparatuses can deploy violence in a controlled way, ensuring that state repression does not go beyond specified targets and limits. Disproportionately deadly or indiscriminate violence often sparks rather than suppresses opposition, galvanizing otherwise neutral members of society to sympathize with the plight of protesters. Regimes that command weak states often have the wherewithal to mobilize gangs of youths and arm them with simple weapons, drugs and alcohol. But the undisciplined violence this strategy entails cannot create the kind of stability produced by more capable coercive state institutions.

Moreover, coercive capacity can enhance authoritarian durability even when it is rarely used. This makes it perilous to use a regime's "demonstrated capacity" to repress protest as a measure of coercive capacity, since true capacity might lie in not needing to demonstrate it.²⁶ Strong coercive institutions allow a regime to make its threats against opponents highly credible and predictable. When oppositionists ponder taking to the streets, they can expect a swift, certain and targeted state response. Tricky as it may sound for a discipline that rests on empirical observation, political scientists need to recognize that the limited use or even absence

of state violence can be an indicator that state coercion is shaping oppositionists' choices and capacities for mobilization in especially effective ways.

EXTRACTING REVENUES

Extraction, or at least the financial resources it yields, has also received considerable attention as a pillar of durable authoritarian rule.²⁷ The importance of extraction to durable authoritarianism, however, goes beyond the need to pay soldiers or woo voters with handouts. When carried out effectively and consistently during normal times, extraction provides regimes with stores of capital that can help them ride out or even preempt crises, by facilitating otherwise impossible economic policies and the well-timed distribution of patronage. States with high extractive capacity will rely on more administratively demanding direct taxes and collect them regularly at a rate that does not stifle economic development. Powerful extractive institutions make possible the kinds of healthy revenue surpluses that prove vital during cyclical economic downturns. High extractive capacity also puts states in a position to benefit from increases in societal wealth; taxes allow states to reap the rewards of industrial booms that might otherwise benefit only private capitalists. Extractive states thus allow the regimes that operate them to maintain their (fiscal) power advantage over society even as society grows wealthier.

Like coercive capacity, extractive capacity reflects not only the total amount of taxes a state collects but the precision with which it collects them. Brute force can extract "taxes" from almost any source, but an effective tax agency will be able to calculate a sustainable tax rate for citizens and private enterprise, filling state coffers without destroying the economy in a fragmented frenzy of predation.

REGISTERING CITIZENS

As one expert on China has argued, "for most citizens, the state looms large not so much as a coercive organization but as a registering one."²⁸ From national censuses to local voter lists, and from birth registries to school rolls to marriage certificates, state officials are the ultimate keepers of population registries, offering the regimes that run the state an enormous potential source of infrastructural power. Yet this power is only potential: states vary dramatically in their capacity to register (and hence monitor) their subjects.

Extraction and registration are perhaps the two most interdependent practices through which state infrastructural power enhances authoritarian regime durability. Direct taxation leaves an informational residue—states gain intelligence about citizens and their economic activities and can even use the tax system to encourage citizens to make themselves known.²⁹ Conversely, effective registration—the identification and collection of information about citizens and orga-

nizations—can facilitate future extractive projects, particularly those involving administratively challenging direct taxes.

When an authoritarian regime commands a state that exhibits the infrastructural capacity to register its population, it can render society more “legible” and enhance its social control.³⁰ Legibility is the foundation of effective surveillance, which is the foundation not only of effectively targeted coercion, but of co-optation and negotiation. Dealing with opposition often requires a regime to “know who the ‘moderates’ [are] . . . in various groups and to separate them from the radicals who were unwilling to reach accommodation.”³¹ The most effective states will fine-tune registration practices to learn not only citizens’ names and addresses, but their histories, ideological commitments and personal connections.

Legibility also makes threats to use coercion more credible. As with other infrastructural mechanisms, coercion seems to work best when citizens know, or assume, that they are legible to the regime through their various interactions with the state. The threat of targeted coercion against oppositionists will be especially credible if a regime has a history of consistent interaction with citizens made legible on the state’s rolls.

As with other infrastructural practices, registration and the legibility it produces are not only valuable to make repression *selective*; they also make state policies more *effective*. States with time-series information on family structures, economic activities and other social statistics may find themselves more capable of targeting and evaluating state welfare or development policies. Though many observers consider it self-evident that “performance legitimacy” helps stabilize and sustain authoritarian rule, one must appreciate the deeper importance of state power in helping regimes implement successful policies in the first place.

Finally, registering citizens in their everyday activities facilitates standardization of rule across the national territory, often undermining autonomous bases of social support and power in the process. Standardized units and record-keeping practices allow central bureaucrats to manage affairs in peripheral areas without relying on untrusted local intermediaries.³²

CULTIVATING DEPENDENCE

Extraction and registration underpin regimes’ centralized provision of services, which are often thought to enhance the durability of authoritarian regimes. Many authors point to the power of patronage to bind voters or other coalition partners to a particular regime.³³ Support is offered to the regime in exchange for some benefit and withheld from the opposition for fear that benefits may be lost.

Yet those who receive benefits from a regime—most obviously, state employees—sometimes do “[bite] the hand that feeds them.”³⁴ State jobs or state benefits alone

will not bind citizens to a regime unless they believe that those state resources would be denied them by a subsequent regime. Schoolteachers and secret police benefit similarly from state employment, but educators under authoritarianism have little to fear from democratization simply by virtue of their employment; democratic regimes have children to educate too. Secret police who are implicated in incumbents' abuses of power have much more to fear from a future democratic regime, but only because of their ties to the current regime, not the state apparatus.

The observation that benefits often breed quiescence, however, is not easily dismissed. Oftentimes, state employees and others who depend heavily on state services do exhibit a noticeable reluctance to behave in an oppositional manner. State-provided services can enhance incumbent regimes' positions in a number of ways, even without producing citizen loyalty (much less "legitimacy") through a quid-pro-quo exchange. They disrupt alternative social-service networks, depriving nonstate organizations of one of their best tools for connecting and gaining credibility with the masses. The promise of needed services offers citizens an incentive to share their personal information with the state, hence improving their legibility for more nefarious regime purposes. State-sponsored education can play a powerful role in socializing citizens into quiescence. More subtly, so can the quotidian experience of routinely requesting and queuing for essential state services, which repeatedly reminds ordinary people of their collective vulnerability to the withdrawal of state largesse.

Perhaps most importantly, citizens' dependence on state services—which inevitably varies depending on state capacity—gives regimes a wider menu of punishment options. State employees who demonstrate opposition sympathies may be fired or have their hours reduced, their pay cut or their work location altered. Their entire families—now more legible to the regime by virtue of their iterated interactions with the state—may be targeted for harassment. Effective public-service delivery also provides regimes with a wider array of rapidly deliverable concessions, such as channeling cash payouts to state-registered bank accounts or expanding health coverage by incorporating new groups into existing state programs.

A regime's nonviolent, nonpublic repressive tools can mean the difference between quietly forestalling a protest movement and loudly battling one in the streets, particularly in situations in which violent repression is likely to spark

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further dissent or attract unwanted international attention. With a range of subtle but painful sanctions, regimes can punish ever smaller transgressions in a proportionate way—fiendishly leaving the punished with still more left to lose.

STATES VS. PARTIES

All authoritarian regimes have states, but only some have ruling parties.³⁵ It may thus seem natural to focus on variation in party institutions rather than state institutions when explaining why some regimes are more durable than others. For more than forty years, ruling parties have been portrayed as the consummate institutions for authoritarian stability and staying power.³⁶ We do not deny that ruling parties can matter greatly for authoritarian durability or divorce ourselves from the notion that “party-state complexes” can stabilize and sustain authoritarian rule in institutional tandem.³⁷ Rather, we advance the claim that state apparatuses are a more powerful source of highly durable authoritarianism than ruling parties for two reasons. First, the four infrastructural mechanisms just detailed are all more effectively deployed by state institutions than party institutions.³⁸ And second, party strength is more often a product of state strength than vice versa.

That states trump parties when it comes to coercion, extraction and registration might seem intuitive. But what about the fourth infrastructural mechanism, cultivating dependence? Our discussion of dependence in the previous section may seem reminiscent of theories that emphasize the role of ruling parties as purveyors of “punishment regimes,” which sanction dissenters and reward loyalists, particularly at election time.³⁹ If parties can cultivate dependence just like states, does that make these institutions substitutable? Can a strong party produce a level of authoritarian durability that rivals that of strong-state regimes?

Not in a sustainable way, we would submit. Empirically, the strongest authoritarian parties are those which are able to draw on extensive state resources, information and policy implementation capacities. Parties may distribute resources (or promise to do so) in exchange for support, but they rarely extract or produce the resources they hand out or administer the economic policies for which they take credit. These are the tasks of state apparatuses; effective state extraction is the most sustainable basis for party-delivered patronage. In other words, states must cultivate dependence before parties can manipulate it.

This suggests an amendment to the claim that incumbents are most secure where both state and party strength are high. Levitsky and Way see strong parties and strong states contributing equally and interchangeably to authoritarian regimes’ “incumbent capacity.”⁴⁰ But our understanding implies that peak party strength is only achievable in cases of strong state power, and that to label a party “strong” in the absence of a strong state is borderline oxymoronic. Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF

may give the regime an advantage over opposition groups that surpasses weak-state regimes without developed parties. But ZANU-PF cannot provide stability to the same degree that Malaysia's ruling party, UMNO, can; it lacks the lifeline of sustainable resources, accurate information and selective coercive capacity provided by the Malaysian state. As a result, Zimbabwe's regime finds itself in continued confrontations with a broad and dogged opposition. It may hang onto power, but it does so in a significantly less stable way—i.e., a less durable way—than its Malaysian counterpart. To put it differently, Zimbabwe's ruling party hangs onto substantially *less* power than Malaysia's.

The critical corollary to this point is that a strong ruling party is more likely to be built on the foundation of a strong state than the other way around. As a matter of historical sequence, colonial powers all built state apparatuses of some kind upon their assumption of rule, but few permitted the emergence of parties of any sort until colonialism's waning days, if at all. As a matter of political logic, if a postcolonial regime has inherited a state apparatus with ample capacity to coerce, tax and register its population, the relative benefits of being in as opposed to out of power increase. Cohesive ruling parties can thus be a sign of authoritarian stability as much as a source. Opposition status looks more like a "political wilderness," and regime insiders will be willing to suffer more abuse from the regime leadership before venturing into it.

For regimes lacking a strong state, the converse is true. It will be harder and costlier to draw a wide range of political elites into any single-party fold in the first instance, and to keep them enmeshed in the party fold over time. Like Mann's famous example of the queen from *Alice in Wonderland*, who screams "Off with her head!" but lacks the capacity to carry out the execution, ruling parties without strong states are more likely to witness cascades of elite defections and to be relatively powerless to stop them once they begin.⁴¹


CONCLUSION

All authoritarian regimes have states, but they do not all have state power. When analysts attempt to trace how authoritarian institutions shape authoritarian durability, they should be as attentive to variation in state power as they have typically been (especially recently) to more democratic-looking institutions like parties, elections and parliaments.

While we have emphasized its uniquely potent contribution to authoritarian durability, state power affects other authoritarian regime dynamics as well.

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Besides exhibiting longer and sturdier tenures in office, authoritarian regimes that enjoy access to strong states should generally produce higher rates of economic growth and be capable of dictating the terms of their eventual withdrawal from power—as is attested by the gradual retreats of authoritarian elites in cases such as Chile, South Africa, South Korea and Taiwan. In authoritarian regimes where state power is less pervasive yet still palpable—Bahrain, China, Cuba, Russia and Vietnam come to mind—theorists of authoritarianism should be as attentive to the inherited, evolving and uneven capacities of the state apparatus as they are to the institutions that are typically taken to constitute the political regime.

We should perhaps conclude by highlighting the most liberating lesson offered by our guiding metaphor. Even the most highly developed coercive and administrative institutions do not function without the guidance and efforts of human agents, just as even the most sophisticated automobile cannot propel and steer itself. Leadership error is a chronic destabilizing possibility in all authoritarian regimes. What is needed is an approach to authoritarianism that is attentive both to the machinery of the state and its operators.⁴² Since the machinery almost always has deeper historical roots than the men who command it, future studies of authoritarian durability and dynamics should adopt a much deeper historical perspective than leading works have to date. 

NOTES

¹ The first author encountered this memorable phrase during a lecture in Professor Frykenberg's South Asian history course at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in the early 1990s.

² An earlier draft of this article was presented under this same title at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. A longer version with a slightly different title was presented at the 2011 conference on “Making Autocracies Work” at the University of Michigan; the 2009 American Sociological Association's Comparative and Historical Sociology Conference; and a 2009 conference on “The New Authoritarianism” at the University of Toronto.

³ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 1.

⁴ Authoritarian durability is profoundly shaped by coalitions as well as institutions. See Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For reasons of space we focus only on the question of institutions here.

⁵ Reflecting common (if somewhat confusing) usage, we refer to the government that runs an authoritarian political system as its “regime” (e.g., “the Mubarak regime” or “the Kuomintang regime”). Authoritarian regimes are actors, not just systems of access to power (i.e., regime types).

⁶ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5.

⁷ Top-down initiatives might also democratize a regime without damaging or destabilizing it, as with Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan and Roh Tae Woo in South Korea. Thus, we see preemptive democratization from above as a likely pathway out of strong-state authoritarianism, though we lack the space to develop the argument here.

⁸ H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ed. and trans., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York:

Oxford University Press, 1946), 228.

⁹ As Richard Snyder puts it, “the burgeoning literature on contemporary nondemocratic regimes . . . places an overwhelming emphasis on the electoral process,” while “stateness (how much do rulers rule) has been less central to prior work on regimes.” Richard Snyder, “Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes,” in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 220, 230n5.

¹⁰ On the colonial origins of postcolonial development, see Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson, “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation,” *American Economic Review* 91, no. 5 (December 2001): 1369–401; Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialism in the Global Periphery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Matthew Lange, *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Unlike these works, even the most long-term accounts of postcolonial authoritarian durability rarely trace its roots to the colonial period.

¹¹ Anna Grzymala-Busse, “Time Will Tell? Temporality and the Analysis of Causal Mechanisms and Processes,” *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 9 (September 2011): 1279.

¹² Ibid. We focus on stability here in part because it has received less attention than duration, but also because stability is more intimately connected to state power than duration (which can be achieved in multiple ways). This sets us apart from scholars who see state *weaknesses* as prolonging authoritarian rule in places like Yemen and Iran—but not as achieving the kind of broader political stability and continuity witnessed in Singapore and Malaysia. For examples of such arguments, see Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Arang Keshavarzian, “Contestation without Democracy: Elite Fragmentation in Iran,” in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, ed. Marsha P. Posusney and Michelle P. Angrist (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

¹³ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ While regimes such as Myanmar’s and Zimbabwe’s are battle-tested yet unstable, others may appear highly stable but would be better conceptualized as untested. This is especially the case in societies that have undergone limited socioeconomic development or where autonomous social groups that could challenge authoritarian rule have failed to emerge. These may be more accurately conceived of as stable or even stagnant *countries* than as stable *regimes*. To the extent that regime durability is due to an absence of oppositional activity unrelated to regime features and practices, such untested regimes might best be considered “presumptively unstable.” Huntington, *Political Order*, 398.

¹⁵ For an argument focused on the size of the public sector, see Kenneth Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico’s Democratization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); on coercive apparatuses, see Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*; and Eva Bellin, “Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders,” in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, ed. Marsha P. Posusney and Michele P. Angrist (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); on extractive and local government organizations, see Benjamin Smith, *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty: Oil Politics in Iran and Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); and on state sponsorship of private-sector growth, see Eva Bellin, “Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries,” *World Politics* 52, no. 2 (January 2000): 175–205.

¹⁶ Bellin, “Coercive Institutions”; Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose*. Like Soifer and vom Hau, we distinguish bureaucratization from infrastructural power. State effectiveness may be partially attributable to certain organizational practices that overlap with bureaucratization in their emphasis on expertise, but are not coterminous with it. We are grateful to Manuel Viedma for his guidance on this point. Hillel Soifer and Matthias vom Hau, “Unpacking the Strength of the State: The Utility of State Infrastructural Power,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2008): 219–23.

¹⁷ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*; Michael Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (April 2001): 325–61.

¹⁸ Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*.

¹⁹ Infrastructural power is thus more general than any specific manifestation of state power (e.g., coercive capacity or fiscal capacity), clarifying why our basic claim is not tautological. In our view, claims about state power are most likely to veer into tautology when they focus solely on coercive

capacity, which can be difficult to measure *ex ante* yet appears palpable once deployed.

²⁰ State infrastructural power can be measured by proxy with a variety of indicators (e.g., tax revenue as a percentage of GDP, proportion of total tax revenue from direct taxes, miles of roads, police per capita, etc.). Such indicators improve dramatically on the blunt use of GDP per capita or urbanization as a proxy for state capacity, but they remain inadequate, especially when used separately. To the extent that organizational coherence and efficacy can be measured directly, it should be considered the best indicator of state infrastructural power.

²¹ We bracket the issue of authoritarian regimes' symbolic practices, with their manifold ambiguities for relationships of domination, since they do not require the same degree of state power as the other mechanisms we detail here. For an analysis of these practices, see Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Indeed, authoritarian ruling parties that command weak state apparatuses might well engage in more symbolic and rhetorical manipulation than their strong-state counterparts, due to their inability to perform other infrastructural tasks effectively. That being said, a regime's capacity not only to *manipulate* but to *monopolize* symbolic production is certainly facilitated by state infrastructural power.

²² Consistent with its general usage in the literature on authoritarianism, we use the term "coercion" to mean an array of repressive practices involving violence or the threat of violence, as distinct from the nonviolent (and usually nonpublic) repressive tactics discussed in the "Cultivating Dependence" section of this article.

²³ Bellin, "Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders."

²⁴ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 59.

²⁵ Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" 335–36.

²⁶ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 376.

²⁷ Rentier revenues (e.g., oil and foreign aid) provide authoritarian regimes with fiscal *viability* until the next crisis hits, but do not substitute for the fiscal *capacity* to generate revenues that are necessary to resolve or avoid future crises.

²⁸ Neil J. Diamant, "Making Love 'Legible' in China: Politics and Society during the Enforcement of Civil Marriage Registration, 1950–1966," *Politics and Society* 29, no. 3 (September 2001): 447.

²⁹ Where extractive and registration practices are effective, citizens may embrace the state rather than evade it, even under authoritarian conditions. "While the subject might normally prefer the safety of anonymity, once he was forced to pay the tax, it was then in his interest to be accurately identified in order to avoid paying the same tax twice." James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 68.

³⁰ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Diamant, "Making Love 'Legible' in China"; Dan Slater, "Can Leviathan be Democratic? Competitive Elections, Robust Mass Politics, and State Infrastructural Power," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2008): 252–72; Slater, *Ordering Power*.

³¹ Smith, *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty*, 155.

³² Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Pierre Landry, *Decentralized Authoritarianism: The Communist Party's Control of Local Elites in Post-Mao China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). As with symbolic practices, we set aside the issue of whether state centralization supports authoritarian durability. Centralized states do not necessarily possess more capable infrastructure for rule than decentralized ones, though we believe they tend to be more capable on average. Also, some authoritarianism-supporting centralization strategies—e.g., the elimination of local elections—are more endogenous to authoritarian regime practices than the (inherited) infrastructural capacities we emphasize here.

³³ Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose*.

³⁴ Bellin, "Contingent Democrats," 183.

³⁵ While a few authoritarian regimes—mostly monarchies—do without parties altogether, "ruling parties" here refers to the kind that actually rule, not those that are fig leaves for personalistic or militarized ruling groups.

³⁶ Huntington, *Political Order*; Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know about Democratization After Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 115–44; Smith, *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty*; Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*; Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Slater, *Ordering Power*, 51. See also Smith, *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty*; and Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

³⁸ Consider the relative rarity of “administered mass organizations,” in which party-like institutions are constructed to produce many of the same infrastructural practices for stability and control that we detail above. These are typically jobs for the state, not a party. Gregory Kasza, *The Conscription Society: Administered Mass Organizations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*.

⁴⁰ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 54–56.

⁴¹ Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

⁴² For an attempt to mesh considerations of authoritarian institutions and autocratic agency in the case of Indonesia, see Dan Slater, “Altering Authoritarianism: Institutional Complexity and Autocratic Agency in Indonesia,” in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, ed. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).