PART I

REFORM AND RESILIENCE

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Understanding Communist Collapse and Resilience

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In 1989 communist regimes from Berlin to Ulaanbaatar began to fall like dominoes. In the aftermath, social scientists produced many explanations for the fall of communism. Nevertheless, given the momentous and multicausal nature of the 1989 events, the question of why some communist regimes collapsed is still open to new interpretations. But 1989 is also notable for what did *not* happen. Several communist regimes survived the fall of the Berlin Wall: communist parties still rule in China, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, and North Korea. Thus, attention to the "non-events" of 1989 allows us to ask a broader question – namely, why do some communist regimes survive the forces of contagion, even as others fall?

By focusing on the survival of some communist regimes and the collapse of others, we can approach the general problem of authoritarian regime resilience. Some authoritarian regimes are relatively short-lived, experiencing frequent breakdowns as a result of coups or revolutions. However, the regimes that underwent turmoil in 1989 had enjoyed very long average life spans. Regardless of whether they survived the watershed of 1989, all these regimes had been *resilient*. They had previously weathered serious domestic and international crises that had not brought them down (for example, de-Stalinization in Eastern Europe or the Cultural Revolution in China). What are the factors that explain such resilience? Why were these regimes capable of maintaining power? Given that some regimes failed and others survived, were there systematic differences among the survivors and the nonsurvivors that explain these divergent outcomes?

This volume investigates authoritarian resilience by focusing on communist regimes, which are autocratic single-party states where, at a minimum, a mass-based Leninist party enjoys a monopoly on the use of force, controls the flow of information, proscribes opposition parties, and exercises substantial control over the economy.[1] The main argument is that, apart from repression,

[1] Adapted from Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 22.

communist resilience is a function of continuous adaptive institutional change. Therefore, collapse is more likely when adaptive institutional change stagnates. As scholars of the Middle East are now questioning basic assumptions of their subfield,[2] they have begun to suggest a similar structural explanation for the Arab Spring, finding that regimes that had inflexible political structures were more likely to collapse, whereas regimes that had room to maneuver institutionally (i.e., the monarchies) or had a strong nationalistic base of rule (i.e., Iran) were more likely to survive.[3] Despite the differences in the specific institutional adaptations necessary in the Middle East and in the communist world, a general point should be noted: autocracies cannot rely on force alone to survive – they also need to engage in adaptive institutional change.

Institutional Sources of Communist Regime Resilience

In recent years, some of the most exciting research in comparative politics has centered on efforts to understand the durability of different types of *noncommunist* authoritarian regimes.[4] A robust finding has emerged, demonstrating that

[2] F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90:4 (July–August 2011), 81–90.

[3] Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90:3 (May–June 2011), 8–16.

[4] See Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13:2 (April 2002), 21–35; Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006); Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). On the Middle East, see Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). On Asia, see Thomas B. Pepinsky, *Economic Crises and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes: Indonesia and Malaysia in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On Latin America, see Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Kenneth F. Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On Africa, see Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Leonardo R. Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability in Africa," *Comparative Political Studies* 42:10 (2009), 1339–1362. On post-Soviet Eurasia, see Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell

noncommunist single-party regimes last significantly longer than military or personalist regimes.[5] This empirical finding, which provided quantitative support for earlier insights in comparative politics,[6] gave rise to a large literature oriented toward uncovering the institutional foundations of authoritarian durability. Scholars primarily investigated how rewarding elites with membership in institutions for rival incorporation, such as legislatures and ruling parties, prolongs the life span of authoritarian regimes by preventing opposition coordination.[7] Although standard theories of authoritarian rule usually restrict the size of the winning coalition to a subset of the elite, known as the selectorate, new research has underscored that leaders also want to win mass support.[8] Because this research typically focuses on *electoral* autocracies, in which opposition parties are allowed to exist and to contest the elections meaningfully, it has identified fiscal transfers during electoral cycles as a key instrument for winning mass support.[9] The chapters in the present volume complement earlier scholarship by focusing on *communist* autocracies (which are a type of nonelectoral autocracy, as they proscribe opposition parties; though elections are held, they have at best only a very limited degree of competitiveness) and by identifying and analyzing nonelectoral channels through which communist autocracies can increase mass support and thus expand their winning coalitions beyond the selectorate.

Communist autocracies deserve special attention for both empirical and theoretical reasons. A basic empirical fact remains unappreciated: communist regimes are the most resilient type of nondemocratic regime, outlasting both noncommunist single-party regimes and nondemocratic monarchies.[10] This unusual longevity suggests that the survival tools used by communist regimes may differ from those used by noncommunist autocracies. Identifying these tools

University Press, 2010). See also Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[5] Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Benjamin Smith, "Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule," *World Politics* 57:3 (April 2005), 421–451. Geddes and Smith each exclude communist regimes when calculating regime duration.

[6] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

[7] See mainly Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[8] Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro, *Popular Support for an Undemocratic Regime: The Changing Views of Russians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[9] Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*.

[10] As of 2000, the average life span of noncommunist single-party regimes was 28.51 years and that of nondemocratic monarchies was 34.75 years. In contrast, communist single-party regimes had an average life span of 46.2 years. My dataset includes 39 noncommunist single-party regimes (based partially on Smith, "Life of the Party"), 20 nondemocratic monarchies, and 15 communist regimes.

requires both empirical research and a theoretical reconceptualization of the foundations of authoritarian rule.

The theoretical contribution of this volume to the debate on the sources of authoritarian resilience is threefold. First, instead of conceptualizing governance institutions as static, the volume stresses the importance of dynamic institutional innovation and adaptation. Second, the chapters broaden the spectrum of instruments that are considered essential for the maintenance of communist rule, focusing on those institutions that ensure the loyalty of both the elites and the masses. Finally, the contributors to this volume pay particular attention to contingent leadership choices in times of uncertainty, which can either strengthen the effects of formal institutions on resilience or lead to institutional crisis, thus precipitating regime collapse. Taken as a whole, the chapters offer a balanced view of communist rule, highlighting structural explanations of resilience, while also stressing the role of contingency for collapse.

The chapters in this volume emphasize four types of adaptations that may prolong the life span of communist regimes by allowing them to expand their support base beyond the selectorate.[11] One essential adaptation pertains to the introduction of economic reforms. These reforms can bring about economic growth, which is essential for regime maintenance. However, economic reforms may also challenge communist rule by creating groups that are not incorporated into the existing political system. One such group is the reform winners (e.g., private entrepreneurs), and another is the reform losers (e.g., the unenfranchised). Therefore, a second type of adaptation requires the inclusion of both the reform winners (by making them stakeholders in the existing political structure) and the reform losers (by implementing redistributive and labor-protective policies). A third strategy is the deployment of institutions of horizontal and vertical accountability, such as parliamentary query sessions or offices for receiving and responding to citizen complaints. These institutions create legitimacy by increasing the responsiveness of leaders both at the elite level and at the lower rungs of the political ladder. A fourth adaptation is ideological, whereby an ideology that is credible to both ordinary citizens and to intellectuals is articulated. In practice, this type of adaptation is effected primarily through nationalism rather than by reinvigorating Marxism-Leninism. The cumulative effect of these adaptations is to reduce the need to rely on repression as a habitual tool of governance. That said, maintaining a repressive potential is also essential for survival. This explains why even a highly adaptive regime like China currently devotes a substantial portion of its budget to the repressive apparatus. Repression is even more important in North Korea, where, until Kim Jong Un took power in December 2011, the only

[11] The selectorate elects those in the winning coalition, which in turn selects the leader; in communist regimes, the selectorate consists of the Central Committee that is chosen by the communist party congress, the winning coalition is the Politburo, and the leader is the general secretary of the communist party.

adaptation the neo-Stalinist regime was willing to undertake was the adoption of an extreme form of militant nationalism.

Political Reform and Regime Collapse

In the absence of adaptive change, certain types of institutional reforms undertaken during periods of crisis may increase the likelihood or speed of regime collapse. As the experiences of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe indicate, such reforms include the introduction of genuine pluralism (the legalization of opposition movements and, eventually, of opposition parties) and the abandonment of the Leninist principles of party organization (most importantly, democratic centralism), both of which subvert the communist party's monopoly on power. At the same time, political reform undertaken in the context of ongoing adaptive change may serve to promote resilience. In China, village elections and inner-party democracy have strengthened the position of the party. Similarly, in Vietnam, the introduction of semicompetitive legislative elections and televised parliamentary query sessions has bolstered the party. Such effects are all the more notable given that semicompetitive elections and televised parliamentary debates destabilized the party in the Soviet Union in 1989–1990. The point to underscore from these contrasting examples is that the East European regimes collapsed not because they instituted political reform per se, but rather because they instituted political reform in a situation shaped by regime *failure to have implemented adaptive institutional changes*. The failure of the communist parties in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to implement adaptive change eroded the loyalty of the masses, and, in that context, political reform served not as a sign of flexibility but rather as a signal of regime weakness that facilitated mass defection to the opposition. This logic suggests why avoiding political reform remains an optimal survival strategy for a regime like North Korea, but also why limited political reform may be an option for other communist regimes that are institutionally more adaptive.

Although all communist regimes aim to maximize their chances of staying in power, only some of them implement adaptive changes. The chapters in the volume argue that the source of this variation lies partly in structural constraints that prevent the introduction of adaptive changes. In the Eastern Bloc, such constraints led to leadership decisions to place a priority on political reform, which turned out to undermine stability. A second reason for variation is geographical proximity to the West and the political integration among the countries of the Eastern Bloc that facilitated the diffusion of demands for political reform. This explains the speed and the clustering of collapse. In contrast, the surviving regimes did not belong to the European communist community. Political isolation and geographical distance allowed them to observe maladaptive change in Europe and eventually to implement policies aimed at promoting adaptive change, including the initiation of controlled political reform.

A Comparative Framework for Studying Communist Resilience and Collapse

A study of the institutional foundations of communist resilience requires a comparative framework. A methodological innovation in this volume is the classification of the fifteen communist regimes as a group. In so doing, this study transcends the historical divisions that have bifurcated communist studies and have produced two separate subfields, with scholars asking largely different questions. An assumption of incomparability between the two subgroups emerged during the Cold War and became even more deeply entrenched after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Students of Asia focused on resilience, whereas specialists on Eastern Europe aimed to explain the mechanisms of regime collapse. Although the contributors to this volume analyze the various differences between the European and the Asian regimes, the chapters as a whole make apparent the important similarities, primarily in terms of their institutional makeup, between the two groups. Focusing on these shared institutions of governance and their evolution over time allows us to isolate what is specifically *communist* about these cases and what distinguishes them from other, less durable authoritarian regimes.

This volume also makes use of a rare natural experiment. Communist regimes were established in fifteen countries with disparate histories, cultures, and geographical locations. What made these countries communist was a common set of institutions of governance, such as a communist party, a planned economy, repressive organs, and an ideological and propaganda apparatus. Of these regimes, ten eventually collapsed, whereas five continue to survive. The divergent outcomes on the dependent variable allow us to ask how the institutions of governance impacted the outcome of interest. The resulting theoretical explanation resembles a standard social science explanation, where the presence of variable X allows for outcome Y, and the absence of variable X accounts for the absence of outcome Y. With regard to resilience, this produces the following explanation: continuous adaptive change makes resilience more likely, whereas insufficient adaptive change increases the probability of collapse.

A third methodological feature of certain chapters in this volume is approaching the problem of collapse and resilience through a paired comparison of cases with similar institutions of governance but with divergent outcomes on the dependent variable nested within the larger sample of communist regimes.[12] Sidney Tarrow has argued that the method of paired comparison allows scholars to correct generalizations based on single cases, to assess the influence of institutions, and to generate hypotheses about causal relations between variables, which is an important step in theory development.[13] Contributors to this volume

[12] Evan S. Lieberman, "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review* 99:3 (2005), 435–452.

[13] Sidney Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice," *Comparative Political Studies* 43:2 (2010), 230–259.

either directly conduct such paired comparison or discuss how their argument about collapse applies in countries that remained resilient (and vice versa). These comparisons illuminate how regimes with similar institutions diverged because of choices about organizing and adapting these institutions to their respective environments over time.

Organization of the Volume

Rather than being organized by country or by region, the volume is organized in five thematic parts. Each part focuses on a different type of institutional adaptation and explores how this adaptation operated in the regimes that survived 1989 and in those that did not. The first question of interest is political and economic reform. Several chapters touch on this topic, but two chapters focus on it directly: this introductory chapter and, especially, Bernstein's chapter on political and economic reforms in the Soviet Union and China (Chapter 2). The second part of the volume examines the role of ideology and legitimacy for the survival of communist regimes. Tismaneanu contrasts ideological erosion and regime collapse in Eastern Europe with the ability of the Chinese and North Korean regimes to engage in different types of ideological adaptation that have proven to be conducive to regime resilience (Chapter 3). Armstrong's chapter discusses how ideological introversion in North Korea, which came about as a response to communist collapse in Europe, has served as a basis for regime resilience (Chapter 4). Part III focuses on international factors, with two chapters on how the diffusion of ideas and demonstration effects contributed to collapse in some communist regimes. Bunce and Wolchik (Chapter 5) analyze the two waves of democratization in the communist world (1987–1990 and 1996–2005), and Kramer discusses the relationship between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (Chapter 6). The placement of the two chapters on contagion and collapse in the middle of the volume reflects two considerations. One is that had these chapters been placed at the end, the volume would imply a teleological account of communist rule. Another is that by placing these chapters in the middle of the volume, we can highlight the adaptive learning that took place in the regimes that survived 1989. The chapters in Parts IV and V explore different dimensions of this adaptive learning. Part IV focuses on inclusion, with chapters that approach this question from two complementary perspectives. Gallagher and Hanson argue that regimes with narrow selectorates create institutions to address the redistributive preferences of the unenfranchised segments of the population (Chapter 7). Tsai discusses the institutional changes implemented in China and Vietnam in order to integrate private entrepreneurs into the communist party (Chapter 8). The final part of this volume examines how institutions of accountability contribute to regime resilience. Abrami, Malesky, and Zheng compare and contrast the extent to which the Politburo and the government in Vietnam and China are subject to horizontal and vertical accountability (Chapter 9). Dimitrov focuses

on citizen complaints as one channel for vertical accountability in Bulgaria and China (Chapter 10). Taken together, the ten chapters in the five thematic parts shed new light on the institutional foundations of governance in communist societies as well as on the interactions between domestic and international factors and structure and contingency during the process of regime collapse. The final chapter (Chapter 11) concludes and offers some broader reflections about the ability of the five remaining communist regimes to maintain resilience.

The remainder of this introductory chapter examines these issues in more depth. It begins by defining the universe of communist regimes and by specifying the stages of their development. It then discusses how the arguments in this volume about adaptive change complement existing theories of regime resilience. It concludes with an analysis of the relationship between stagnation of institutional adaptation and regime collapse.

COMMUNIST REGIMES AND THEIR INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section has two goals relevant to the comparative study of communist autocracies. The first is to argue that communist regimes should indeed be thought of as a group and to define the criteria for inclusion in this group. The second is to stress the importance of the stages in the development of communist regimes and to show that the institutions necessary for regime survival in the early stages of development differ from those that are important in later stages. The section concludes with a discussion of the communist penumbra, which consists of regimes that, despite sometimes being classified as communist, did not possess the institutional characteristics of the fifteen core regimes.

The Universe of Communist Regimes

Scholars of communist rule early on noted the "unity in diversity" that characterized the communist world.[14] There were indeed numerous differences among the fifteen core countries prior to 1989. One difference can be traced back to the historical origin of the regime. In most countries communist parties gained power through a revolution (the Soviet Union, Mongolia, Albania, Yugoslavia, North Korea, China, Vietnam, and Cuba) or by victory in free (Czechoslovakia) or partially manipulated (Bulgaria) elections, but there were also countries where communist rule was imposed (Romania, Poland,

[14] Donald L. M. Blackmer, *Unity in Diversity: Italian Communism and the Communist World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968). See also Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Communist Ideology and Power: From Unity to Diversity," *Journal of Politics* 19:4 (1957), 549–590 and especially Chalmers A. Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970).