1

Introduction

Since humans began to live in settled communities, most have lived under autocracy.[1] Dictatorships still rule roughly 40 percent of the world's nations. All international wars since the end of World War I have involved dictatorships. Two-thirds of civil wars and ethnic conflicts since World War II have erupted in countries under authoritarian rule.[2] Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, dictatorships have perpetrated nearly 85 percent of mass killings by governments.[3] In other words, dictatorships affect millions of people's lives (and deaths) and initiate most of the urgent international challenges that policy makers face. We cannot avoid dealing with them. And yet a limited understanding of how dictatorships work undermines our ability to influence and negotiate with them.

Most academic analyses of how governments work have focused on democracies. We therefore know much less about dictatorial decision-making than about democratic. As a further complication, dictatorships differ not only from democracies but also from each other, and these differences have consequences for citizen welfare and international conflict. Although some dictatorships initiate more than their share of wars and political violence, many other

[1] The absence of fair, reasonably competitive elections through which citizens choose those who make policies on their behalf defines autocracy or dictatorship. The coding rules that operationalize this definition of dictatorship can be found at http://sites.psu.edu/dictators.

[2] These figures were calculated using data on regime type from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), data on civil wars from Themner and Wallensteen (2014), data on ethnic conflict from Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (2009), and data on mass killings from Ulfelder and Valentino (2008). Civil war statistics are calculated from all civil war years, including internationalized civil conflicts. Ethnic war and mass-killing statistics are calculated from the onset years of conflicts. The years included are 1946–2010.

[3] Calculated from data on one-sided mass killings from 1989 to 2010 from Eck and Hultman (2007). The figure excludes the genocide in 1994 Rwanda, which is hard to classify.

dictatorships live in peace with their neighbors and refrain from oppressing citizens. The fastest-growing countries in the world are dictatorships, but the most economically mismanaged are dictatorships as well. Some dictatorships have followed policies to equalize incomes, but others have raised inequality to astonishing levels. Abstract theories that treat all dictatorships as the same cannot make sense of these differences. We need more realistic theories.

A great deal has been written about specific autocracies by individuals with impressive local expertise, but only a few comparative studies grounded in evidence exist. We also have some interesting theories of dictatorship, but fewer theories firmly anchored in the real world. We know little about why some dictatorships establish stable government while others suffer continuous upheaval, why some create democratic-looking political institutions to engage citizens and others do not, why some distribute benefits broadly while others concentrate wealth within a small group of regime supporters, or why some last many decades but many collapse within a year or two. In short, we understand little about how dictatorships work and why they sometimes fail to work.

Some of the reasons why analysts have made less progress in the study of dictatorship than democracy are obvious. Dictatorial decision-making often occurs in secret, while policy-making and leadership choice in democracies are relatively transparent (Lewis 1978, 622). Decision-making opacity interferes with understanding why dictatorships do things. Small dictatorial elite groups usually make decisions in informal settings: "formal institutions are not necessarily the place to look when you want to understand everyday operating procedures" in dictatorships (Fitzpatrick 2015, 278). Legislative debates and votes often ratify policy choices made elsewhere, and cabinet ministers may be the implementers of decisions, not the decision makers. Democracies publish great quantities of data about themselves, making it easier for scholars to investigate them. Not only do dictatorships publish less, but what they do publish may be purposely inaccurate (Magee and Doces 2014). Election results may reflect the resource advantage enjoyed by the ruling party rather than voters' preferences about who should rule, and published results may not match votes cast.

For all these reasons, in order to make progress in understanding dictatorships, we need much more systematic information about them than has been available. More challenging, the information needs to reflect informal aspects of real dictatorial decision-making, not just the formal characteristics of rule included in many existing data sets. More detailed information has begun to be collected in recent years, facilitating the development of new theories about dictatorship (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010; Svolik 2012). In this book we use additional newly collected data to build on these efforts, which enables us to take another step toward explaining political choices in dictatorships.

A second, perhaps less obvious, reason for the difficulty in developing a systematic understanding of authoritarian politics is the great heterogeneity

across autocracies in the way decisions are made and leaders chosen, which groups influence these decisions and who is excluded, who supports the dictatorial elite, and who benefits from their decisions. The policy-making process in Saudi Arabia is quite different from that in China, and both differ from decision-making procedures during military rule in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. Thus, while many theories about how democratic governments function fit all democracies, useful theories about authoritarian politics have to explain and take into account the differences among dictatorships.

This means that in order to develop theories about authoritarian politics, we may first need to explain their differences. Our approach to doing that begins with identifying characteristics of the different groups that seize dictatorial power, which we can observe before the dictatorship begins. Groups potentially able to initiate dictatorship have varying capacities, resources, organizational structures, ways of making decisions, and distributions of within-group power. After the seizure of power, these characteristics shape the way decisions are made in the ensuing dictatorship and who can influence them. Preexisting traits of the seizure group, as we show below, affect which citizens outside the group can influence decisions, which part of the citizenry is likely to support the regime, how the dictatorship responds to citizens who oppose it, which domestic and international policies the dictatorship chooses, and what kinds of formal political institutions it establishes to solve its cooperation problems, monitor potential opponents, and incorporate citizens into unchallenging forms of participation.

We use the term "seizure group" to refer to the small group that literally ousts the incumbent and takes over in order to initiate dictatorship, as well as their organized support base. For example, when military officers seize power in a coup, the seizure group includes both the individual coup plotters and the part of the military (possibly all of it) that provides less active support for them. Seizure groups are thus similar to Haber's (2006) "launching groups" except that we make no assumptions about their ability to solve collective action problems or oust the dictator they install. Nor do we assume that the group that helps the dictator seize power takes over the bureaucracy, courts, police, and military because, in the real world, they often do not. Frequently, in fact, these institutions remain staffed or partly staffed by individuals hired by those who ruled before the seizure of power.

As an example, consider a coup such as the one in Argentina in 1976: the commanding officer of the armed forces, supported by a consensus among other high-ranking officers, seizes control of government. In this kind of situation, before the coup most members of the seizure group have direct control of weapons and expertise in using them but less expertise in bargaining. They have a hierarchical organization structure that can usually ensure disciplined implementation of orders by soldiers (though not civilians), as well as a technocratic decision-making style, with decisions concentrated at the top of the military hierarchy. These characteristics can be expected to influence the way decisions

are made after the seizure of power. Because of strong norms about the chain of command within the military, for example, military seizure groups usually choose their highest-ranked officer as dictator.

Contrast this portrait of military rule with rule by a party that won an earlier free and fair election, but then used its control of the legislature to pass laws that severely disadvantaged the opposition, thus "authoritarianizing" the government.[4] For example, between 2002 and 2005, the elected Chávez government in Venezuela used harassment and intimidation of the opposition, arrests of opposition leaders, and interference with the media to authoritarianize the political system. Other ways that democratically elected governments have authoritarianized include banning opposition parties and closing legislatures.

A party leadership that initially grew out of competitive election campaigns has developed very different capacities, organization, and resources than a military seizure group. Such party-based seizure groups typically lack weapons and expertise in using them, but have a great deal of experience in bargaining, cooptation, and electoral mobilization. The party may have a hierarchical organization in the sense that decision-making is concentrated in the party leader, but its activists and employees tend to be undisciplined because of the use of jobs and other benefits to coopt opponents and buy support from people with diverse interests. As a consequence, decisions made at the top may be distorted during implementation to benefit local officials or simply not implemented. Like the central traits of military seizure groups, these characteristics also tend to carry over into post-seizure dictatorships established by parties that were once fairly elected.

Several intuitions lie behind the claim that preexisting characteristics of the group that establishes the dictatorship persist and shape political processes that follow. First, we expect the inner circle of the dictatorship to be chosen from the seizure group. Second, we expect groups represented in the inner circles of dictatorships to dominate early decision-making and to have more influence on decisions than excluded groups throughout the life of the dictatorship. We also expect *organized* included groups to wield more power than unorganized ones. Parties and militaries are large, often well-organized groups frequently represented in seizure groups and thus initially in the dictator's inner circle. The dictator's inner circle may also represent the interests of particular class, ethnic, religious, or regional groups, but since such groups tend to be loosely organized, we expect them to have less capacity to influence decisions and implementation than more effectively organized groups. Third, we expect groups that have developed skills and routinized ways of interacting and making decisions to gravitate toward these same ways of doing things immediately after seizures of power. Our theories build on these intuitions.

[4] This is a frequent means of establishing dictatorship, as shown in Chapter 2.

We expect preexisting characteristics of the seizure group to influence the kind of autocratic *regime* that emerges after a seizure of power. By "regime" we mean the set of very basic formal and informal rules for choosing leaders and policies. We "measure" regimes as the continuous country-years in which the same group – though not necessarily the same individuals – controls the government and uses the same basic rules. Regimes can and often do include the tenures of more than one dictator, as in China under Communist Party rule or Saudi Arabia under the Al Saud family dynasty. "Very basic" rules include such unspoken requirements as the necessity for paramount leaders to come from particular ethnic groups or from highest-ranking officers, not necessarily electoral rules or constitutional provisions, which the dictatorial inner circle can change and/or abrogate. Because dictatorships lack third-party enforcement of formal political rules (Svolik 2012), the kinds of formal political institutions that shape politics in democracies have less influence on the behavior of elites in dictatorships. The basic rules that define dictatorial regimes are those, whether formal or informal, that really shape the choice of top leaders and important policies.

IMPLEMENTING OUR DEFINITION OF REGIME

For gathering the data on which this study depends, we relied on a set of detailed rules to identify the beginnings and ends of autocratic regimes. In keeping with much of the literature, countries are coded as democratic if government leaders achieve power through direct, reasonably fair competitive election; indirect election by democratically elected assemblies; or constitutional succession to democratically elected executives.

Events that define the beginning of dictatorship include the following:

- Government leaders achieve power through some means *other than* a direct, reasonably fair competitive election; or indirect election by a body at least 60 percent of which was elected in direct, reasonably fair, competitive elections; or constitutional succession to a democratically elected executive.
- The government achieved power through competitive elections, as described above, but later changed the formal or informal rules such that competition in subsequent elections was limited.
- If competitive elections are held to choose the government, but the military either prevents one or more parties for which substantial numbers of citizens would be expected to vote from competing, or dictates policy choice in important policy areas (e.g., foreign policy in the Middle East). We label such regimes "indirect military rule."

These rules are mostly uncontroversial, but they lead to a few coding decisions with which others may disagree. For example, we code the government of Indonesia's popular first leader, Suharto, as authoritarian because he was not elected before taking power. Some other independence leaders whose

governments were coded as democratic at independence (because of fair competitive pre-independence elections) were later classified as authoritarian after they banned an opposition party, arrested opposition leaders, or used violence and intimidation against opposition voters.

Once a country-year is coded as authoritarian, successive years in the same country are coded as part of the same regime until one of the following events occurs:

- A competitive election (as defined above) for the executive, or for the body that chooses the executive, occurs and is won by a person other than the incumbent or someone closely allied with the incumbent; and the individual or party elected is allowed to take office. The end date for the regime is the election, but the regime is coded as ending only if the candidate or party elected is allowed to take power.
- Or the ruling group markedly changes the rules for choosing leaders and policies such that the identity of the group from which leaders can be chosen or the group that can choose major policies changes.
- Or the government is ousted by a coup, popular uprising, rebellion, civil war, invasion, or other violent means, *and* replaced by a different regime (defined as above: a government that follows different rules for choosing leaders and policies).

We code competitive elections as ending dictatorships only if the incumbent is defeated because so many dictatorships hold competitive elections. Many of the ways that dictatorships manipulate electoral outcomes do not occur on election day or during vote counting, so foreign observers may not see rigging. This makes it difficult to judge whether elections are free and fair. We use incumbent turnover because it is a clear indicator that the dictatorship did not control the election outcome. This is a conservative rule in the sense that we code dictatorships as continuing unless we are sure they have ended. This rule leads to a few controversial classifications; for example, we code Ghana's last democratization as of the 2000 election, which led to the first incumbent turnover since Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings's seizure of power, but many analysts code it as of 1992, the first multiparty election.

The most difficult coding decisions involve coups (defined as the overthrow of the incumbent leader by members of the *military* of the regime being ousted),[5] which sometimes replace the whole ruling group and sometimes replace only the dictator in an ongoing regime. We classify coups as regime changes if they replace the incumbent government with one supported by regions, religions, ethnicities, or tribes different from those that supported the ousted incumbent or if they eliminate civilian collaborators from the inner

[5] Our definition is thus consistent with everyday usage, but differs from that of Svolik (2012) and Roessler (2016), who label any replacement of the dictator by regime insiders as a coup.

circle. Such coups are coded as regime changes because they change the composition of the group that can influence policy and leadership choice. For example, we treat the coup that replaced the military dictatorship led by Colonel Saye Zerbo in Burkina Faso with one led by Captain Thomas Sankara as a regime change because Sankara's military faction was rooted in different ethnic groups than Zerbo's (Englebert 1998, 51–65). If a coup simply replaces a ruling general with another general from the military command council, without changing the underlying group from which leaders are selected, we code it as a leader change, but not a regime change.

In a very small number of instances, we also classified leader changes in party-led dictatorships as regime changes because of dramatic changes in the ethnic, religious, regional, or tribal base of the ruling group initiated by the new dictator. In nearly all situations, a peaceful transition from one leader to another in a dominant-party regime would be considered a leader change in an ongoing dictatorship. However, Paul Biya's succession in Cameroon is one of the handful that we coded as a new regime. The coalition that had supported Ahmadou Ahidjo, Cameroon's first leader, was multiregional and multiethnic though northern Muslims were favored; Ahidjo was a northern Muslim and Biya, his prime minister, a southern Christian. Soon after becoming president, Biya began narrowing the group with political influence and concentrating power in his own small (southern) ethnic group at the expense of the coalition he had inherited. The post-1983 government is treated as a different regime because the regional and ethnic bases of policy influence changed along with the group from which officials were selected (Harkness 2014, 598–99).[6]

THE GROUPS THAT INITIATE DICTATORSHIPS

Two kinds of groups establish most contemporary dictatorships: groups of officers and soldiers, and groups of civilians organized into parties. Historically, tribal or clan leaders supported by armed followers began most monarchies, but this means of establishing dictatorship may have disappeared. Outgoing colonial rulers (re)established a number of post–World War II monarchies.

Seizures Led by a Group of Military Officers

Military officers usually achieve power via coups, though they are sometimes handed political control during popular uprisings. After the seizure, officers initially decide who will rule the country and make basic policy decisions. Policy choice in some areas may be delegated to civilians, especially for decisions that require technical expertise, but officers choose which civilians and

[6] For the full coding rules for identifying regime beginnings and ends, see the Appendix to this chapter. The data on regimes and all coding rules for defining them are available at http://sites.psu.edu/dictators.

can dismiss them. Other officers may have the capacity to constrain the military dictator and force him to consult about major decisions, because the wide dispersion among officers of arms and men under orders ensures that they can make credible threats to oust the dictator if he fails to consult or to heed their advice.[7] Such credible threats to depose give the dictator incentives to consult with other officers, but only if they can in turn make credible promises to support him *if* he consults. The dictator has less reason to consult with officers from a recently created, undisciplined, or factionalized officer corps, which cannot make credible promises of support because those bargaining with the dictator cannot count on being obeyed by junior officers and thus cannot prevent rogue coups.

An example of a seizure of power by a unified military is the 1980 coup in Turkey led by General Kenan Evren and the rest of the military high command. The Turkish army has a long history of disciplined professionalism. The coup was planned by the high command and voted on by the generals at the War Academy.[8] They ruled through the National Security Council, a consultative body composed of the service chiefs and the commander of the gendarmerie. During the dictatorship, officers made many key policy decisions and chose civilian technocrats to handle the economy. Officers also planned and oversaw the orderly return to civilian rule that ended the dictatorship.

Seizures Led by Parties

Parties achieve dictatorial power in three main ways: via "authoritarianization" after winning competitive elections, by armed insurgency, and through imposition by a foreign occupier. The different means of establishing dictatorship are associated with different internal party-governing structures and different ways of interacting with ordinary people. But in all, party leaders and procedures control personnel appointments and hence the political careers of those who wish to share power and influence or work for the government after the seizure of power. High party officials, who can include officers as well as civilians, can constrain the dictator if his hold on office depends ultimately on their support. Dictatorial ruling parties range from highly organized, disciplined networks with tentacles reaching into every neighborhood and village to cliques of the dictator's friends who can mobilize public employees to turn out votes for the dictator in sham elections but perform few other functions. Parties that led a

[7] Historically, the vast majority of dictators and members of their inner circles have been male. The data set used as the basis for most empirical statements in this book includes one female dictator, who served as regent for a year during the minority of the prince designated as successor to the deceased king of Swaziland.

[8] This experience contrasts of course with the failed Turkish coup of 2016, which was organized by one faction of the military but defeated by a combination of courageous civilian mobilization and loyal troops from opposing factions.

long struggle to mobilize popular support prior to the seizure of power tend to be more organized and disciplined than those that were cobbled together during the last competitive election before authoritarianization or those created after the seizure of power in order to reward the dictator's supporters with public employment and other benefits.

As an example of party seizure of power, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) of Zambia used a typical authoritarianization strategy. UNIP and its leader Kenneth Kaunda had led the independence movement and won a fair pre-independence election in 1964. The party enjoyed widespread popularity at independence and developed an effective grassroots political network by fighting the competitive elections held before authoritarianization. UNIP transformed itself into a dominant-party dictatorship by using intimidation and violence against opponents to ensure its victory in the 1967 by-elections. It then ruled Zambia until 1991, maintaining its grip on power by banning rival political parties and repressing opponents. During UNIP rule, civilian party members dominated policy-making and governance. The party elite had little ability to constrain its leader, however. Until 1967, Kaunda unilaterally chose the party's executive committee members. Then, after the first internal party elections, the executive committee factionalized along ethnic/regional lines, leading Kaunda to reassert personal control over it to reduce ethnic conflict (Molteno 1974, 67–68; Tordoff and Molteno 1974, 9–11, 29, 35). If the dictator chooses the members of the leadership group, they cannot limit his decision-making autonomy.

Seizures Led by What Becomes a Ruling Family

Seizures of power that result in family-controlled dictatorships have occurred via the conquest of territories by a family-led group and their armed supporters, usurpation of the throne of an established monarchy by the armed followers of a different family or clan, and imposition by an outgoing colonial power. After such seizures, a ruling family chooses future leaders and plays an important role in the decision-making inner circle, though economic and some other aspects of policy are often delegated to commoners with expertise. The monarch's brothers, uncles, and/or sons often control the most important ministries and lead the military and security services (Herb 1999). In this way, power is dispersed within the ruling lineage, which both limits the discretion of the monarch and protects the ruling family from external challenges. Powerful members of the family can influence policy decisions because, in extreme circumstances, they can dismiss the monarch.

What became the ruling family of Oman established the Al Said dynasty via traditional military prowess. In 1741 Ahmed bin Said al Busaidi, governor of Sohar on the coast of what is now Oman, led the city's defense against a Persian invasion during a very chaotic time. As a result, he was formally chosen as imam in about 1744. The Al Said have remained in power as traditional sultans

ever since. In the current era, Said bin Taimur inherited the throne when his father abdicated in 1932. His son, Qabus bin Said Al Said, ousted him in 1970 at the behest of the rest of the family (and with support from the British) for obstructing investment and development. Qabus continues to rule today (Mohamedi 1994; Smyth 1994; Plekhanov 2004, 94–99).

In contrast to Oman, Jordan's Hashemite dynasty is a British creation. The first Jordanian monarch, King Abdullah I, was the son of the Ottoman emir of Mecca, who claimed a hereditary right to rule in the Hijaz (now part of Saudi Arabia). He was a leader of the Arab nationalist movement against Ottoman rule and sided with the British during World War I. In 1921, the British appointed him emir of Jordan, a state constructed by the British, and he remained in power when Jordan gained independence in 1946. When Abdullah was assassinated in 1951, his oldest son succeeded to the throne but abdicated in favor of his underage son the following year due to mental illness. A Regency Council controlled the country until Crown Prince Hussein came of age. Hussein died in 1999 and was succeeded by his oldest son, who continues to rule (Haddad 1971, 484–91; Lewis 1989; Wilson 1990; "Background Note: Jordan" 2011).

CONFLICT AND BARGAINING WITHIN THE SEIZURE GROUP

The different groups that initiate dictatorship have different arrangements for organizing themselves, making decisions, and taking action. The procedures and norms established in the seizure group before the dictatorship exists then influence who rules after the seizure of power, the kind of institutions they create to organize their rule, and their first policy choices. The group's preexisting rules and procedures for making decisions provide a focal point in the chaos that characterizes the early weeks of many dictatorships. Many seizure groups apparently give little thought to the practical details of what they will do after ousting the old regime. Following the Iraqi coup in 1968, for example, "Like all other post-coup governments in Iraq, al-Bakr and his colleagues had no very clear idea about politics or administration on a day to day basis" (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1987, 116). After the Sudanese coup in 1958, Woodward says, "it was clear that few plans for the post-coup situation had been made" (1990, 102). Some plotters have not even chosen who will rule the nation. Describing the 2008 coup in Mauritania, Pazzanita notes, "Although the 6 August coup was swiftly and efficiently executed ... the composition of the HCE (Haute Conseil d'Etat, the new ruling council) evidently was not well thought-out beforehand" (2008, 160). Sometimes more than one member of the seizure group assumes he will become regime leader.

Under pressure to make many decisions quickly, the new rulers tend to rely on their existing leadership and familiar decision-making structures. After the seizure of power, members of the group must quickly decide who will lead, who will fill other top offices, and how much power the new leader will have relative