

## I

## Introduction

The use of violence by authoritarian regimes against their people has long been central to the trajectories of world politics and of human history. Historically, authoritarianism rather than democracy has been the norm, and much of citizen interaction with the state has been centered on trying to avoid abuse at the hands of those in power. Today, too, autocracies comprise a significant fraction of the world's countries.<sup>1</sup> These regimes govern almost 60 percent of the world's population, dominate geopolitically critical regions of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, and lead several of the world's great powers. From the gulags of Stalinist Russia to the failed protests in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989 to the post-Arab Spring crackdowns in Egypt and Syria, repression plays a central role in our conception of dictatorship; history and literature have provided us with towering accounts of the human effects of institutionalized terror.<sup>2</sup>

The stakes of that repressive activity are high, for both regimes and their citizens. When militaries agree to repress, citizens are often killed in large numbers in public spaces, with reverberations around the globe; when coercive agents balk at participating in government crackdowns, their intransigence can topple dictators and pave the way for transitions to democracy (or to another autocracy). Where state coercion is unopposed

<sup>1</sup> This book uses *autocratic*, *authoritarian*, and *dictatorial* interchangeably. *Freedom in the World 2013* (Freedom House, 2013), p. 4, [www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet\\_o.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet_o.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007); Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000); Gao Xingjian, *One Man's Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat* (New York: Picador, 2000); Roberto Bolaño, *By Night in Chile* (New York: New Directions, 2003).

by citizens, some of the world's worst human rights abuses can come to pass, as has happened in North Korea; but where it is resisted, as has happened in Syria, the struggle can metastasize into insurgency or civil war, and can even trigger external intervention leading to interstate conflict.

The abuses committed by states against their citizens, however, are a relatively overlooked source of political violence in the world. Conceptualizing authoritarian regimes as uniformly dependent on coercion ignores a critical element of variation in their governance: the different ways in which they use violence and repression to maintain power. In some places and at some times, autocratic regimes rely on low-intensity forms of repression such as surveillance and intimidation, while at other times they turn to high-intensity violence such as mass killing. Eighteen people per year died under Brazil's military junta, while the annual death rate in Argentina under military rule was a staggering 1,280.<sup>3</sup> Under some regimes, as in Taiwan and Chile, violence was high in the early years of the regime but dropped over time, while in other places, such as the Philippines, state violence escalated over the course of the dictatorship. The events of the Arab Spring provided observers with ample proof that the security forces of regimes faced with the common challenge of popular protest behave in very different ways, with profound consequences for outcomes including human rights, regime stability, civil conflict, and geopolitics.

This book concentrates on two key questions related to the use of coercion under autocracy. First, what determines the design of autocratic coercive institutions? Why do different autocrats design their coercive apparatus differently? Second, what effect do these institutional design choices have on patterns of repression and the use of violence against civilians?

Coercive institutions are a dictator's final defense in pursuit of political survival, but also his chief obstacle to achieving that goal. This book argues that autocrats face a coercive dilemma: whether to organize their internal security apparatus to protect against a coup, or to deal with the threat of popular unrest. Because coup-proofing calls for fragmented and socially exclusive organizations, while protecting against popular unrest demands unitary and inclusive ones, autocrats cannot simultaneously maximize their defenses against both threats. When dictators assume power, then, they must (and do) choose which threat to prioritize. That choice, in turn, has profound consequences for the citizens who

<sup>3</sup> Alfred McCoy, *Closer Than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 192–93.

live under their rule. A fragmented, exclusive coercive apparatus gives its agents social and material incentives to escalate rather than dampen violence, and also hampers agents from collecting the intelligence necessary to engage in targeted, discriminate, and pre-emptive repression. A unitary and inclusive apparatus configured to address significant mass unrest, however, has much better intelligence capacity vis-à-vis its own citizens, and creates incentives for agents to minimize the use of violence and to rely instead on alternative forms of repression, including surveillance and targeted pre-emption. Given its stronger intelligence capacity, the mass-oriented coercive apparatus is also better at detecting and responding to changes in the nature of threats than is its coup-proofed counterpart, leading to predictable patterns of institutional change that are neither entirely path dependent nor entirely in keeping with the optimization predicted by rational design. The chapters that follow trace how coercive institutional design unfolds and what its consequences are – for autocrats, for their coercive agents, and for the civilians they rule.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF COERCION UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM

Despite the intuitive centrality of coercion to authoritarian political systems, we currently have a poor understanding of the dynamics of authoritarian violence. Historians, biographers, and novelists have filled library shelves with books about Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia,<sup>4</sup> but political scientists have failed to ask whether the coercive dynamics at work in these two particular regimes were replicated in the scores of authoritarian

<sup>4</sup> For a sample that does not even scratch the surface of this extensive literature, see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992); William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990); Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–45* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage 1997); Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Adrian Weale, *Army of Evil: A History of the SS* (New York: NAL Caliber/Penguin, 2010); Amir Weiner and Aigi Rahi-Tamm, “Getting to Know You: The Soviet Surveillance System, 1939–57,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 5–45; David Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–53* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–41* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Paul R. Gregory, *Terror By Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (An Archival Study)* (New Haven and Stanford: Yale University Press and the Hoover Institution, 2009).

regimes that have populated the world in the subsequent seven decades. Consequently, our common understanding of authoritarianism is dominated by a few cases that may well be outliers rather than representative examples of authoritarian rule. Moreover, scholars have not sought to discern underlying systematic patterns in autocratic regimes' organization and use of violence, an oversight that has been noted by Dallin and Breslauer, Tilly, and Davenport, among others.<sup>5</sup>

What do scholars currently know about authoritarian coercive institutions and why they differ? Comparative politics has recently experienced a resurgence of interest in the study of authoritarian politics, spanning a range of methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives.<sup>6</sup> These studies have especially probed the role played by political *institutions* such as courts, parties, legislatures, and elections.<sup>7</sup> Despite this focus, however,

<sup>5</sup> For a partial, single-case exception, see Gregory, *Terror By Quota*; Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); Christian Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 10 (2007), pp. 1–23; Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 11 (November 2007), pp. 1279–301; Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships," *Economics & Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2006), pp. 1–26; Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2 (June 1999), pp. 115–44; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: The Origins and Evolution of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dan Slater, "Iron Cage in an Iron Fist: Authoritarian Institutions and the Personalization of Power in Malaysia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (October 2003), pp. 81–101; Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Milan Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jeffrey A. Winters, *Oligarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jason Brownlee, *Durable Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Gandhi, *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship*; Barbara Geddes, "Why Elections and Parties in Authoritarian Regimes," paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual conference (2005); Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa, *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan," *Democratization*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2006), pp. 456–71; Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge

and despite the centrality of coercion in works on the development of the nation-state, the role of autocratic *coercive* institutions remains strikingly under-examined. In focusing primarily on the quasi-democratic features of non-democracies, we have risked “neglecting their defining feature: the use of coercion, and sometimes terror.”<sup>8</sup> If rule by violence rather than consent is, as Milan Svoblik terms it, the “original sin” of dictatorship, then scholars are all the more remiss in overlooking these variations.

A small handful of works are single-case analyses that provide excellent information on an individual country’s coercive apparatus.<sup>9</sup> They do not, however, examine variations in the design of coercive institutions or offer a systematic explanation for why countries might adopt different institutional designs. Yet, in practice, we observe widespread variations in the form of authoritarian coercive institutions. Some countries, like

University Press, 2006); Benjamin Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule,” *World Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Spring 2005), pp. 421–51; Slater, “Iron Cage.” See also Jessica Weeks, “Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve,” *International Organization*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2007), pp. 35–64; Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler, “Nodding or Needling? Analyzing Delegate Responsiveness in an Authoritarian Parliament,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (2010), pp. 482–502; Geddes, “What Do We Know about Democratization?”; Philip Keefer, “Why Follow the Leader? Collective Action, Credible Commitment, and Conflict,” draft paper prepared for Michelle Garfinkel and Stergios Skaperdas, eds., *Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Peace and Conflict* (July 2010).

<sup>8</sup> David Art, “Coercive Institutions under Authoritarian Regimes: A Research Agenda,” paper presented at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington (September 2011), p. 2; David Art, “What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After 10 Years?” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (April 2012); Svoblik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, Ch. 1; Christopher Andrew, “Intelligence, International Relations, and Under-Theorization,” in L.V. Scott and Peter Jackson, eds., *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in the Shadows* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 29–41.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory, *Terror By Quota*; Xuezhong Guo, *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Pablo Policzer, *The Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao’s Secret Agents, 1949–67* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jonathan R. Adelman, ed., *Terror and Communist Politics: The Role of the Secret Police in Communist States* (Boulder: Westview, 1984). In a somewhat different category is Eva Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (January 2004), pp. 139–57. Bellin notes the importance of the coercive apparatus, but – as discussed in Chapter 2 – treats these institutions’ strength as proceeding from structural factors – resource endowments, either material (oil wealth) or social (patrimonialism) – that remain roughly constant in a society or in a regime across time. This argument leaves unexplained the reorganizations of internal security and the trends of repression that vary more quickly than structural factors evolve.

TABLE 1.1. *Fragmentation in authoritarian coercive institutions*

Regime	Lead agency/agencies	Coordinating authority?
<b>Fragmented:</b>		
Iraq	Internal: General Security Directorate/ Directorate of Military Intelligence, General Directorate of Intelligence, Special Security Organization Military: Popular Army, Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, Saddam’s Fedayeen	No
Philippines	National Intelligence and Security Authority Presidential Security Command Intelligence Services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines: Military Intelligence Group Philippine Constabulary: 5th Con- stabulary Security Unit, Metrocom Intelligence Services Group Dept. of National Defense: Security Unit, National Defense Intelligence Office	No
South Korea (Park)	KCIA Army Security Command Presidential Security Service Capitol Garrison Command	No
Chile (1973–77)	Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), Army, Air Force, Navy, Carabineros	No
<b>Unitary (not fragmented):</b>		
Chile (1977–90)	Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI)	Yes
East Germany	Ministry for State Security (Stasi)	Yes (after 1953)
Taiwan	National Security Bureau (NSB)	Yes (after 1955)
South Korea (Chun)	Defense Security Command	Yes

East Germany, create a single powerful “secret police,” while others, like Libya under Qadhafi, employ multiple overlapping and competing security forces with no clear coordinating authority over them (see Table 1.1). Coercive institutions also vary in the number of people they employ for surveillance relative to the size of the population. Despite the Stasi’s

TABLE 1.2. *Ratio of authoritarian internal security personnel to population<sup>a</sup>*

Country	Ratio
Chad (Habre, 1982–90)	1:10,000
Soviet Union	1:5,830
Iraq (Saddam Hussein)	1:5,090
Chile (early 1970s)	1:2,600
Nazi Gestapo (c. 1940)	1:2,000
Philippines (Marcos, 1980s)	1:1,120
Republic of China (Taiwan)	1:132
East Germany (officers only)	1:166
(including informants)	1:67
North Korea	1:124
(including informants, 2012)	1:40

<sup>a</sup> Figures calculated by the author.

fame, their level of societal penetration was highly unusual, as shown in Table 1.2.

There is, as yet, no explanation for why these kinds of institutional differences might arise. Thus, despite a burgeoning literature, theoretical significance, and acute contemporary relevance, we lack a systematic understanding of the organization of violence under authoritarianism.

This might not be especially important if these institutions did not subsequently display widespread variation in their behavior, much of which cannot be satisfactorily explained by existing studies of repression and state violence. Yet as the examples that begin this chapter show, both the strategies of repression and the levels of violence employed by authoritarian regimes differ dramatically across countries, as well as within countries across space and time. In contemporary literature, the most common explanations for higher levels of repression focus on escalating threat from the population – but as I will show in more detail in the next chapter, these explanations neglect the chief insight from civil–military relations, which is that empowering security agencies to conduct effective repression creates an equally or more serious risk to the autocrat’s political and often physical survival: the risk of a coup. Taking that threat seriously requires a fundamental rethinking of how to organize a regime’s repressive capacity.

Moreover, because these existing threat-based arguments focus largely on repression of public protest, rather than the more difficult-to-observe processes of pre-protest surveillance and violence, they also neglect the

point that a strategic autocrat will seek not simply to repress protest, but to deter or pre-empt it. Many existing studies of repression, therefore, focus only on cases where the coercive apparatus has already failed to detect, deter, or pre-empt public opposition, and thereby overlook the set of cases where pre-protest repression is successful.

There are understandable reasons for the omission of coercive institutions from our discussions of authoritarian politics. Accessing source materials on the sensitive decision-making processes of closed regimes and determining the scope and nature of violence is difficult, even in the best-documented and most-analyzed cases.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the belief, now largely defunct, that the world was evolving toward universal democracy may have convinced scholars that the topic had dwindling real-world relevance.<sup>11</sup> As the number of democracies increased at the end of the Cold War and civil wars multiplied, state terror likely seemed an old-fashioned and outdated concern, limited to a handful of bizarre holdouts like North Korea, whose time was surely almost up. Scholars may also have avoided examining the motivations of perpetrators of human rights violations because to do so sounds like justification – a tendency that Holocaust scholars have called the “moral sensitivity exclusion.”<sup>12</sup>

The result, however, is that much variation in repressive behavior and in the use of violence – cross-national, cross-temporal, sub-national, and especially outside of a protest context – remains empirically unexplained. We do not know how dictators construct the institutions of coercion, or what the consequences of these choices are, for them or for the people they rule. We do not know what drives different kinds of variation in the patterns of state violence, or why, given the costs of indiscriminate violence, regimes use it at some times, but avoid it at others. Repression in authoritarian political systems, in short, is something that is assumed far more than it is analyzed.

This oversight is fundamentally misleading. Beyond implications for state violence, omitting coercive institutions from our analysis of authoritarian politics risks overstating the contribution of other factors to outcomes ranging from regime stability and longevity to authoritarian foreign policy behavior. After all, the coercive apparatus and its willingness and ability to engage in repression have played a critical role in

<sup>10</sup> Eric Lichtblau, “The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 2002), pp. 5–21.

<sup>12</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge, 1998).



*The argument and plan of the book*

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determining the survival or failure of many autocratic incumbents and regimes, from the Soviet Union in 1991 to Tunisia and Egypt in 2011.<sup>13</sup> The coercive apparatus is also a critical component of the “audience” to whom an autocrat is – in varying degrees – accountable for his actions, meaning that choices made during the construction of these institutions can strengthen or weaken the constraints that affect his propensity to initiate international conflict.<sup>14</sup> Examining how autocrats create and use their coercive apparatus, therefore, will help us understand not only variations in repression itself, but also the relative importance of coercive and non-coercive factors in the longevity and behavior of the world’s dictatorships.

THE ARGUMENT AND PLAN OF THE BOOK

Coercive institutions matter. Their creation and management are among any dictator’s most urgent priorities. They fundamentally shape patterns of repression and state violence under authoritarianism, and do so in ways that defy the predictions of existing theories.

This book examines two questions in turn. First, how do autocrats design and construct their coercive apparatus? Second, what difference do coercive institutional variations make for levels of repression and violence?

Chapter 2 outlines the logic of my theory. It begins from the premise that autocrats who want to stay in power must simultaneously defend themselves from two different internal threats: threats from the population and threats from elites, especially elites in the coercive apparatus itself. In practice, most autocrats deal with a combination of these threats at any given point in time. In constructing a coercive apparatus, however, they face a fundamental *organizational* tradeoff between addressing the risk of popular overthrow or coup-proofing against rival elites.<sup>15</sup> Coup-proofing calls for an internally fragmented and socially exclusive security force, while managing popular unrest requires a unitary apparatus with broadly embedded, socially inclusive intelligence networks.

<sup>13</sup> Zoltan Barany, “The Role of the Military,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 24–35.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica L. Weeks, “Strongmen and Strawmen: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (May 2012), pp. 326–47.

<sup>15</sup> Milan Svolik has termed these problems “the twin problems of dictatorship.” Svolik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, p. 2.

I argue that autocrats who face this “coercive dilemma” construct their coercive institutions based on the dominant perceived threat at the time they come to power, optimizing institutional characteristics for whichever threat they perceive to be most acute. Autocrats chiefly concerned with the risk of a coup create fragmented and exclusive organizations, while autocrats most threatened by popular unrest create unitary and inclusive ones.

Institutional variations then give rise to predictably varying patterns of state violence. A more fragmented, socially exclusive security apparatus, associated with a high initial threat from elites, is likely to be more violent for two reasons. First, both fragmentation and exclusivity damage an organization’s capacity to collect and effectively analyze *intelligence*, which reduces the ability of the coercive apparatus to engage in pre-emptive, discriminate, and targeted forms of repression. Fragmentation and exclusivity also create professional and social *incentives* to engage in higher levels of violence. By contrast, autocrats who are truly concerned about popular threats use less violence rather than more and use it in more discriminate ways, because they mobilize organizations expressly designed for that purpose, with intelligence capacity and incentives that favor limiting violence rather than increasing it.

This chapter provides the first comparative account of the origins of the coercive apparatus and of why these institutions vary so much in their structure and social composition. In doing so, it shifts the focus from authoritarian regimes more generally to authoritarian *coercive institutions*: the specific set of institutions that collectively hold responsibility for internal intelligence and security. The chapter also incorporates these institutions, for the first time, into existing discussions of how autocrats seek to hold power, including the strategies that they employ with respect to managing potential opposition. It shifts our understanding of autocratic thinking about threat management from one focused on short-term reaction to protest to one focused on longer-term efforts to deter and pre-empt opposition from ever materializing. The chapter concludes by outlining a research design that tests its arguments for coercive institutional origins and institutional effects on repression against the most prominent alternatives. It proposes an empirical strategy that broadens our observational aperture on repression by including cases of pre-protest surveillance, repression, and violence.

The remainder of the book tests my two main arguments empirically. It does so by looking at several cases in East Asia, where the combination of temporal and cross-national variations in violence, along with the ability to control for alternative explanations and an unusually complete