Charting the Dark Side of the Moon:
Regime Responsiveness, Authoritarian Consolidation and
the (In-)Stability of Authoritarian Regimes‡

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1. Introduction

It is perhaps no coincidence that trends of wide-spread democratisation have been equalled to a force of nature. Indeed, the effect of the democratic “waves” sweeping over authoritarian landscapes was formidable, and the momentum of each wave was unpredictable. Starting with Portugal's democratisation in 1974, extending to most of Latin America and Southern Europe and culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the “Third Wave of Democracy” promised to be a tsunami washing the earth clean of illiberal political regimes. Yet only four years after Francis Fukuyama prominently declared the advent of the “End of History” in his 1992 book,2 the well-known democracy scholar Larry Diamond wondered whether this Third Wave had already ebbed out.3 Worry turned into anxiety when, in a Foreign Affairs article a little more than a decade later, he avails himself of a Cold War metaphor to diagnose a “democratic rollback”.4

Until very recently, Comparative Politics mostly concerned itself with the dynamics of the democratic waves and the democratic landscapes built on the rubble of the former dictatorships. It has, however, neglected the equally important study of “autocratic undertows” and of those regimes able to withstand the democratic tide. For a long time, it has turned a blind eye to the various institutional and organizational adaptations that authoritarian regimes engage in to better confront internal and external challenges to their legitimacy. The literature on democratic transitions has tended to characterize them rather uniformly as hostile to participation and innovation, phlegmatic, and unable to adapt to economic or political crises.5 Because of these features, they were regarded as inherently unstable.

As opposed to democracies which, no matter how short-lived they turned out to be, are conceptualized to enter reasonably well-charted processes of “consolidation” right after their birth, “authoritarian consolidation” has long been regarded as a contradiction in terms.6 As opposed to democracies, authoritarian regimes tended to be understood as a black box out of which democracies emerge and into which they return upon breakdown.7 Given the number of long-standing authoritarian regimes especially in East Asia and the Middle East, these assumptions are slowly coming under attack.

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1 Huntington 1991.
3 Diamond 1996.
4 Diamond 2008.
5 Merkel 1999.
6 Carothers 2002.
7 Linz 1978.
In line with a growing body of literature that is concerned with the resilience of authoritarian regimes, we seek to understand why some authoritarian regimes are more likely to survive than others. However, we hold that it is important to not only look at the duration of a regime, but also its quality. For example, China and Myanmar are both long-standing authoritarian regimes, yet they are fundamentally different with regards to how their regimes function. While the ruling elites in China have taken great care to improve the institutional base that underpins their rule, such institutionalisation has not taken place in Myanmar. For this reason, the capacity of the Chinese regime is far greater than that of Myanmar to flexibly react to social demands and thereby defuse (latent) conflicts. The Junta in Myanmar, on the other hand, chiefly relies on organised and, where possible, covert repression to uphold its rule. Yet different are regimes where repression tends to be overt and unorganised, like Liberia under Charles Taylor. In order to better understand the resilience of authoritarian regimes in general and the impact of differences in regime character on the longevity of authoritarian regimes in particular, we propose an analytical framework that builds on the related concepts of "responsiveness" and "authoritarian consolidation." In their combination, they are concerned with how (collective) government actors can improve their capacities to structure the incentives of those governed to secure their compliance and address social grievances to gain their support. Responsiveness denotes the capacity of a regime to learn and the willingness of the elites to solve problems without recurring to coercion. However, solving problems without recurring to coercion presupposes the existence of instruments that enable a regime to aggregate and address social preferences. Authoritarian consolidation denotes the process of acquiring and improving such instruments.

At the centre of our theoretical approach stands a differentiated concept of state power combining three dimensions: the traditional Weberian understanding of power as getting someone to do something he would not otherwise have done, i.e. the application of coercion; the power located in a differentiated institutional structure that is capable of regulating society and thereby able to structure the incentives of social actors; and the ability to “make people want what you want them to want”. In fact, we augment Michael Mann's distinction between “despotic power” and “infrastructural power” with another dimension of power that Foucault has termed “governmentality,” which is best conceptualised in Steven Lukes’ “radical view” of power (see below), and which we call "discursive power."

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The usage of the term “authoritarian consolidation” has gained fashion, although this is not yet underpinned by a theoretical concept. At the time of writing, Google Scholar listed 102 references for “authoritarian consolidation”, 39 of which originating between 2001 and 2005, and 40 between 2006 and 2009. They are all used descriptively, however, and none of them was formulated as a genuine concept.
Consolidation is comprehended as a – somewhat stylized – process which enables a regime to move from repression to the extension of cooptation and finally to a comprehensive institutionalisation and regularisation of state-society relations (extension of inclusion). Responsiveness we understand as the willingness and ability to react to or seek to prevent regime crisis, and to respond to societal demands more generally, without resorting to despotic power. In the short run, responsive strategies do not seek to the solve the (impending) crisis through the suppression of discontent but by removing the cause of the immediate grievances through the application of the existing infrastructural power of the state. In the long run, a responsive regime will undertake a process of learning and institutional differentiation, in which infrastructural power is increased by reforming the existing institutional framework in order to prevent similar crises from recurring in the future. As part of this process, the regime will also attempt to shape political discourses by improving networks of communication connecting state and society which serve as the vehicle for the transmission of propaganda. Of course, this does not mean that elites in a more consolidated regime will forego the use of despotic power entirely but that they have access to a broader set of governing tools, some of which can be applied in more subtle ways. Due to this, we also expect that more consolidated regimes will last longer and survive tougher challenges than their less consolidated counterparts.

Consolidation and responsiveness are thus closely linked, but they are not identical. Responsiveness is an actor-level variable that encompasses regime decision-making in situations of crisis as well as the regime’s willingness and ability to learn from such crises and thereby extend its strategic timeframe. Of course, the opportunities for responsiveness can be constrained when there are insufficient resources for institution-building or when strategic reform is blocked by veto players. Consolidation, on the other hand, is a structure-level phenomenon that encompasses the improvement of these very institutions, their embeddedness in society, and the capacities of the state propaganda system. This, of course, can also entail the institutionalisation and regularisation of elite relations, which makes factionalism less and responsiveness more likely. Thus, responsiveness drives consolidation and consolidation opens new opportunities for responsive action. This brings us quite close to Linz and Stepan’s understanding of democratic consolidation: only through actively creating responsive institutions and, we add, managing discourses and beliefs are authoritarian regimes able to convince their citizens that they are “the only game in town”.9

9 Linz/ Stepan 1996: 15.
We start by giving a brief overview over existing approaches to democratic consolidation to argue that democratic and authoritarian processes of consolidation, far from being opposites, indeed have much in common. Thereafter, we explain the three forms of power introduced above and relate them to the levels identified in conceptual approaches to democratic regime consolidation. At the macro level, authoritarian consolidation is manifested in the build-up of infrastructural power. At the meso level which connects state and society, the institutions and organisations thus created are used not only to penetrate and regulate society, but also to relay societal demands into decision-making processes. That is, infrastructural power is utilized in a responsive way. At the micro level, discursive power is used to justify state actions, structure demands and shape a political culture conducive to the survival of the authoritarian regime. In the last section, we illustrate our theoretical argument with case studies of authoritarian regimes in China and Guinea.

2. Approaches to Democratic Consolidation

In the task of trying to find out why some authoritarian regimes are more resilient than others, much is to learn from looking at the extensive literature on democratic consolidation that has been produced in the last two decades. In fact, we will argue that there are considerable overlaps between the factors that make democratic and authoritarian regimes consolidate.

It is important to note, first, that there are two rather distinct understandings of the term “democratic consolidation”. The first asks when a regime can be considered consolidated, and the most widely answer is provided by Juan Linz und Alfred Stepan: “Essentially, by a ‘consolidated democracy’ we mean a political regime in which democracy as a complex set of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, ‘the only game in town’.”

While this definition is intuitively compelling, it is very hard to operationalize when democracy has indeed become “the only game in town”. Samuel Huntington argued that this would be the case when at least two elections after the country’s founding elections have led to the dismissal of the previous government. Another indicator proposed by Larry Diamond is that a democracy is consolidated when it is considered “legitimate” by the political elite and when it is supported by 70 to 75 percent of the population. For obvious reasons, however,

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10 Ibid.
12 Diamond 1999: 67-68.
such context-insensitive indicators have not proven practical. While some scholars advocated abandoning the concept altogether, Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O’Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela made the case for trusting scholarly intuition: “(T)he qualitative difference between transitional and consolidated regimes is such that the analyst should be able to determine whether specific cases are one or the other.”

A second understanding, which we follow in our concept, seeks to solve the problem by seeing consolidation as a process that starts right after democritisation and basically never ends. A good example for such scholarship is Andreas Schedler’s sub-conceptualisation of democratic consolidation as “avoiding democratic breakdown”, “avoiding democratic erosion”, “completing democracy”, “deepening democracy”, and “organising democracy.” Thus, he follows Geoffrey Pridham who distinguishes between “negative” and “positive” consolidation. By negative consolidation, Pridham means generating passive elite support for the existing regime in the absence of a viable alternative, while positive consolidation denotes genuine legitimisation by elites and the general population alike.

As a careful reading of the above sections makes clear, the literature on democratic consolidation can be readily applied to authoritarian regimes as well, which, we argue, basically face the same problems of preventing breakdown, deepening and organising the regime, and generating legitimacy. In fact, they face the same challenge of moving, as Gramsci put it, from a "war of manoeuvre," where the political system itself is contested, to a "war of position," where political and social elites agree on the nature of the political system and seek to improve it on the basis of this consensus. Thus, according to Philippe Schmitter, "Regime consolidation consists in transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms and contingent solutions that emerged ... during the uncertain struggles of the transition into structures, i.e. into relationships that are reliably known, regularly practised and habitually accepted by those persons or collectives defined as participants/ citizens/ subjects of such structures."

Building and refining such "accepted structures," as we will show, are equally important for authoritarian regimes. It is in the control of such structures that infrastructural power manifests itself, and discursive power can help to accelerate its acceptance. The similarities do not stop here. “Stateness” and “a viable bureaucracy”, the two most important

13 Beyme 1996: 146.
14 Schneider 1995; Bartos 1999.
16 Schedler 1998.
17 Pridham 1990: 15.
18 See also Tilly 2007.
preconditions for democratic consolidation listed by Linz and Stepan,\textsuperscript{21} are no less relevant to authoritarian regimes. Finally, the arenas in which consolidation is said to occur are quite similar. Based on the work of Linz and Stepan just mentioned, Wolfgang Merkel distinguishes between three connected levels of consolidation: constitution, intermediate level (parties and associations), and attitudes and behaviour.\textsuperscript{22} Or, more broadly, institutional structure, modes of participation, and political culture. As we will show in the following section, these levels are valid for authoritarian regimes as well, but the challenges the latter face are somewhat different.

We will come back to these differences in the course of this paper, but we should note another difference at this point of our enquiry. As the preceding overview has shown, much of the literature of democratic consolidation (in contrast to democratic transitions) concentrates on examining institutions and, with the exception of the elite theories by Burton and Higley,\textsuperscript{23} tends to neglect the distinctive roles played by various actors. In addition, the normative outlook of most of these studies seems to build on Huntington’s observation that, in order for a political system to function, public participation must be matched by adequate political structures able to channel such participation.\textsuperscript{24} As for the relationship between actors and such institutions, it is a commonplace in the literature on New Institutionalism that elites shape political rules, which in turn shape elite strategies. However, the impact that political institutions have in structuring not only the modes of public participation but also the decision, in which kinds of participation to engage still requires examination. The implicit assumption is that the public is happy with whatever participatory institutions they are presented as long as they are democratic and enable them to influence policy-making.

Two fallacies are inherent in this view: first, it over-emphasises the role that public participation plays in the life of most people. As a consequence, other direct and indirect contacts with state organisations, which they engage in on a day-to-day basis, might be awarded much more importance in evaluating government performance. Examples in case are the job market, the fiscal system, public transport or regular access to the internet. Second, the evaluation of institutions by individuals in society takes place in a collective realm and evaluations are influenced not only by personal experiences but also, and perhaps mainly, by discourses within peer groups, media reports, statements by political elites etc.

\textsuperscript{21} Linz/ Stepan 1996: 24.
\textsuperscript{22} Merkel 1999: 145-69.
\textsuperscript{23} Higley/ Burton (eds.) 1992.
\textsuperscript{24} Huntington 1968.
For these reasons, we understand authoritarian consolidation not as largely self-referential processes taking place in each of the three levels mentioned above – the constitution, the intermediate level of parties and associations, attitudes and behaviour – and involving casts of very different actors (i.e. government, civil society organisations and political parties, individuals). Rather, we see it as a deliberate state project driven by responsive elites seeking to secure their rule. Therefore, we conceptualise the three levels as arenas in which different aspects of state power are deliberately formed and played out. As will be seen below, our concept of power is not limited to the chance of making people do something which they would not otherwise do (“power over”), but also to the chance of providing structural incentives for certain types of behaviour (“power to”).

In addition, we not only focus on input legitimacy generated by the existence of democratic mechanisms of interest aggregation, but also on output legitimacy created by reducing the complexity of social and economic life, increasing well-being and more generally addressing social grievances in a successful way. In a related manner, we hold that either kind of legitimacy is created not only (and perhaps not mainly) through a subject's own and immediate contact with the regime, but also by means of government propaganda that provides compelling narratives of good government performance.

### 3. Authoritarian Consolidation and the Three Dimensions of Power

The three levels of consolidation provide a good starting point when trying to disentangle the concept of authoritarian consolidation (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: democratic and authoritarian consolidation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>democratic consolidation</th>
<th>authoritarian consolidation</th>
<th>role of the state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>macro level</strong></td>
<td>- constitution</td>
<td>- legal system</td>
<td>generating infrastructural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(- legal system)</td>
<td>- bureaucracy</td>
<td>power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(- bureaucracy)</td>
<td>- communication</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>meso level</strong></td>
<td>- party system</td>
<td>embeddedness of</td>
<td>responsively applying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- civil society</td>
<td>government institutions</td>
<td>infrast. power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>micro level</strong></td>
<td>attitudes and</td>
<td>attitudes and behaviour</td>
<td>applying discursive power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>behaviour (elites,</td>
<td>(elites, population)</td>
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<td>population)</td>
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<td><strong>(legitimation)</strong></td>
<td>„democracy“</td>
<td>ideology/mentality</td>
<td>generating discursive power</td>
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With regard to the first level, studies of democratic consolidation look at how apt a constitution is in structuring political life and if it was passed by public mandate. As just pointed out, however, they tend to overemphasise representative institutions and neglect those that structure everyday life. For example, the differentiation of the legal system tends to receive only scarce attention in such studies. In fact, authoritarian regimes are not much different from democracies in that the existence of a dense network of institutions provides citizens with incentives to behave in certain ways and thereby reduces complexity and improves predictability. Furthermore, such a network also enables the regime to flexibly react to social grievances. The existence and density of such institutions essentially is what the concept of infrastructural power captures. As for the second level in democratic consolidation studies, the party system and the pervasiveness of civil society organisations is examined, as are collective veto players such as the military or the landed elite. Obviously, we will generally not find an institutionalised party system and a high density and variation of civil society organisations in authoritarian regimes, but, as will be shown, infrastructural power can be used to link state and society by other means than parties and pluralist associations. Hence, such embeddedness can be understood as one way of utilising infrastructural power in a responsive manner (coordinating coercion would be the non-responsive variant).

Finally, the third arena is devoted to attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the general public. Unfortunately, studies on elite-level political culture are scarce in this context. As we know, the existence of a democratic political culture is the result not only of successful political participation, but also, and perhaps more so, of socialisation and political education, much of which is directly undertaken in state organizations such as schools and universities. In authoritarian regimes, values and political culture play an equally important role. Hence, the third element that complements coercion and infrastructural power is the ability of the regime to intentionally shape or influence the attitudes and beliefs of individuals to make them accept or support something which might, at the first glance, to be quite irrational to support. This we call discursive power.

We have added a fourth row, which relates to the attitude dimension and pertains to the legitimisation of the regime. As Juan Linz has prominently stated, authoritarian regimes tend to claim legitimisation on the basis of mentalities such as national strength, economic growth or social stability. Democracies, in contrast, tend to legitimate their regime form not by means of goals external to that regime form, but by the very regime form itself. In other words, being a democracy is self-legitimating, which is why many authoritarian regimes strive to set up a democratic façade. We conceptualise the process of creating and elaborating such an
overarching ideology or mentality as the creation of discursive power. Before we examine infrastructural and discursive power in more detail, a short explanation of the notion of "despotic power" is in order.

3.1 Despotic Power

Despotic power is the easiest to understand, since it closely approximates the Weberian understanding of power which we are intuitively familiar with. Mann defines it as “the range of actions which elites can undertake without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups,”\(^{25}\), i.e. power OVER civil society.

“Great despotic power,” Mann clarifies, “can be ‘measured’ most vividly in the ability of all these Red Queens to shout ‘off with his head’ and have their whim gratified without further ado – provided the person is at hand. Despotic power is also usually what is meant in the literature by ‘autonomy of power.’”\(^{26}\)

Despotic power is exemplified, among others, in states of emergency declared without a constitutional basis, over-reliance on presidential decrees, plain-clothes security agents arresting regime opponents in the middle of the night, the military mobilised against anti-regime demonstrations, confiscating private property under false pretences, opposition newspapers shut down, whole neighbourhoods deterred by government-sponsored thugs from attending elections. In sum, despotic power can be understood as the chance to apply coercive means when and where state elites see fit, unhampered by procedures that need legitimation by society. As we argued in the beginning of this paper, positive consolidation in the sense that "authoritarianism becomes the only game in town" entails reducing the use of despotic power. Infrastructural and discursive power, however, need to be developed to fill the void.

3.2 Infrastructural Power

Infrastructural power, on the other hand, denotes the “logistics of political control,”\(^{27}\) the “capacity of the state to penetrate and coordinate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.”\(^{28}\) This definition refers to two dimensions of infrastructural power, namely the spatial dimension of state organisations and their relational nature. The first is the “territorial reach” of the state and applies to the extension of the “organisational networks that they coordinate, control and construct” into even the remotest areas of the state territory.\(^{29}\) A lack of territorial reach can manifest itself in a regime whose

\(^{25}\) Mann 1993: 113.
\(^{26}\) Ibid.
\(^{27}\) Ibid.: 116.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.: 113.
\(^{29}\) Schedler vom Hau 2008: 222.
power is constrained to a few cities without extending to the countryside, or in a government who only holds sway in particular regions within a country. Several presidents have been derisively called “Mayor of Mogadishu” (or Kabul, Monrovia etc.), often shortly before they were swept out of office.

The second dimension is what Soifer calls the “weight of the state”, i.e. the “organisational entwining” of state and non-state actors. Again, two components can be identified. The first component are the resources that the government has at its disposal. This is frequently measured with indicators such as the size of state revenues as a percentage of GDP, the size of the army, the size and quality of the bureaucracy and so on, but must also include surveying technologies that make societies legible to state institutions. The second component is how these resources can actually be employed. This is not only a function of the territorial reach of the state discussed above, but also one of vertical and horizontal organisational coherence and a state's “embeddedness” in society. As for vertical organisational coherence, a good example is the Chinese saying that “heaven is high, the emperor is far away”, meaning that although state organisations might be nominally present, the orders of the central government cannot be enforced in remote regions because local-level cadres pursue their own particularistic goals. Horizontal coherence applies to the coherence of the leadership. Factionalism and splits in the leadership have torn many authoritarian regimes apart, and they are not conducive to the responsiveness of the regime. Hence, institutionalising and regularising the turnover of regime leadership is an important element of authoritarian consolidation.

These two components that make up the "weight of the state" are at the heart of our analysis and merit further attention. The following subsection will focus on how and where state organisations can penetrate society by regularising behaviour through implementing and enforcing authoritative rules in an increasing number of social domains. We will discuss this under the heading of "institutionalisation."

As mentioned above, responsive behaviour necessitates the aggregation of preferences in society and the existence of a monitoring system that warns the regime of an impending crisis. In democracies, this role is played by representative organisations and the media. In

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30 Ibid.
31 Soifer Ibid.
33 Göbel 2009.
authoritarian regimes, as the developmental state literature has shown, such an "embeddedness" of the regime in can be achieved also by other means.\textsuperscript{34}

**Institutionalization**

Institutions, according to Sue Crawford’s and Elinor Ostrom’s definition, are “enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world. The rules, norms, and shared strategies are constituted and reconstituted by human interaction in frequently occurring or repetitive situations.”\textsuperscript{35} The difference between formal and informal institutions is that

“(f)ormal institutions are openly codified. Thus, regulations are included which have the status of constitutional clauses and laws, but also standing orders and norms actionable at law. Whilst formal institutions are guaranteed by state agencies and their disapproval is sanctioned by that state, informal institutions are based solely on the fact of their existence and of their effectiveness. The power of sanction involved with them is linked largely to social mechanisms of exclusion, or is based quite simply on the condition that its non-utilisation minimizes the chances of gaining access to goods and services. Informal institutions are equally known and recognizable publicly; however, they are not laid down in writing.”\textsuperscript{36}

According to Arturo Valenzuela,\textsuperscript{37} there is an intimate relationship between democratic consolidation and institutionalization, both formal and informal:

“(T)he process of reaching democratic consolidation consists of eliminating the institutions, procedures, and expectations that are incompatible with the minimal workings of a democratic regime, thereby permitting the beneficial ones that are created or recreated with the transition to a democratic government to develop further.”

As to what “incompatible with the minimal workings of a democratic regime” entails, Valenzuela agrees with Guillermo O’Donnell that “rulers and officialdom [must] subject themselves to the distinction between the public and the private.”\textsuperscript{38}

But does that not apply to the consolidation of any kind of regime? Indeed, it is in this realm that most of the studies on the stability of authoritarian regimes are located, but their focus tends to lie on institutions structuring elite behaviour in authoritarian regimes. In fact, two important dimensions are covered: leadership recruitment and mechanisms for elite dispute mediation. As to the first, Barbara Geddes, in her famous comparative study of various forms of authoritarian government,\textsuperscript{39} traced the higher life expectancy of single-party systems to the

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\textsuperscript{34} See for example Granovetter 1985; Evans 1995.
\textsuperscript{35} Crawford/ Ostrom 1995: 582.
\textsuperscript{36} Lauth 2000: 24.
\textsuperscript{37} Valenzuela 1992: 70.
\textsuperscript{38} O’Donnell 1992: 49.
\textsuperscript{39} Geddes 1999.
party’s integrative function and to the presence of regularized procedures of elite succession within such a system. This argument was further elaborated by Jason Brownlee, who found that the ability of a single party to integrate contending factions was determined in the early years of a regime. When elite conflicts could be resolved early on, factions were much less likely to defect the ruling coalition in later times.

These findings no doubt carry great explanatory power, but in our opinion they do not go far enough. While they are no doubt useful for explaining how certain rules can serve to channel or totally avoid potentially lethal conflicts within the political leadership and between political elites on the one and economic and social elites on the other side, their horizon is restricted a) to the elite level and b) to conflict mediation. They do not, however, tell us anything about broader state-society relations and the workings of day-to-day politics where conflicts are largely absent.

As we will show, crucial elements of state infrastructural power are also the capacity to address social grievances or even prevent them from forming, to extract resources and redistribute them, and to monitor the movements and socio-structural composition of the population. This can only be achieved where a professional bureaucracy is present.

Therefore, we follow up on the notion of Linz and Stepan that the improvement and differentiation of the bureaucratic apparatus is in fact one of consolidation's most vital components. But how can such “professionalization” be conceptualised? First of all, it was already mentioned that one crucial dimension of state infrastructural power is the territorial reach of its organisations, the extent to which villagers far away from the central apparatus have access to and can be reached by state administrative organisations. Second, enough organisational coherence must exist to ensure that information, communication and fiscal flows are not misdirected or severed on their way up and down. Third, expert knowledge is required at the upper levels of the bureaucracy to design policies able to forestall or address social grievances, and at the lower levels to actually implement these policies.

The existence of a “professional” bureaucracy plays an important role in Peter Evans’ concept of “embedded autonomy”. Evans convincingly showed that economic transformation was more likely to be successful in regimes where bureaucracies were characterised by “selective, meritocratic recruitment”, “longterm career rewards” and “corporate coherence”. The last point is exceedingly important, since it gives a regime the “ability to resist incursions by the
invisible hand of individual maximisation by bureaucrats." As Evans points out, corporate coherence is largely a function of the former two items, but is reinforced by the coexistence of pre-existing informal networks tying bureaucrats to each other and of beliefs or “mentalities” tying the aspirations of bureaucrats to the goals of the state. The developmental state literature is a good example of how regime legitimacy is tied to regime performance, which is in turn a result of improved infrastructural power.

**Embeddedness**

As to the intermediate level of communicative channels between regime organisations and societal groups, studies of democratic consolidation tend to concentrate on the institutionalisation of the party system and the “vibrancy” of civil society. Comparative studies on the integrative role of the authoritarian “equivalent” of civil society associations, i.e. corporatist mass organisations, have so far been scarce, but would merit more attention. The example of China below shows that such organisations can indeed fulfil an aggregative role.

As for other formalised processes channelling societal demands into the regime, newer studies have sought to explain the stability of authoritarian regimes with the existence of semi-competitive elections and limited discourse in parliaments.

However, the prevalent - and perhaps most convincing - approaches on embedded state-society relationships tend to focus on informal relations between political, economic, and social elites. For example, the "rentier state" approach explains the longevity of authoritarian regimes with the fact that political elites use rents appropriated from the sale of natural resources or the control of state enterprises to "buy off" potential challengers to their rule. Rentier states often radiate stability, but as the example of Indonesia has shown, they are prone to sudden breakdowns if rents cease to flow.

Informal cooptation is one central element also in the literature on developmental states, where professional and meritocratic bureaucracies are built on personal networks knit in elite academies, where retired bureaucratic can serve as advisors to key enterprises, and where political and economic elites meet in lush surroundings to discuss (economic) policies. One puzzle that needs to be approached is the relative importance of these formal and informal channels linking political, economic, and social elites to each other.

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42 Schedler 2006.
43 Gandhi 2007.
3.3 Discursive Power

Finally, on the level of individual-level beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, the literature on democratic consolidation stresses that a "democratic political culture" needs to take precedence over authoritarian values. Political culture is defined as "a people’s predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of their country and the role of the self in that system." Larry Diamond identifies three dimensions of political culture:

"The cognitive orientation, involving knowledge of and beliefs about the political system; an affective orientation, consisting of feelings about the political system, and an evaluational orientation, including commitments to political values and judgements (making use of information and feelings) about the performance of the political system relative to those values." 

It would be beyond the scope of this paper the excellent work available on the component parts of political culture, and how political culture changes over time. What is necessary for the analysis at hand is that empirical research has shown that support for democracy correlates significantly not with the short-term performance of the regime in dealing with economic and social problems, but how it delivers on its "promises of freedom and democracy." Larry Diamond has built a comprehensive model of how the historical legacy of a democracy, the current political and economic performance, party system institutionalisation and feelings of efficacy shape assessments, perceptions, and trust which ultimately translates into regime legitimacy. The implicit assumption of this model is that experience directly translates into attitudes and beliefs, and neglects the role that ready-made assessments of regime performance dispersed through the media and peer group plays. In a similar vein, the role of education and political socialisation for producing regime support is only mentioned in passim. Both, however, are very important elements in explaining the stability not only of authoritarian, but also of democratic regimes.

Authoritarian regimes usually do not promise freedom and democracy (although, as seen below, China does), but legitimating frameworks that Juan Linz has called "mentalities." As stated above, such mentalities usually build on visions of national strength and economic well-being, and often come in the guise of "modernisation projects" that require the cooperation of all social forces. As Peter Evans puts it with regard to professional

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.: 192-93.
47 Ibid.: 204.
48 Ibid.: 199.
bureaucracies in authoritarian development-oriented regimes, "what is at stake is building a self-orienting organisation that generates sufficient incentives to induce its individual members to pursue collective goals and assimilate enough information to allow it to choose goals worth pursuing."^49 Case studies of career choices of Chinese university graduates show that propaganda can indeed contribute to building up such a capacity for "sustained collective action" in the name of a nation's progress and thereby help stabilise the regime.^50

In order to pursue this line of research further, we avail ourselves of a concept that we call "discursive power." Discursive power or, in Foucault's words “governmentality”, denotes “the art of government”, a “means of securing the active complicity of the subjects of power in their own self-regulation.”^51 Hence, Foucault’s concept of government goes beyond Weberian concepts of state-society relations, in which coercion is a central element. He stresses the importance of ethics and moral values for shaping the conduct both of oneself and of others.

By arguing that powerful groups in society more or less intentionally seek to shape the ideational parameters of self-conduct, he provides a framework for thinking about the linkages between questions of government and ethics.

Whereas Max Weber defined the state primarily in terms of its “monopoly over the means of coercion”, the late Foucault stressed that strong states only seldom recur to violence, but rather seek to influence individuals in way that they support state projects because they believe that this is the correct thing to do. In other words, authorities make use “governmental technologies”, a complex of “practical mechanisms, procedures, instruments, and calculations through which [they] seek to guide and shape the conduct and decisions of others in order to achieve specific objectives.”^52 Familiar examples of symbolic devices thus utilized are the production and interpretation of statistics and maps.^53 In the case of China, for example, this also encompasses the diffusion of paradigms such as the “Three Represents” and the “Harmonious Society”, attempts to shape identities such as that of the “peasant,”^54 but also means of political socialization such as such as hymns, flags, constitutions or the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.^55

Hence, governmentality brings “ideas back in”. In contrast to institutionalist approaches where power is mainly associated with the means to change the political rules of the game,

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^50 Hoffmann 2006.
^51 Jessop 2008: 147.
^52 Lemke 2007: 50.
^53 Scott 1998.
^54 Kipnis 1995.
^55 Anderson 1983.
the concept alerts us to another source of power: the means to change (or at least influence) the cognitive filters through which strategic environments are interpreted.\textsuperscript{56} Of course, the manipulation and creation of symbols requires considerable skill and finesse because the addressees need to develop a certain degree of intrinsic motivation to make these narratives their own. As Bob Jessop points out, “it is the continuing interaction between the semiotic and extra-semiotic in a complex co-evolutionary process of variation, selection, and retention that gives relatively successful economic and political imaginaries their performative, constitutive force in the material world.”\textsuperscript{57} In other words, successful political propaganda shapes political and social realities, but also needs to somehow correspond to these realities.

Steven Lukes builds on such conceptions of power, but differs in one important respect from Foucault. Whereas for Foucault all social relations were power relations, Lukes differentiates between power and influence. The crucial difference between the two is the existence or nonexistence of a latent conflict of interests. According to Lukes, only where such a conflict of interest exists can we speak of power being applied.\textsuperscript{58} On the one hand, this distinction makes sense. As Foucault in his later years admitted himself, if all social action is conceived to be the result of power being applied on an individual, the concept of "freedom" would be totally negated, and it becomes very difficult to explain how resistance against domination can emerge.\textsuperscript{59} On the other hand, if a subject is being manipulated, he by definition cannot conceive of a conflict of interest taking place. Lukes is aware that he charts dangerous waters by claiming that the best interest of a person can be identified by the researcher, although this, he admits, can be very difficult. Aware of the conceptual problems this might pose, we nevertheless heed Luke's distinction between power and influence for the time being.

In any case, we argue that authoritarian regimes represent excellent case studies for further insight into the factors that determine the success or failure of deliberate attempts to shape popular opinions and individual values and thereby increase regime legitimacy. It is much more difficult to elicit the causal relationship between propaganda and attitude formation in democracies due to the more open and less limited character of the “ideological marketplace” and the multitude of internal and external actors who present competing interpretations of social and political realities. In contrast, a study of propaganda in authoritarian regimes is facilitated by the fact that they have more means at their disposal than democracies to control media coverage of sensitive political and social issues. Due to the scarcity of autonomous

\textsuperscript{56} Hay 2001.
\textsuperscript{57} Jessop 2008: 240.
\textsuperscript{58} Lukes 2004: 35-37.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.: 97.
advocacy groups and the tightness of media control, channels of communication and opinion formation outside the propaganda apparatus are far easier to track than in pluralist democracies - provided, of course, that the necessary access to such material can be secured.

3.4 The Interrelationship between the Three Dimensions of Power

Clearly, these dimensions of power are not mutually exclusive, but can reinforce each other (Figure 2).

Figure 2: the mutually reinforcing nature of the three dimensions of state power

In his initial design of the component parts of “autonomous state power”, Mann already stressed that the existence of infrastructural power (IP) may be a necessary precondition to the successful application of despotic power (DP). Put simply, without the monitoring capacities that result from IP, the despots might find themselves unable to find the object against whom despotic power is to be applied. But it is not only monitoring capabilities that IP offers, but also capacities to organise coercion effectively, as Scott Straus has demonstrated in his analysis of the genocide in Rwanda.  

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60 Straus 2006.
Another element would be the use of information derived from improved monitoring capacities to selectively target key figures of the opposition and thereby prevent large-scale demonstrations from occurring. As these examples show, an increase in IP does not automatically mean that coercion will be reduced. Resorting to IP and discursive power (alone or in combination) is only possible where responsiveness exists. Arguably, regimes which utilise infrastructural power to prop up despotic power can be stable for a long time (such as North Korea, Laos or Myanmar), but they are not gaining quality. In fact, there are good reasons that both regimes, despite their stable appearances, are considered "fragile" by the Fragile States Index.

The other way round, DP can also be used to enhance IP. Though not made explicit, this relationship is one of the crucial elements underlying the success of “developmental states” in Asia and elsewhere. Because of their authoritarian nature, these states were able to undertake economic restructuring without the “bothersome” interference of trade unions protesting against exploitative wages, peasant organisations deploiring the extraction of agricultural surplus for the buildup of urban industry, environmental groups demonstrating against the pollution discharged by these factories, or individual entrepreneurs colluding with parliamentarians or other decision makers in the political system to further their own particularistic goals. 61 This alerts us to the fact that authoritarian regimes, consolidated as they may be, are not democracies. As such, they are still very likely to make use of DP where goals cannot be the attained by making use of IP or discursive power.

The two-way relationship that exists between IP and discursive power has received scarce attention so far, but is very important for the study at hand. First of all, as had been the case with DP, the application of Discursive Power becomes more efficient the better the underlying infrastructure is. This applies not only to the technical level and density of TV and radio networks and the print media, to the ability to produce compelling propaganda or to the sophistication of internet censorship, but also to gathering the information that allows autocracies to fabricate propaganda that is indeed believable. As mentioned above, propaganda must correspond to the lifeworld experiences of its addressees and channels must exist to relay such lifeworld experiences to those in power. In the other direction, such propaganda helps to shape not only diffuse beliefs, mentalities and even demands, but can also create specific support for institutional adjustments that are undertaken and that would otherwise not resonate so well with the general public. For example, sacrifices people have to

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61 Pempel 1999.
make for the sake of modernisation, progress, and development are frequently justified by recurring to the above-mentioned mentalities, or, even more frequently, national and international forces are blamed for the existence of poverty and uneven development. In addition, propaganda is often used to proliferate success stories with regards to infrastructure improvement, the extension of social security systems, administrative reforms and other signs of responsiveness.

Finally, there is a two-way relationship between discursive power and DP. Clearly, discursive power can be used to ameliorate the effects of harsh actions undertaken against segments of the population such as minorities or dissidents, but also to imbue international events affecting the country in question with a tailor-made interpretation that serves to bolster the legitimacy of the regime in power. The evocation of nationalism by the Chinese party-state in times of crises serves as a good case in point. The other way round, DP can be used to fabricate evidence which underscores propaganda already dispersed, such as instigating violence by or fabricating evidence against enemies of the regime.

4. Case Studies

In order to illustrate and refine the theoretical framework elaborated above, we now present two brief case studies. The case of China illustrates how a regime can survive and learn from a major crisis. It will be seen how, after the large-scale crackdowns against anti-regime protests in June 1989, the regime underwent a process of consolidation and increased responsiveness. The second case, of the Conté regime in Guinea, is an example of a regime that had ultimately been unable to secure its position as “the only game in town”. These cases underscore the necessity of developing a regime’s IP and discursive power capabilities in order to ensure its long-term survival.

4.1 The People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China might well turn out to become the textbook example for the interrelationship between responsiveness and authoritarian regime consolidation, especially after the severe crisis in late 1989. In fact, the year 1989 was a turning point for China. Before that year, China indeed displayed many of the features that theories of regime transitions and authoritarianism attribute to authoritarian regimes.

The PRC was founded in 1949 after a long period of internal turmoil and external aggression. Like the governments in Korea and Taiwan, the victorious Communist Party engaged in land
reforms, but unlike them the barest infrastructure of a political system had to be built almost from scratch. Under the radical communism and the strong and increasingly personalised leadership of Mao Zedong, the regime quickly assumed a totalitarian character, and many of the institutions created in the 1950s were dismantled during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a near civil war that Chinese today call the "10 years of chaos" (shí nián luàn). In 1976, the paramount leader died, leaving behind no strong successor, but a strong reformist party faction which had time and again sought to fuse socialism and market principles in a curious mixture of "plan ideological" and "plan rational" policy-making. The next 20 years were characterised by what scholars and the media frequently referred to "economic reforms without political reforms", and the country was riddled with corruption, factional strive and increasing inequality. At that time, China was neither a predatory nor a developmental state, but arguably closer to the former. In the late 1980s, a student-led protest movement started to protest against corruption, favouritism and a double-digit inflation. In 1989, a meeting staged between defiant student leaders and a moralising, yet unrelenting Prime Minister symbolised what Samuel Huntington has found to be a dangerous combination: significant participatory pressures, but a lack of institutions able to channel such participation. In other words, the buildup of infrastructural state power had been slow, and the regime reacted to the crises with a massive display of despotic power.

While reformists in the political leadership opted to engage with the students, the hardliners predicted that liberalisation would lead to a regime breakdown similar to the one being witnessed in the Soviet Union. They opted for a crackdown on the protest movement, which eventually took place in early June 1989. Because of the magnitude of the student-led demonstrations not only in the heart of Beijing, but also in many other Chinese cities, and because of the harsh reaction of the international community, social scientists and media pundits predicted the impending death of China’s one-party regime.

As we will show now, 1989 was indeed a turning point for the Chinese regime, but not one that heralded regime implosion. On the contrary, the next 20 years were a period characterised by political system reforms, i.e. the buildup of infrastructural power and the deepening of embeddedness, albeit without either liberalisation or democratisation. In addition, they thoroughly restructured the propaganda apparatus to build up discursive power. Clearly, the political elites at that time had proven responsive by drawing important lessons from the 1989

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62 Huntington 1968.
crisis and the breakdown of the Sowjet Union, and by improving or building up from scratch
the infrastructure that would enable them to forestall or react more flexibly to crises as the one
endured in 1989.

With regards to the institutionalisation, the institutions structuring both horizontal and vertical
state-state relations underwent thorough reforms. With respect to the former, the leadership
had learned that factional strive is dangerous since it can render the bureaucracy inefficient by
forcing bureaucrats to take sides, that reformers reaching out to oppositional groups in society
can instigate protests, and that it leaves the leadership impotent to deal with the negative
consequences arising from bureaucratic inefficiency and public protest. Soon after the 1989
demonstrations, measures were taken to rejuvenate and professionalize political leadership in
Beijing and beyond.\textsuperscript{64} In addition, the factional struggle for leadership positions had begun to
be replaced by an institutionalised and formalised system of leadership succession.\textsuperscript{65} For
example, the Chinese presidency is now confined to two terms in office (as is the post of the
General Secretary of the CCP, which is held by the same person), and term limits also apply
to provincial Party secretaries. Conflicts between different factions of course continue to
exist, but they are hidden from the public now, which is presented with the image of a unified
and harmonious leadership striving for the common good. With numerous think tanks
(Chinese and foreign) supplying leaders with information and advice, decision-making is far
more professionalized than only 10 years ago. Finally, between 1998 and 2002 China
underwent a programme of government streamlining that led to the reduction of 1.5 Million
government employees at all levels.\textsuperscript{66} In addition, the bureaucracy underwent significant
rejuvenation, professionalization, and restructuring, and several laws were passed to simplify
and regularise law-making and administrative procedures.\textsuperscript{67}

Regarding central-local relations, the responsivity of the system was increased by delegating
managerial autonomy over important tasks to lower administrative levels, without however
relinquishing control over the outcomes.\textsuperscript{68} Thereby, the creative potential of local-level
politicians was harnessed to produce innovations for policies necessary for China's economic
and, to a smaller extent, social development.

\textsuperscript{64} Yang 2004.
\textsuperscript{65} Fewsmith 1999.
\textsuperscript{66} Yang 2004: 25.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.: Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{68} Göbel 2009; Heilmann 2008.
As to the embeddedness of the regime, there are at least three important means that enable the party leadership to react to social challenges without having to resort to coercion. First of all, some scholars stress that the rubberstamp representative organs at all levels (the People's Congresses and the Consultative Conferences) are increasingly becoming arenas for voicing discontent. However, it remains debatable whether indeed social, and not merely personal, interests are actually represented there. No doubt more important for relaying public opinions into the political system are channels such as the internet, a system of Letters and Complaints attached to government organs, as well as letters to the editor which are evaluated and summarised by the news agencies and passed on the political decision-makers.\(^{69}\) Second, the level of social organisations has increased significantly. As of now, there exist about 300,000 registered social- and non-profit organisations, the number of non-registered organisations is estimated to surpass 3 Million.\(^{70}\) Since the organisation of genuinely political interests is very difficult in China, the majority of these organisations is active in the rather "unpolitical" sectors of social welfare and environmental protection. Given that their relationship to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tends to be one of cooperation rather than conflict, the state can shift some of its burdens to society without having to fear that perceptions of increased efficacy on the side of the organisations' members will turn them against the regime.\(^{71}\) In fact, the governments at all levels tend to actively support such organisations and, where applicable, incorporate them into the mass organisations of the CCP.\(^{72}\) Third, the party state has created arenas of limited political participation not only for the growing middle classes (such as house-owner's committees), but also for the disadvantaged strata of Chinese society. By means of semi-competitive village elections, China's peasants are partially integrated into the regime and instrumentalized as watchdogs against local cadre corruption.\(^{73}\) In the cities, newly formed Residents' Committees not only provide avenues for community participation, but are also responsible for handing out lowest cost of living payments and for engaging the elderly and jobless in community tasks, education programmes and freetime activities.\(^{74}\) In addition, medical insurance and lowest cost of living are being extended from the cities to the countryside.

Finally, as regards discursive power, Anne-Marie Brady has shown how the year 1989 marked the "turning point of a new era" for China's propaganda system. Not only was the

\(^{69}\) Chung 2000.
\(^{70}\) Howell 2003.
\(^{71}\) Göbel/ Heberer (eds.) 2004.
\(^{72}\) Heberer 2008.
\(^{73}\) Baum/ Shevchenko 1999.
\(^{74}\) Heberer/ Schubert 2008. See also Heberer forthcoming and Heberer forthcoming.
whole system modernised and rationalised, but also was "thought work" stepped up intensively.\textsuperscript{75} A number of clever strategies can be identified. First, government propaganda insures that modernisation does not go unnoticed, and research has shown that government propaganda indeed helps to built support for China's party state. For example, central government propaganda obfuscated the systemic nature of excessive fiscal extractions from China's peasants simply by blaming local cadres for lacking morality.\textsuperscript{76} Second, the regime has shifted its legitimacy basis from voicing abstract mentalities to providing short-term development benchmarks on which it offers to be evaluated.\textsuperscript{77} Naturally, if these benchmarks are reached, the central government will accept the praise, but if they are not reached, the lower-unit administrations can always be blamed. In terms of sensitive issues like human rights, the Chinese government went from a defensive to an offensive position by confronting the "Western" model of individual human rights with an "Asian" model of collective human rights. In a similar vein, Chinese leaders frequently use the word “democracy” in the context of their reforms, but it is quite clear that the term does not mean to them what it means to us. Whereas we tend to see democracy as an end in itself, Chinese leaders understand it merely as a set of participatory mechanisms that can be employed to reach non-democratic political aims. It is no coincidence, however, that a concept that seems to be so much at odds with an authoritarian context is so frequently used. By giving such a strong normative concept its own meaning the Chinese government cleverly attempts to soften its impact when it is used as a discursive weapon against its authoritarian rule. Finally, the regime uses the propaganda apparatus to prop up nationalist feelings in China's population in order to portray itself as a safeguard of national interests and, more importantly, a guarantor of stability.\textsuperscript{78}

4.2 Guinea

Guinean politics briefly made international headlines in December 2008 when the military seized power in a bloodless coup following the death of the ailing autocrat, Lansana Conté. Military coups, once a West African tradition, had become very scarce in the region in the 1990s and 2000s, so at first glance the extent to which the population welcomed the new rulers might seem surprising. However, early public support for the junta can be explained when one take’s the deep-seated frustration of the Guinean people with the previous regime into account. Former president Lansana Conté had been in office for more than 24 years and his regime had been unable to “lock in” the consolidation it achieved in the late 1980s and

\textsuperscript{75} Brady 2008. 
\textsuperscript{76} Li 2004. 
\textsuperscript{77} Holbug 2008. 
\textsuperscript{78} Lynch 1999.
early 1990s by following short-termist strategy and failing to institutionalize its position of authority.

The Conté regime had the good fortune that it followed the regime of Sekou Touré. Touré, who had led the country into independence in 1958, ran a socialist-style system that became less and less popular over the years. By banning private trading in the early 1970s, Touré plunged the country into famine and unrest. As political opposition mounted, “Guinean political leadership functioned in a continuing siege mentality, creating fear and suspicion on all sides. With every alleged plot, real or imaginary, and the purges that followed, fewer people were left at positions of power and trust. “ 79 State institutions were dismantled and the regime became more and more personalized with key posts increasingly being occupied by relatives of Touré. The state existed completely separated from society as the population got ever more detached from its political rulers – indeed, millions of Guineans had already left the country. Even the single party, the Parti Démocratique de Guinée, was starved of resources and authority. Only when it became clear that the regime could only survive through international aid did Touré initiate a piecemeal liberalisation of the economy in 1977 which – together with the inflow of aid rents – kept his regime afloat for another few years.

Within a week of Touré’s death, the army, led by Lansana Conté, assumed power to the almost palpable relief of Guinean citizens. Conté, buoyed by popular support for his programme of economic reform, wasted no time in entrenching his position by murdering or jailing his co-conspirators, Touré loyalists and opposition politicians. During the late 1980s, Conté was at the apex of his power. However, we argue that Conté’s failure to develop the infrastructural and the discursive power of his regime and the subsequent lack of consolidation eventually led to the regime’s decline.

In the institutional realm, the regime was never particularly strong. The bureaucracy never received much attention and in matters of elite recruitment, Conté also had a tendency to prefer kin over merit. However, the regime was propped up by rents accruing from the extraction of bauxite. Bauxite mining is a capital-intensive, heavily industrialized activity which means that it can only be done by large companies. This, in turn, makes it easy for the state to collect taxes, customs duties and concession payments from a small number of corporations. In the end, this ensured that the regime had a huge advantage in resources over potential opponents without ever being institutionalised or developing tax capacity to a significant degree.

79 Azarya/ Chazan 1987: 115.
If Conté made no measurable progress in the institutional arena, he did much better – for a time – when it came to embeddedness. While his predecessor relied on a single party, Conté soon discovered the possibilities of electoral authoritarianism and semi-competitive parliaments. He allowed the free formation of political parties in 1991-92 and held regular elections at the municipal and national level, first running for president himself in 1993. However, even at the time it was fairly obvious that Conté, like so many other African post-1990 autocrats, ensured that he and his party would never lose these elections. Voter rolls were intransparent, commissions dominated by the regimes and schedules were frequently moved to better suit the president’s needs. Thus, Conté was able to capture public grievances and channel them into a political system in which he held all the cards. As for attitudes, Conté followed populist policies, frequently tapping into Guinean nationalism and exploiting his early popular support.

Conté’s governing strategy can be described as short-term responsiveness mixed with despotic power. This included four main tactics: First, he frequently reshuffled his cabinet, sometimes due to popular discontent with particular ministers and at other times to fend off elite challengers from within the regime. Second, the government was often faced with economic and political protest by students, teachers, civil servants and soldiers. Its usual response, particularly during the early 1990s, was to simply “buy off” the protesters by acquiescing to their demands (or at least pretending to do so). Third, the democratic opposition was outmaneuvered in an endless dance of reform and restoration. Opposition leaders were frequently and arbitrarily imprisoned, barred from running or forced into exile. Finally, in a striking similarity to Touré’s tenure, plots – whether real, fabricated or imaginary – were “uncovered” regularly. Usually, opposition parties or the army were implicated and key figures punished.

This strategy worked quite well for a long time, keeping Conté in power while many of his fellow autocrats in sub-Saharan Africa were swept out of office.80 The regime even managed to squash an armed uprising in the south-east that was sponsored by the Liberian then-president Charles Taylor in 2000-01. However, what little support the regime still enjoyed finally crumbled soon thereafter. In order to win the 2003 presidential election, the ailing Conté had to have the Supreme Court ban all but one of the opposition contenders. The country slid into an economic crisis, suffering from high levels of inflation (around 40% in 2004) and rising prices of gasoline and staple foods. Not surprisingly, this led to riots in

80 Bratton/van de Walle 1997.
Conakry as well as in the provinces which the regime, strapped for cash, was no longer able to buy off, relying instead on the armed forces to remain in power. By then, Conté had long lost the support of the army and the populace. Unions called for general strikes which were widely observed in 2006 and 2007. While the inner circle of the regime continued to purge itself of its reformist members, and with Conté increasingly incapacitated due to his failing health, the protests could only by contained by the massive use of force. In the end, after Conté’s death, his regime was quickly replaced by an army coup in an eerie resemblance to events in 1984 after the death Conté’s predecessor.

5. Conclusion

As we have hopefully shown, the systematic study of how and why authoritarian regimes remain stable and can even gain a substantive measure of public support is a true challenge to Comparative Politics. While previous studies on authoritarian regime stability have focussed on isolated institutional traits, elite cooptation or, in the case of the developmental state literature, a combination of both, we have attempted here to present an analytical framework that allows the systematic and comprehensive study of macro-, meso- and micro-level factors which contribute individually and in combination to improve not only the stability, but also the quality of authoritarian regimes. An important insight that strongly resonates with observations made by Samuel Huntington more than four decades ago is that many, indeed perhaps most institutions necessary for the consolidation of a democracy also need to be present in authoritarian regimes.

In addition, we have shown that two issues which have been neglected so far need to be included in approaches seeking to explain the consolidation of authoritarian regimes. First, while most approaches so far have focussed either on the role of coercion or on the role of institutions, much explanatory power also lies in the third dimension of state power, which we have called discursive power. Second and relatedly, we have shown that these dimensions of state power can not only be applied alone, but that they are mutually reinforcing when applied in combination. Both issues merit more scholarly attention.

The next step in our research will be to identify such parameters of quality and responsiveness by means of a case study-based nested analysis. A major challenge will be the identification and incorporation of what we conceptualize as intervening variables that no doubt have a great influence on the stability and quality of any regime. Important examples in case include the class structure ethnic heterogeneity of a country, the role of exogenous
shocks such as economic crises and natural disasters, and the embeddedness of a regime in the international environment (which can serve as an important "discursive power asset" and might be the result of enhanced infrastructural power).

In order to meet these challenges a process tracing approach in a most different case design will be applied to refine the framework presented here. The aim is to generate hypotheses about how the component parts identified in this study relate to each other and to the intervening variables to deepen authoritarian consolidation and improve regime responsiveness, and, alternatively, how backlashes and even breakdowns of authoritarian regimes can be explained. Four long-standing authoritarian regimes that were faced with major crises will be compared, with two cases having survived such crises (China and perhaps Uganda), and two having not (Indonesia and Guinea). Subsequently, the hypotheses thus derived will be tested in a large-N analysis that utilizes various indicators from existing indices. Ultimately, we hope that our research will benefit not only the better understanding of how authoritarian regimes function, but also provide fresh insights into issues of democratic consolidation.
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