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## Hybrid Regime Persistence

Hybrid regimes exist in every part of the world, from Asia to Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Eurasia. Some are global economic hubs or centers; such as Singapore; Others are key oil producers, such as Kuwait and Venezuela; many are developing countries, such as Cambodia and Bangladesh or nuclear weapons states, such as Pakistan; regional trade centers, such as Mexico, Malaysia and Turkey; and conflict-ridden nations such as Myanmar and Uganda. Diamond (2002, p. 25) classifies them as “hegemonic electoral authoritarian, competitive electoral authoritarian, and ambiguous regimes.” He utilizes the Freedom House Index, in which a country with a score between 4.0 and 6.0 on a scale of 7 points is regarded as hybrid (Diamond 2002, p. 29).

In hybrid regimes, multiparty elections are organized regularly; parliaments are allowed to function within limits; the rights of citizens to form political parties and organizations are permitted; civil rights and liberties are at least partially guaranteed and respected; independent media exists to a certain extent; and civil society and NGOs operate freely with limits (Levitsky & Way 2010 p. 7; Ottaway 2003, pp. 5-6). Opposition groups, journalists, human-rights activists, independent judges, and government critics remain vulnerable to intimidation, arrest, and sometimes, violent attack. Power cannot be easily transferred through elections because the level of the playing field is asymmetric, with access to resources, media and the law in the hands of the ruling party. Therefore, political competition remains a fiction (Ottaway 2003, p. 15).

Brownlee (2007, p. 2) observes that “thirty years after the third wave [of democratization] began, the foundations of democracy remained unsteady in many countries, and in others they were utterly absent.” The persistence of a hybrid regime, such as Cambodia’s under Hun Sen, Malaysia’s under Mahathir, and Egypt’s under Mubarak confounded the expectation that autocracy was just a transitional stage before democracy. They were not struggling to promote democracy; rather, autocrats created the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to political risks (Ottaway 2003, p. 3).

The persistence of hybrid regimes basically refers to the regime duration or longevity of a ruling party that controls the executive and legislative branches for at least four consecutive elections (Greene 2007, p. 12), for example Malaysia under UMNO (1974 – 2018); Taiwan under KMT (1987 – 2000); Singapore under PAP (1981–present); and most importantly the longest was Mexico under PRI (1929 – 2000). What factors account for the apparent persistence of hybrid regimes? Conversely, what contributes to the instability of hybrid regimes?

Scholars such as Levitsky and Way (2010), Brownlee (2007), Greene (2007) and Magaloni (2006), Pepinsky (2009), and Slater (2010) use very different methodologies to make a number of contributions to our understanding of hybrid regime’s persistence or breakdown. By examining the ruling party of hybrid regimes, and their institutions, both formal and informal seriously, Levitsky and Way, and Brownlee (2007) are able to gain real traction on the question of persistence. Rather than pointing to endogenous factors, Levitsky and Way add exogenous shocks to locate the reasons for durability. Magaloni (2006) and Greene (2007) point to patronage-based explanations which allow or prevent elite cohesion for authoritarian

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persistence. Meanwhile, Pepinsky (2009) focuses on economic factors, and Slate (2010) demonstrates the degree of infrastructural power and patterns of state-society relations.

Levitsky and Way (2010) use a “logical” approach, which might be the most satisfying explanation because they combine large-N qualitative data from written sources and their own survey and build powerful models and theories. To explain degrees of variation in hybrid regime persistence, both authors use three different possible regime outcomes: 1) stable authoritarianism, 2) unstable authoritarianism and 3) newly-emerging democracy. To begin with, they start with a two-step notion, namely, that international impetus initiates the first cut, and internal determinants complement the analysis. Basically, a hybrid regime with low linkages with the Western experience leads to a higher possibility of remaining in power, particularly in parallel with “black knight” support from a powerful autocracy such as China and Russia. Linkage is defined as economic, social, communication, and geopolitical ties between a hybrid regime and a democratic one. As such, low linkage means the absence of external socialization of democratic beliefs and values. The persistence of a hybrid regime also relies on external leverage. Basically, the degree of authoritarian stability remains high if a hybrid regime is huge in terms of territory, economy, oil and natural resources, nuclear weapon ownership, large military size, and continuous support of a black knight. These elements, when combined together, make a hybrid regime independent and isolated from external pressure for liberalization. Out of the 35 cases examined by Levitsky and Way, Mexico, Taiwan and Russia are considered as having low leverage. As a result, the trio has never experienced democracy.

Internal factors, according to Levitsky and Way, refer to the strength of a governing party and security and police force. They measure the cohesiveness and strength of the party and coercive forces as high, medium and low levels. Highly cohesive and strong parties are basically defined by social penetration and geographical extension, and the unity between its senior members and lower level elites sharing the same beliefs, history, ethnic identity, and ideology (see Appendix IV Levitsky and Way 2010, pp. 377-378). These features enable a governing party to challenge its opponents even during an economic crisis. As for patronage distribution, the case of Africa contributes to understanding the efficacy of clientelist strategies in sustaining hybrid regimes. In Africa, patronage is distributed in the government through cabinet appointments (Arriola 2009). Political leaders from different ethnic groups are granted cabinet positions to protect stability in the country. Even though patronage is necessary, it is not sufficient for regime durability. Hybrid regimes can be most durable when the mechanisms of patronage distribution are supplemented by a coercive apparatus, in many instances, such as in Vietnam or Cambodia, a well-trained and well-equipped security and police force drawn from the residue of large-scale external wars, enduring military competition or threats, or revolutionary and anticolonial struggles (see Appendix IV, Levitsky and Way 2010, p. 376). In sum, altogether these factors allow a governing party to preserve and persist in its dominant position within the country’s party system while reducing the economic, political, social, military, diplomatic linkages with Western democracies for a longer period.

Another important factor in understanding a hybrid regime’s persistence comes from the study of Brownlee (2007), who examines the series of changes in the hybrid regime’s dominant party with mass membership that offers benefits to elite members. He begins with statistical analysis, plus fieldwork and interviews, and then comes up with four case studies to support his empirical findings. He categorizes these regimes as autocracy with elections; but he fails to distinguish clearly between hybrid regime types. His historical analysis begins in the early 1950s in some countries. One of his central arguments is that a well-structured and institutionalized party

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maintains cohesive elites, assists in solving elite conflicts, and prevents factionalism within the ruling party. By contrast, if an autocratic regime with a weak ruling party, or when the role of such a party is declining, the possible result is political instability, as the elites could make common cause with the opposition. The author takes the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt and UMNO in Malaysia as examples of ruling party capacity in bringing elite cohesion within the regime and electoral control in the public arena. By contrast, Iran and the Philippines, had elite rivalries within the party, leading to open factionalism (Brownlee 2007, p. 13-14).

According to Brownlee, a ruling party evolves in three different stages, highlighting the difficulty in monopolizing top positions within the regime. The dispute between political elites is inevitable. But, the dispute is less serious than the tools used to overcome political hostility, within accepted rules or with physical violence. According to the author, when the use of force is often central in claiming political legitimacy and authority at first and when rules are absent, violence need replacing with the organization that enables to facilitate elite conflicts. Otherwise, it is a sign for instability. Brownlee (2007, p. 39) further argues that “by offering a sustainable system for members to settle disputes and exert influence, ruling parties generate and maintain a cohesive leadership cadre.” These strategies make it sure that “no faction will indefinitely trump the others, and thus the organization’s decisions will, over time, reflect its composition” (Brownlee 2007, p. 39) Thus, a hybrid regime with no well-organized party and with such organizational strength, elite factionalism will be epidemic. The riots of the Yellow Shirts that began in Paris in November of 2018, might be seen as an example.

Another important factors in hybrid regime’s persistence comes from the scholarly works of Greene (2007) and Magaloni (2006), who highlighted the role of access to resources and use of patronage as necessary conditions for the persistence of hybrid regimes with an example of the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) (1928-2000). Cambodia’s People Party (CPP) (1998-present) serves as a recent example. For Greene, the fact that a state dominates the economy provides effective tools for the ruling party to buy off loyalty from political and economic elites. However, the resources alone are less important than the ability of the ruling party to divert, manage and target capital flows in order to gain electoral votes. Moreover, such hybrid regime persists by linking the conditions of economic security in exchange for the support of the ruling party. The winner is known before the election day due to the uneven playing field between the incumbent and the opposition. A good example is Cambodia where the CPP won 100 percent seats in both houses of parliament. At this point, Greene acknowledges that repression and extensive electoral fraud are not necessary, as the previous example illustrates. By contrast, Magaloni asserts that hegemonic-party regimes rely mainly on fraudulent and repressive practices to maintain their monopolies of political power. For her, fraud is a supplement and not a staple in such “electoral autocracies.” Rather, she argues, a hegemonic party’s true source of power derives from its ability to generate widespread support through what she describes as “oversized governing coalition.” As discuss earlier in this paper with African countries as examples of hybrid persistence through patronage without overt coercion from police or military. Uganda is a prime example. Cambodia is another example where patronage is usually sufficient, with force employed less commonly.

A longstanding economic crisis can lead to a recession, capital flight, and a dramatic decline in living standards for millions of people. Sooner or later it will bring about social tension and political corruption, all of which result in popular discontent challenging the government. Pepinsky (2009) holds that political coalitions always seek to acquire beneficial outcomes for themselves, and a hybrid regime is dependent on their support. Thus, when facing an economic

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crisis, the regime is under pressure from the coalition to implement policies in their favor. When different kinds of coalitions have compatible interests, then policy responses will be coherent. Conversely, when they have different interests, policy responses will be contradictory and of little utility, and the corresponding results will put autocrats in trouble. In his book, Pepinsky identifies three kinds of coalitions: labor; holders of fixed capital; holders of mobile capital. The groups will have diverging economic interests and desires for differing policies. For example, Pepinsky argues that Malaysia under Mahathir was supported by a coalition of labor (ethnic Malays masses) and a group of newly-emerged Malay entrepreneurs with fixed investments in sectors such as real estate, infrastructure, transport, and manufacturing. Meanwhile, holders of mobile capital did not form part of the supporting coalition and were thus ignored. Given that neither group could divert their own resources overseas, they pushed for capital account closure and loose fiscal policy. This more consistent policy responses ultimately helped Mahathir's government to emerge from the crisis, and the regime remained stable. By contrast, Indonesia had an inconsistent policy response. As a result, political and social turmoil led to Suharto's "authoritarian breakdown." To generalize his "coalition" theory, Pepinsky briefly tests it against empirical evidence from debt crises in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico in the 1980s.

For Slater, one of the key factors in the durability of hybrid regimes is the ability of the state to raise revenues in the form of taxation on individuals and businesses. With constant revenue flows into the national treasury, the government can more easily meet the needs of the population by providing more public goods.

A "provisional pact" (patron-client relationships) is not critical to the durability of autocratic regime because they don't provide permanent fiscal stability. Examples of "provisional pact" are nepotism, construction projects, tax reduction, gifts to religious institutions. Unstable regimes are the usual outcome of such acts of patronage because they cannot easily be sustained over time. Singapore and Malaysia are good examples where patronage is not needed for maintaining a persistent hybrid regime because they have an efficient tax system and fiscal management in contrast to the rest of Southeast Asia.

Last but not least, external impetus such as the "black knights" could be another source of the hybrid regime persistence. Chou (2017) defines black knights as "a strategic response of autocratic powers to halt a democratic domino effects that could threaten one's own regime, as well as regional allies." "Black support" includes tourism, real estate speculation, technological inputs, infrastructure investments, protection against Western sanctions (especially the United Nations), educational and cultural exchanges, newspaper publications, military assistance, among others, greatly strengthening the prospects of autocratic survival.

In Bader's (2015) quantitative research, she finds that only export dependence on China has statistical significance, even accounting for small amount of total trade. However, there were few/no causal linkages between elements of Chinese influence (such as state visits, arms trading, aid projects, and economic cooperation) and the survival of autocracies. She argues that China's foreign policy is more pragmatic, reflecting Chinese domestic interests and legitimacy. For instance, Beijing uses its economic leverage to put pressure on its trading countries in order to isolate Taiwan and delegitimize Tibet's leaders.

Moreover, Bader (2015) also asserts that Chinese foreign policy serves instrumental, rather than ideological goals, focusing on "influence without interference." Chou (2017) distinguishes between intended and unintended influence: a necessary consideration for those who look for

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black knight support. But, since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, China is now more dynamic in terms of economic cooperation, military development, and diplomatic exchanges. Chinese's foreign policy might change. As such, Beijing might exert its influence to sway politics in authoritarian regimes, particularly within the Southeast Asian region.

Other literature concurs that authoritarian powers attempt to export their governance approach to ensure autocratic durability or maintain national and regional stability (Wong 2018). For example, the Chinese government can fund an institution in what Bell et al. (2015) called the National Endowment for Meritocracy designed for to train the governing practices and institutes of her allies. The Confucius Institutes are just one small example. Moreover, having autocratic neighbors also reduces the risk of democratic spillover (Bader 2015; Chou 2017). It has also been suggested that China can help its autocratic allies in disrupting opposition movements by refusing political asylum or arresting those who are condemned by its allies (Silitsky 2010 in Bader 2015). Beijing has also reportedly cooperated with other dictatorships to share information technologies to control social media and enhance state-controlled surveillance (Kurlantzick & Link 2009 in Bader 2015). Last but not least, China has also been accused of supplying technological equipment for repression and torture, that is, to resist popular uprisings and protests (Wong 2018, p. 3).

In conclusion, we might use this discussion to speculate as to what the effects of a global economic recession will have system-wide on the persistence of hybrid regimes. Most likely Singapore and Malaysia will be able to survive a recession quite well because of their taxation and governing system. Malaysia will be more likely persist because they have more resources for feeding the population, while Singapore needs to import most of its food supply. In other words, Malaysia has greater food security. If the economies of China and Russia decline appreciably due to the collapse of the world economy, they will have to decrease "black knight" activities that support hybrid regimes around the world. For example, Cambodia is a beneficiary of China's "black knight" support. With the absence of such support, the opposition might appeal for Western support and mobilize the population, especially the marginalized and the young, to challenge the ruling autocratic government.

Russia, like China, could be seen as a "black knight" in supporting a military intervention in Syria and Crimea, in addition to its interference in the elections in the US and Europe. If Putin loses favor (his poll rate is now down to 60 percent) in Russia, he will have to decrease his "black knight" activities. In summary, the "black knight" activities of China and Russia, and whether they can be sustained, will affect hybrid regimes around the world, and Southeast Asia in particular. It is worth mentioning that Malaysia is now delinking itself from Chinese influence: in particular Chinese loans, investments, and infrastructure projects. Malaysia seems to be learning a lesson from Sri Lanka in which the country is in deep debt to China and has to turn over ownership of its ports to China.