

# Political Order and One-Party Rule

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Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2010.13:123–43

First published online as a Review in Advance on January 26, 2010

The *Annual Review of Political Science* is online at [polisci.annualreviews.org](http://polisci.annualreviews.org)

This article's doi:  
10.1146/annurev.polisci.031908.220529

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1094-2939/10/0615-0123\$20.00

## Key Words

autocracy, stability, single-party, dominant-party, elections

## Abstract

The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of one-party autocracies. One-party regimes have become the most common type of authoritarian rule and have proved to be more stable and to grow faster than other types of authoritarianism. We review the literature on one-party rule and, using data from 1950–2006, suggest four avenues for future research: focusing on autocrats' ability to simultaneously minimize threats from the elites and from the masses; focusing on the conditions that foster the establishment and the collapse of one-party regimes and on transitions from one type of authoritarianism to another; focusing on the relationship between authoritarian elections and democratization; and focusing on the global and international forces that influence the spread of one-party rule.

## INTRODUCTION

As the twentieth century ended, optimism spread among supporters of democracy. During the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991), the world witnessed the collapse of 85 authoritarian regimes, and the number of countries governed by elected officials became greater than at any previous time in human history (Geddes 1999). The prospects for democracy had never seemed better. Yet this spread of democracy was also accompanied by the spread of one-party autocracies, and when the third wave of democratization came to a halt in the end of the twentieth century, one-party regimes continued expanding.

**Figure 1** shows the distribution of six political orders—democratic, anarchic, military, monarchic, single-party, and dominant-party—during 1950–2006.<sup>1</sup> Both single-party and dominant-party regimes constitute what we refer to as one-party regimes; the difference is that single-party regimes proscribe opposition parties’ participation in elections (e.g., China or Vietnam today), whereas dominant-party regimes permit the opposition to compete in multiparty elections that usually do not allow alternation of political power (e.g., Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Senegal after 1976, Tanzania, Kenya and Gabon after the early 1990s, Mexico before 2000, or Venezuela today).<sup>2</sup> Dominant-party regimes are also

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<sup>1</sup>The classification of democratic regimes is based on Przeworski et al. (2000) and updates by Golder (2005) and Bolotnyy & Magaloni (2009). The remaining observations are divided into autocracies and anarchical regimes (Bolotnyy & Magaloni 2009). Anarchical regimes are those wherein one of the following two types of governments exist: a government that was put into place by the military or by a civilian body to act as an intermediary between one regime and the next; or a government that was popularly elected but is currently undergoing civil war or prevalent civil unrest and hence cannot function adequately. Drawing from the literature on types of authoritarianism (Geddes 2003, Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, Gandhi 2008, Hadenius & Teorell 2007, Magaloni 2008), autocratic regimes are subdivided into monarchies, military regimes, single-party regimes, and dominant-party regimes (Bolotnyy & Magaloni 2009).

<sup>2</sup>This distinction was originally highlighted by Sartori (1976), although he used the term hegemonic to refer to autocracies that permit opposition parties (see also Magaloni

known in the literature as “electoral authoritarian” (Linz 2000, Diamond 2002, Schedler 2002) or as “competitive authoritarian” regimes (Levitsky & Way 2002). Despite the important differences between single-party and dominant-party regimes, we often refer to them together—as one-party regimes—and highlight this distinction only when it is relevant to our argument.

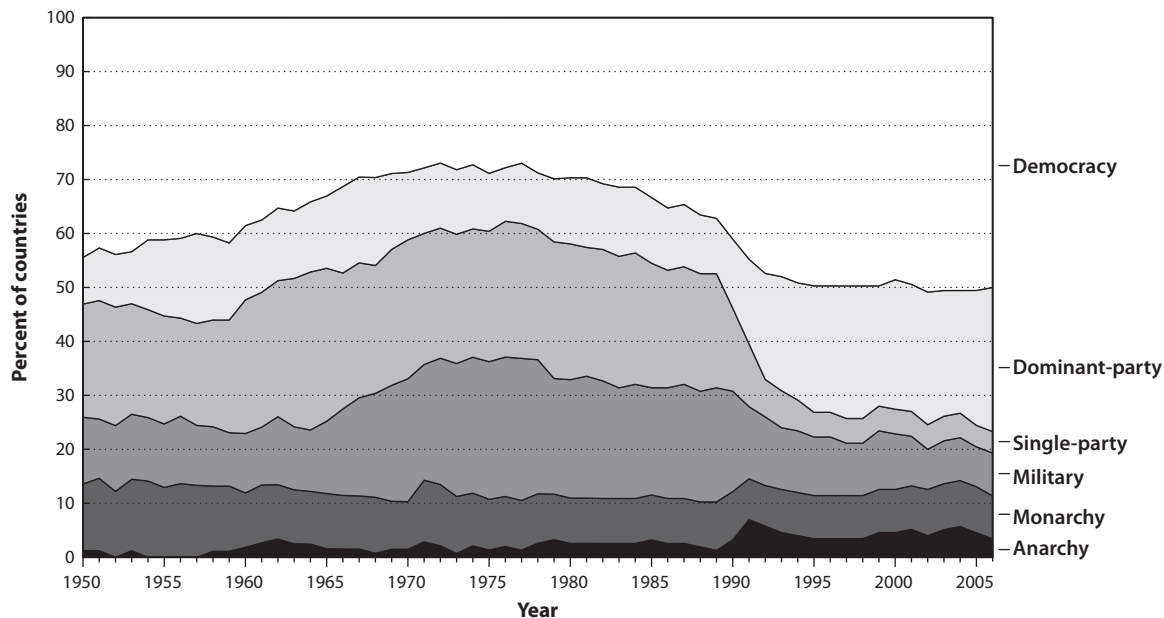
The figure suggests that even after the third wave, the world’s political order is predominantly autocratic, and that while the spread of democracy came to a close in the mid-1990s, one-party regimes continued spreading throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. One-party regimes have now become the most common type of authoritarian rule, constituting 57% of the authoritarian regimes during 1950–2006 and 33% of the total number of regimes in the world.

The spread of one-party dictatorships has sparked a great deal of academic curiosity, and scholars have shown that compared to other types of dictatorships, one-party regimes last longer (Huntington 1968, Geddes 2003, Magaloni 2008), suffer fewer coups (Cox 2008, Geddes 2008, Kricheli 2008), have better counterinsurgency capacities (Keefer 2008), and enjoy higher economic growth (Keefer 2007, Gandhi 2008, Gehlbach & Keefer 2008, Wright 2008c). Why are one-party dictatorships more stable than are others? Why do they grow more and experience fewer violent threats?

Puzzled by these questions, students of authoritarian regimes have been increasingly studying the functions served by ruling parties in one-party autocracies. They now view the ruling party as having two interwoven functions that account for one-party rule’s superiority: a bargaining function, whereby dictators use the party to bargain with the elites and

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2006). Notice that we do not elaborate here on the distinction between dominant-party democracies or “uncommon democracies” (Pempel 1990), wherein one party rules for decades under democratic conditions, and dominant-party autocracies.



**Figure 1**

Political order: democratic, anarchic, military, monarchic, single-party, and dominant-party regimes during 1950–2006.

minimize potential threats to their stability; and a mobilizing function, whereby dictators use the party machine to mobilize mass support.

We review this literature and propose ways of synthesizing its main findings. We then suggest two challenges to the current literature: the functionalist challenge and the endogeneity challenge. According to the functionalist challenge, arguments elucidating the role played by the ruling party do not fully explain why autocrats frequently use parties instead of using other institutional structures that could serve similar functions. The endogeneity challenge points out that autocrats might be encouraged to use ruling parties under certain conditions, and these conditions might also affect the regime’s survival prospects; if so, a mere correlation between one-party rule and better political and economic performance resulting from these underlying conditions is being mistaken for a ruling-party effect. To overcome these theoretical and methodological challenges, a deeper understanding of the underlying circumstances that foster the emergence of

one-party autocracies is required. We briefly examine the full scope of political transitions during 1950–2006. Using Markov estimates, we show, first, that one-party dictatorships are frequently established on the ruins of another type of dictatorship; second, that transitions from one type of dictatorship to another are the most common type of regime transition, amounting to 43% of the total number of regime transitions during 1950–2006; and third, that contrary to the common view, compared to military rule and to anarchy, one-party regimes are the least likely to transform to democracy after their collapse. These three findings suggest that transitions from one type of dictatorship to another deserve more scholarly attention.

We conclude by suggesting four avenues for future research: first, focusing on the emergence and the collapse of one-party regimes and on transitions from one type of dictatorship into another; second, focusing on the changing global and geopolitical trends of regime transitions—to and from one-party regimes—before, during, and after the Cold War;

third, focusing on the relationship between authoritarian elections and the prospects of democracy; and fourth, focusing on the strategies dictators follow to appease simultaneous threats to their stability from within the elites and from within the masses.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PARTY

### Co-Opting the Opposition and Elite Bargaining

Autocrats are fundamentally interested in their own survival in power (Tullock 1987, Wintrobe 1998, Haber 2006). If autocrats rely too much on terror, repression, and intimidation to sustain their rule, they become more vulnerable to agency and moral-hazard problems on the part of their own security apparatus, upon which their ability to survive ultimately depends (Wintrobe 1998). In order to rule the country, autocrats have to bestow resources on elite members, who, in turn, can use these same resources to overthrow the regime (Haber 2006). How can the autocrat appease the elites and discourage military threats to his stability?

Students of dictatorships have suggested several hypotheses about autocrats' use of political parties and other pseudodemocratic institutions to appease potential elite challengers and enhance their longevity. One hypothesis is that dictators can use these institutions to distribute economic transfers and rents, thereby co-opting potential rivals. Licenses, offices, and access to economic resources can be used in order to invest a large body of political players with a stake in the ruler's survival (Wintrobe 1998, Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003).

Autocrats' ability to use this distributive strategy can be limited, as suggested by Haber (2006), Magaloni (2008), and Debs (2007), by problems of commitment on the part of the dictator's opposition. The dictator is caught in a dilemma when trying to buy off potential rivals using economic transfers, because it is not clear what prevents his rivals from taking these transfers and then using them to organize a conspiracy against him. By trying to appease his

opponents he might unintentionally make them more powerful, thereby increasing the threat to his survival.

Another hypothesis is that dictators can broaden their appeal by making policy concessions in a direction favored by potential opponents. Using pseudodemocratic institutions, including parties and legislatures, the autocrat can give voice to groups within society, bargain with opponents, and make policy concessions to address their demands (Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, p. 17). By allowing non-regime-sponsored parties to access the legislature, dictators can provide some means for advancement into political office and for limited policy influence. In selectively co-opting the opposition and manipulating electoral laws, dictators also create divided oppositions and increase coordination costs among their opponents (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2001; Lust-Okar 2005; Magaloni 2006, 2009).

Autocrats' ability to use policy concessions can be limited by problems of commitment on the part of the dictator (Magaloni 2008). The mere existence of parties and legislature does not necessarily mean that office-holders in these institutions have power and influence over policy outcomes, since after the threat of rebellion or the need for cooperation has been answered, the autocrat can dismiss dissenting voices arbitrarily and renege on his promises. To extract real policy concessions, non-regime-sponsored parties must be able to retain some means to threaten the dictator's survival when he reneges on his promises by, for example, mobilizing voters in great numbers to the streets.

Moreover, the literature lacks a consensus on the extent to which legislatures in fact serve as a constraint on dictators. Gandhi (2008) convincingly demonstrates that dictatorships with legislatures grow more than do those without them, and argues that legislatures constrain erratic and predatory behavior on the part of rulers. Wright (2008a) suggests further that legislatures are only binding in single-party and military regimes because these emerge in natural-resource-poor countries wherein "the

dictator concedes a legislature to ensure capital owners that he will not confiscate their mobile assets” (Wright 2008a, p. 327). However, scholars have also argued that, in many one-party regimes, the forum wherein policy concessions actually take place is often not the legislature, and that the correlation between the existence of legislatures and economic growth can be explained by the higher levels of institutionalization enjoyed by autocrats who choose to have a legislature, not by the legislatures’ existence (Lust-Okar 2005, 2006; Magaloni et al. 2007; Masoud 2008; Shehata 2008; Blaydes 2009). Arriola (2009) shows, for example, that African leaders more often seek to co-opt the opposition by offering access to the cabinet, which provides them with more direct control over state resources. Blaydes (2009) similarly suggests that the Egyptian legislature has played a limited role in policy making, and that office seekers value legislative seats not because they enable them to participate in policy making but because they grant legal immunity.

How can dictators establish a credible commitment to share power with potential opponents when they face threats to their survival? Lazarev (2005), Brownlee (2007), Gehlbach & Keefer (2008), and Magaloni (2008) suggest a third hypothesis: More than using legislatures, dictators can use institutions within the ruling party in order to make credible intertemporal power-sharing deals with potential elite opponents. Instead of policy, which can be changed arbitrarily by the dictator, the party controls succession and access-to-power positions. Party cadres will support the regime rather than seek to conspire against it only if, in exchange, they can expect to be promoted into rent-paying positions. When they do not expect such credible power sharing, elite splits and instability become more likely (Magaloni 2006, Baturo 2007). Hence, instead of counteracting threats by groups within society, in this approach the party serves to neutralize threats from within the ruling elite by guaranteeing them a share of power over the long run.

An implication of this account is that if formal and informal rules for accession to power

within the party are constantly violated, the commitment breaks down, and the dictator becomes vulnerable. Thus, in this view, governance under one-party rule is portrayed as a system of power sharing between the dictator and the central leadership of his party, which controls appointments and promotions that are executed according to certain informal and formal party norms. The dictator has ample powers to appoint this leadership, but it has to come from within the party.

Boix & Svolik (2008) go one step further, arguing that power sharing under authoritarianism “is sustained by the ability of each side to punish the other party if it decides to deviate from that joint-governance arrangement and, in particular, by the credible threat of a rebellion by the ruler’s allies” (p. 2) (see also Gehlbach & Keefer 2008). In this account, the role of legislatures and parties is to facilitate collective action among the dictator’s allies to oppose potential dictatorial abuses. This persuasive notion that dictatorial institutions are backed by the credible threat of a collective rebellion against dictatorial abuses deserves further analysis. Dictators often selectively abuse members of the ruling elite—they purge, imprison, or send their enemies into exile—and get away with it because they are serving the interests of elite members against each other (Tullock 1987). Collective rebellions are also associated with coordination and collective-action problems. Thus, understanding the types of abuses that are likely to inspire collective rage is a promising direction for future research.

The hypothesis that dictators use their ruling parties to facilitate bargaining with the elites also leads to a hypothesis about the likelihood of such bargaining: The need to appease the elites stems from the autocrat’s fear of threats to his stability on the part of the elites or of the military. Thus, we should expect the party to function as a power-sharing arrangement when the elites’ threats to the dictator’s rule are indeed credible. The dictator has an incentive to broaden his supporting coalition only when the opposition is powerful enough to threaten the stability of the regime (Bueno de Mesquita et al.

2003, Smith 2005, Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, Boix & Svolik 2008, Gandhi 2008).

This hypothesis relies, however, on the assumption that the autocrat knows when the threats to his stability are severe enough to require bargaining with the elites. Yet history has shown that even the closest allies of the autocrat might eventually threaten his rule. Moreover, even when they are fully loyal to the regime, elites sometimes have an incentive to misrepresent the degree of power and control the autocrat actually holds (Tullock 1987, Schatzberg 1988, Wintrobe 1998). Dictators therefore often face severe information problems with regard to the military's and the opposition's ability to overthrow them. As a result, dictators might find it beneficial to allow political competition in order to gather information about the loyalty of their party cadres and about the actual power their opponents enjoy (Ames 1970, Magaloni 2006, Birney 2007, Brownlee 2007, Cox 2008, Kricheli 2008, Blaydes 2009, Lorentzen 2009). Yet in order to produce credible information, citizens' participation should somehow be tied to the actual power autocrats enjoy. Can the dictator's party, on top of co-opting the elites, create a vested interest among the citizens? The following subsection addresses the literature on this question.

### **Building Mass Support**

Autocrats are interested in their own survival, but this motivation does not necessarily mean that they will opt to completely exclude the masses from the political process or to refrain from distributing rents and providing public goods. Instead, the same motivation that leads them to bargain with the elites often induces autocrats to use the party machine as a patronage system, whereby citizens receive rents from the government.

Mass support is important for the stability of the regime because it enhances cooperation within the ruling coalition. If the population overwhelmingly supports the party and the party controls the distribution of power, positions, and rents, potential elite rivals have

no chance to gain power and spoils by competing outside the party (Magaloni 2006). In many one-party regimes, the party controls land titles, fertilizers, subsidized housing, scholarships, food, construction materials, and many other privileges, which are distributed to the most loyal members of the party. One-party regimes therefore virtually create a market for privileges that are allocated based on degrees of loyalty (Wintrobe 1998; Lust-Okar 2005, 2006). When they are well institutionalized, ruling parties should thus be understood as giant patronage systems that give the citizens a vested interest in the perpetuation of the regime (Magaloni 2006; Geddes 2006, 2008; Pepinsky 2007).

The ability of a single party to monopolize mass support by controlling the state's resources and using patronage networks has been called a "tragic brilliance" (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2001)—tragic in that the party can remain in power even without sustained economic prosperity, and brilliant in that voters play an active role in sustaining the system. This system is held together by a "punishment regime" wherein the party distributes rents to citizens who remain loyal and withdraws them from those who defect. This punishment regime is particularly effective at trapping poor voters into supporting the dictatorship, because their livelihood depends on state transfers (Zhong & Chen 2002, Blaydes 2006, Magaloni 2006, Tezcur 2008). Citizens with alternative sources of income can better afford to make "ideological investments" in democratization and oppose the regime.

This tragic brilliance is also captured by Havel (1978), who lamented that under communism every acquiescent citizen had become a perpetrator as well as a victim. Thanks to the command economy, the Communist Party could control access to virtually every valuable resource, job, or privilege and could thus threaten to withdraw access to any of these if citizens refused to acquiesce. To sustain this punishment regime, a strong party organization is required to acquire information about citizens' loyalties and to implement punishment. Communist systems obtained this

information through a combination of mechanisms, penetrating virtually every group within society—youth, workers, teachers, peasants, and sometimes even the family unit. No organization was allowed to exist outside the party. Mass acquiescence was thus sustained through a combination of fear, the penetration and atomization of society, and material inducements.

Most noncommunist one-party regimes are significantly less coercive (Gandhi 2008), but their mechanisms for obtaining citizen acquiescence are similar to those in more repressive regimes, in that state resources are used to reward the loyal and punish the disloyal. The denser the party's organizational networks to monitor and sanction citizens, and the more it monopolizes valuable resources, the more capable a one-party regime is of trapping citizens into supporting the system (Magaloni 2006). As a result, citizens' support of the regime can be an informative signal of the regime's stability. Citizens have an incentive to actively support the regime only if they expect it to last and to continue distributing privileges (Kricheli 2008) and if they expect to be punished if they defect (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2001). This explains why one-party regimes normally invest a great deal of resources in winning elections with huge margins and in generating large turnout even when elections are not competitive (Simpser 2005, Magaloni 2006, Blaydes 2009, Malesky & Schuler 2009). Supermajoritarian election outcomes and high turnout generate an image of invincibility that works to dissuade potential elite challenges, particularly those coming from powerful party officials. Unity within the one-party regime is hence deeply intertwined with the party's capacity to mobilize the masses (Geddes 2006, 2008; Magaloni 2006).

In addition to requiring a strong party organization, one-party regimes must solve critical agency and moral-hazard problems on the part of the party cadres to effectively mobilize voters. Once it is certain that the dictator's party will win, the party cadres do not necessarily have an incentive to invest time, effort, and organizational resources in distributing rents to the citizenry in order to generate high turnout

and supermajorities. If left unchecked, party cadres will have an incentive to free-ride by running on the party ticket, gaining access to power and spoils, and taking much of the pie for themselves.

Blaydes (2009) provides a fascinating account of how Egypt's one-party regime solved these problems using a semiauction system: "elections in Egypt closely resemble an all-pay auction with bidders (parliamentary candidates) paying for a shot at the prize (the parliamentary seat). The bid that candidates pay is the cost of the electoral campaign, which is not financed by the hegemonic party" (Blaydes 2009, p. 15). This semiauction system entices voters to support candidates who are seen as closer to the regime, and to whom they are connected by family, clan, tribe, village, or personal relationships (Lust-Okar 2006, Malesky & Schuler 2008, Masoud 2008, Shehata 2008). In Mexico, the ruling party's central leadership controlled the nomination processes and, owing to a system of nonreelection for all competitive offices, the party could induce strong discipline from subnational office-seekers who had an incentive to align with the party leadership and with the president to obtain access to future rent-seeking positions. Langston's (2001, 2006) work persuasively shows that this regime began to crumble when the leadership lost control of the nomination process.

By rewarding with more power and more privileges those who work harder for the party—those who mobilize voters, fill the party's rallies, spy on others, and keep their districts free of protests—the system becomes incentive-compatible. The ruling party thereby lays the costs of popular mobilization at election time upon elite office seekers who are willing to put in effort, resources, and organizational skills to gain access to state-controlled privileges (Lazarev 2005; Lust-Okar 2005, 2006).

The resulting support of the masses can further be used to counter threats from the military, which, according to Geddes (2006, 2008), represents the most formidable threat to dictators. She argues that the creation of a party reduces the probability of successful coups for

two reasons: First, the party works to increase the number of citizens who have something to lose from the ouster of the dictator; second, the party machine can be employed to mobilize citizens in street protests at the time of a coup.

Autocrats' ability to use the masses to counter threats to their stability is therefore intimately tied to their ability to gain mass support via the party machine. If so, a one-party regime's durability should depend on its access to resources to be distributed to the people in return for their support. If the regime controls natural resources or other economic means, it should be able to increase social spending, mobilize the masses, and thereby increase its survival prospects (Morrison 2009). If, however, the ruling party weakens and opposition leaders gain access to such resources, the party's ability to mobilize the masses will be hindered, and the regime will be destabilized (Greene 2002, 2007; Lawson 2002; Langston 2006). In these cases, political cooperation among different opposition groups to dislodge the ruling party is more likely (Arriola 2008).

Availability of economic resources also decreases the probability of coups (Londregan & Poole 1990) and of political destabilization (Fearon & Laitin 2003, Goldstone et al. 2003, Collier & Hoeffler 2004, Hegre & Sambanis 2006). Correspondingly, higher levels of per capita income and stronger economic growth are associated with authoritarian stability (Haggard & Kaufman 1995, Cox 2008, Geddes 2008, Kricheli 2008, Magaloni & Wallace 2008). When dictators have the resources to induce cooperation from powerful groups within the elite and to fund a patronage system to co-opt the citizens, the state remains stable. When they lack these resources, they "cannot pay their civil servants (who may therefore turn to corruption) or their armed forces (who may then use their weapons to pay themselves)" (Bates 2008a, p. 5).

Analogously, scholars have also established a link between one-party regimes and higher economic performance (Keefe 2007, Gandhi 2008, Gehlbach & Keefer 2008, Wright 2008c). Yet the mechanisms underlying this link remain

unsettled in the literature. Some suggest that one-party autocracies grow more than do other types of autocracies because they are more stable, which lengthens rulers' time horizons and reduces their incentives to plunder the economy (Olson 1993, Wright 2008c). Others argue that one-party dictatorships grow more because their institutions are more constraining, and capital owners face a lower risk of confiscation (Gandhi 2008, Gehlbach & Keefer 2008, Wright 2008c). Moreover, it remains puzzling that most single-party regimes have been markedly populist and often confiscate the assets of the rich instead of protecting their property rights to encourage investment (Magaloni 2006, Haber et al. 2003). Finally, the direction of the causal relation between economic growth and one-party rule is unclear. Are development and wealth causes of autocratic parties, which in turn make dictatorships more stable, or are they consequences of one-party rule? At the very least, access to economic resources should not be taken as completely exogenous to regime type, as it is likely to be influenced by the type of institutions dictators establish.

## THE PARTY'S ORIGINS

The mere fact that single parties improve dictators' survival prospects does not necessarily entail that dictators will opt to create such parties. Nor does it entail that parties emerge because they serve this function. Using Elster's (1982) terms, these are functionalist explanations that expose the functions served by single parties but do not necessarily explain their causes.

Functionalist theories of single-party rule leave us with many open questions. It is not clear whether autocrats are aware of the bargaining and mobilizing functions of ruling parties, and whether these functions play an important role in an autocrat's decision to foster a ruling party. Even if dictators are aware of these functions, they might opt to create other types of institutions that serve similar functions. For example, Haber et al. (2003) suggest that dictators can solve the credible-commitment problem through social networks and through



intermarriage between the property class and the ruling class, which is fairly typical in “personalist” regimes. Why dictators opt for the creation of a party rather than pursuing the personal-networks strategy highlighted by Haber et al. is not fully explained by the extant literature on one-party regimes. Moreover, sustaining a thick party organization burdens the autocrat with high costs (Belova & Lazarev 2007) that may outweigh its benefits. We need a better understanding of the conditions under which creating and sustaining a party is an achievable and worthwhile strategy for the dictator, compared to other possible strategies, including ruling through personal connections or through kinship ties.

Examining the conditions that foster the creation of one-party regimes might also enable us to overcome the endogeneity problems associated with contemporary analyses of one-party rule. The mere empirical association between one-party regimes and higher survival prospects does not necessarily imply that parties actually increase autocrats’ stability. If one-party regimes are more likely to be constituted when autocrats are more stable, then it might well be the case that the correlation between one-party regimes and higher survival prospects is mostly explained by this initial selection effect.

If so, when are one-party autocracies likely to be established? Are they more common after the fall of democracy or after the fall of another type of autocracy? To provide insight into these issues, the estimated transition matrix of regime transformations among 169 countries from 1950 to 2006 is displayed in **Table 1**. This matrix was estimated by first finding the single-period probabilities of a transition from one regime type to another based on the existing dataset; and second, treating these probabilities as determining a Markov process from one regime into another occurring through the course of half a century. The elements in the matrix therefore represent the percentage of regimes from one type (rows) that will transform to regimes from another type (columns) during this 50-period estimated process. The

**Table 1** Estimated regime transition matrix, 1950–2006

Original regime type	Transitions							Total transitions	Stability	Total
	To anarchy	To monarchy	To military	To single party	To dominant party	To democracy				
Anarchy	–	3.9% 2	23.5% 12	3.9% 2	33.3% 17	35.3% 18	23.18%	51	76.82%	220
Monarchy	0.0% 0	–	63.6% 7	9.1% 1	27.3% 3	0.0%	1.50%	11	98.50%	734
Military	30.4% 28	2.2% 2	–	7.6% 7	27.2% 25	32.6% 30	7.31%	92	92.69%	100%
Single-party	8.8% 5	0.0% 0	38.6% 22	–	33.3% 19	19.3% 11	4.14%	57	95.86% 1321	1257
Dominant-party	17.5% 11	0.0% 0	23.8% 15	30.2% 19	–	28.6% 18	5.04%	63	94.96% 1188	100%
Democracy	12.1% 7	0.0% 0	67.2% 39	1.7% 1	19.0% 11	–	1.90%	58	98.10% 2991	3049

**Table 2** Transitions to one-party rule

Original regime type	To single party	To dominant party	To one party (single or dominant)
Anarchy	6.67% 2	22.67% 17	28.36% 19
Monarchy	3.33% 1	4% 3	5.97% 4
Military	23.33% 7	33.33% 25	47.76% 32
Single party	–	25.33% 19	–
Dominant party	63.33% 19	–	–
Democracy	3.33% 1	14.66% 11	17.91% 12
Total	100% 30	100% 75	100% 67

number of observations in each category is written below each percentage. **Table 2** presents the same information but focuses only on the transitions to one-party rule, specifying the percentage of transitions from each regime type out of the overall number of transition to one-party rule. Importantly, the figures in both tables take into account the fact that one regime can transform into another and then transform into a third type of regime, and so forth.

**Tables 1** and **2** indicate that one-party rule is not likely to emerge out of a single type of regime; instead, they suggest four common paths to one-party rule. We suggest that each of these different paths entails a different combination of top-down versus bottom-up forces, and depends on how these forces interact with international forces and changing international conditions.

The first path is the path from military rule: 33.33% of dominant-party regimes and 23.33% of the single-party regimes established during 1950–2006 emerged out of military dictatorships. This route to the emergence of one-party dictatorship is mostly driven by top-down forces. Its logic corresponds to Geddes’ (2008) hypothesis that military autocrats often create political parties to mobilize the masses and thereby counterbalance military threats to their

stability. The fact that one-party regimes are likely to emerge as a strategic decision on the part of dictators also corresponds to Smith’s (2005) and Gandhi & Przeworski’s (2006) hypothesis that suggests that dictators resort to the creation of political parties when they confront strong oppositions. The transition from a military (or more personalist) dictatorship to a party regime is understood as a way to accommodate concessions to the opposition in an effort to minimize threats to the dictator’s stability.

The second path to one-party rule is the path from anarchy: 22.67% of dominant-party regimes and 6.67% of single-party regimes established during 1950–2006 were established after a period of anarchy or civil war. Huntington (1968) first highlighted this route to the emergence of one-party regimes, suggesting that these regimes are the product of social revolutions or independence movements: “The more intense and prolonged the struggle and the deeper its ideological commitment, the greater the political stability of the one-party system” (p. 425). This is a bottom-up path to one-party rule.

Why does anarchy lead to the establishment of one-party rule as opposed to the establishment of a different regime type? One possibility, which is drawn from the literature on civil war, is that anarchy transforms into one-party dictatorship when one dominant force is able to eliminate the opposition militarily, or when the population is ethnically concentrated (Bates 2008a,b). If, on the other hand, a minority has a significant advantage in access to military resources or economic resources to fund violence, this minority might be able to dominate and rule by fear and terror (Collier et al. 2007). In these cases, it might be more likely that anarchy gets resolved through the establishment of a military dictatorship rather than a party dictatorship. Democracy might result, instead, when military forces are more balanced (Wantchekon 2004, Przeworski 2009). Another possibility is that one-party dictatorships arise out of anarchy as a pact among warlords to create political order after these warlords realize that they would be better off

colluding to share power than continuing to fight. Magaloni (2006) argues that this was the path of emergence of the Mexican one-party regime.

The third path to one-party rule is the path from democracy: 17.91% of one-party regimes were established after the fall of democracy. The regimes of President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and of President Vladimir Putin in Russia are two of the best-known examples. Although democracies are most likely to collapse in the hands of the military (67.2% of the transitions from democratic rule), they often succumb to dominant-party autocracy (19%). This tendency of democracy to collapse to dominant-party autocracy rather than to single-party or military regimes is mostly a post-Cold War phenomenon. In the period between 1950 and 1989, there were 58 collapses of democratic regimes, 67% of which transformed to military dictatorship. After the end of the Cold War, on the other hand, there were only 14 democratic breakdowns, and the overwhelming majority of these led to dominant-party dictatorship. Interestingly, during the same period, some authoritarian leaders in post-communist regimes managed to adapt to democracy and return to power using their access to state resources to rebuild their supporting coalitions (Grzymala-Busse 2002, 2007).

The fourth path to one-party rule is from another type of one-party rule, that is, from a dominant-party regime to a single-party regime or vice versa. These transitions are processes of liberalization or antiliberalization through which dictators modify the existing rules of political contestation while remaining in power. Transitions from dominant-party to single-party regimes were common in the early period of decolonization in many African countries, and these mostly occurred after independence leaders won overwhelming victories in the first independent multiparty elections and subsequently chose to ban the opposition. Most of these transitions to single-party dictatorships correspond to the bottom-up route of party creation highlighted by Huntington (1968). Transitions from single-party

dictatorships to dominant-party regimes, on the other hand, resulted from the legalization of multiparty competition and were most frequent in the 1990s both in Africa and the former Soviet Republics. Parties like the Chama Cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania, the Gabonese Democratic Party, the Kenya African National Union, and the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, to name just a few, ruled for years while proscribing the opposition, and decided to allow multiparty elections only after 1990.

In addition to the four paths to one-party rule, **Tables 1** and **2** also suggest some insights into the collapse of one-party rule. In contrast to the common view that one-party rule leads to democratization, one-party regimes seldom democratize: Only 24.17% of the transitions from one-party rule are to democracy. Instead of democratizing, most of the single-party regimes fall prey to military coups or broaden political competition to become dominant-party regimes: 38.6% of the transitions from single-party regimes are to military regimes and 33.3% are to dominant-party regimes, while only 19.3% are to democracy. Moreover, dominant-party regimes are most likely to transform to single-party regimes, not to democratic regimes: 30.2% of the transitions from dominant-party regimes are to single-party regimes, while only 28.6% are to democratic regimes. In fact, compared to military rule and to anarchy, one-party regimes are the least likely to transform to democracy after their collapse.

These findings suggest that transitions from one type of authoritarianism to another deserve more scholarly attention. The regime-transitions literature has focused mostly on transitions from authoritarian rule to democratic rule or vice versa (e.g., O'Donnell et al. 1986; Przeworski et al. 2000; Acemoglu & Robinson 2001, 2006, 2008; Boix 2003; Boix & Stokes 2003; Epstein et al. 2006). However, members of the ruling clique can also respond to the weakening of the current regime or to mass mobilization by establishing a new dictatorship. Transitions from one type of authoritarian rule to another were indeed the most

**Table 3 Simulated long-term regime distributions<sup>a</sup> under changing geopolitical conditions**

Time period	Anarchy	Monarchy	Military	Single party	Dominant party	Democracy
Decolonization: 1950–1964	2.79%	9.22%	15.97%	17.13%	16.01%	38.89%
Cold War: 1965–1988	2.3%	5.2%	28%	17%	8.4%	40%
Post Cold War: 1989–2006	3.6%	8.2%	5.2%	0%	26.2%	57%

<sup>a</sup>Regime distributions come from simulating Markov transition frequencies obtained for the three historical periods. The base frequency vector is the average regime distribution of the period 1950–2006. Simulations come from repeating each Markov transition matrix 50 times.

common form of regime change during the past half century: Out of the total number of regime transitions during 1950–2006, 43% were transitions from dictatorship to dictatorship, while only 27% were from democracy to dictatorship and 31% from dictatorship to democracy.

Yet because of its focus on regime change from autocracy to democracy and vice versa, the regime-transitions literature cannot provide a theory of why dictators are most commonly replaced by new dictators, or of why transitions to another type of autocracy are more likely than transitions to democracy under certain conditions but not under all conditions. The next section suggests that changing geopolitical conditions—a factor commonly ignored in the democracy literature—need to be taken more fully into account to understand transitions in general and transitions from and to one-party dictatorship in particular.

### CHANGING GLOBAL AND GEOPOLITICAL CONDITIONS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

The origins, stability, and collapse of one-party regimes cannot be treated independently of global forces and of changing geopolitical conditions. Arguably, global and international forces can influence the stability levels one-party regimes enjoy as well as the likelihood that a collapsing regime will transform into a one-party autocracy. Moreover, changes that influence the entire global community—e.g., innovations in the technology of ruling, the emergence of a new discourse about elections, or the spread of the international media—might also encourage global trends in the spread of one-party rule.

To better understand the change in the global and geopolitical trends governing regime transitions to and from one-party rule, we examine, using Markov simulations, how the spread of one-party rule would have looked if the global and geopolitical trends existing in one of three subperiods—before, during, and after the Cold War—had prevailed for half a century. We estimate three alternative Markov chain transition probabilities: one for the years of decolonization during 1950–1964; a second for the height of the Cold War during 1965–1988; and a third for the post-Cold War period of 1989–2006. We then apply the transition probabilities in each period to the average distribution of political regimes in the period 1950–2000,<sup>3</sup> and repeat the Markov process for 50 years, yielding different distributions of political regimes that reflect how the world order would have looked if one of these geopolitical orders had prevailed for 50 years. The resulting hypothetical distributions of different types of regimes are presented in **Table 3**. The entries in this table represent the percentage of each regime type under each relevant geopolitical order.

The results presented in **Table 3** strongly support the hypothesis that the frequency of one-party dictatorships has been subject to disparate trends before, after, and during the Cold War. If the geopolitical trends existing during the decolonization period had continued to exist, the future would have looked rather heterogeneous: About 39% of the countries would

<sup>3</sup>The average distribution of regimes is as follows: 39% democracies, 17% single-party, 16% dominant-party, 16% military, 3% anarchy.

have been democracies, 16% military dictatorships, 17% single-party dictatorships, 16% dominant-party regimes, and 9% monarchies. On the other hand, if the geopolitical trends existing during the Cold War had existed for the last half century, most of the autocracies would have been military regimes, followed distantly by single-party dictatorships. Dominant-party regimes would not have been especially common. Last, if the geopolitical trends of the post-Cold War era had existed for the last half century, dominant-party regimes would have been the most common type of authoritarianism. Single-party regimes would have completely disappeared, and military dictatorships would have represented only 5% of the regimes. The post-Cold War era should thus unquestionably be associated with the spread of dominant-party autocracies or “electoral authoritarian” regimes.

What shapes these international trends of regime transitions? Bates (2001) suggests that during the Cold War, dictators strategically played the different international interests to their advantage, gaining access to foreign and military aid without having to make policy concessions in terms of liberalization or democratization. As such, Cold War conditions were particularly conducive to the emergence of closed dictatorships, and in particular to military dictatorships, which strategically used the communist threat to get funds from international financial institutions and from the United States to repress their opponents. Communist one-party regimes, for their part, relied on the Soviet Union to sustain their economies.

The end of the Cold War, by contrast, has favored the expansion of both democracy and electoral authoritarianism. Dictators interested in gaining access to international funds possess a strong interest in adopting multiparty elections because donors generously reward dictators who hold elections (Kricheli 2009). Global economic forces also played an important role in changing autocrats’ incentives to hold elections: In the 1970s, developing countries were negatively affected by higher oil prices, which reduced demand for their exports in rich

countries. Many developing countries overborrowed to continue spending, and the resulting debt crisis of the 1980s compelled developing countries to retrench their spending, adjust their finances, liberalize trade, and embrace the market. The change in economic policies and the continued pressure of international financial institutions and donors to adjust macroeconomic policies triggered the collapse of patronage networks that had previously sustained authoritarian regimes. In the face of this weakening of the state, the loss of economic resources that resulted from economic liberalization, and the sustained deterioration of living conditions, dictators’ opponents strengthened. In some cases, weakening autocrats were compelled to embrace the market and democracy simultaneously (Przeworski 1991, Haggard & Kaufman 1995). In other cases, autocrats responded by liberalizing the regime and allowing multiparty competition while continuing to hold power through the corruption of electoral processes.

The literature examining these changing trends in the spread of dominant-party rule is still in its infancy. Research has focused mainly on international actors’ influence on an autocrat’s decision to hold elections or allow election monitoring, and on their influence on democratization (Bates 2001, Levitsky & Way 2005, Brinks & Coppedge 2006, Gleditsch & Ward 2006, Escribá-Folch & Wright 2008, Mainwaring & Perez-Liñan 2008, Beaulieu & Hyde 2009, Kricheli 2009). We note four challenges faced by this literature.

One challenge associated with identifying the links between international factors, policy making, and democratization is to better specify the strategic behavior of the international community, in particular foreign donors. Why do donors reward multiparty elections so generously if autocrats continue to rule by corrupting electoral processes and by rigging elections? Kricheli (2009) suggests one avenue for answering this question: Donors for the most part are not interested in promoting democracy but rather care about political stability, which shapes the return on their investments.

According to Kricheli, autocrats holding elections signal their stability, not their democratic commitment, and thus get rewarded. But more work is needed to uncover how and under what conditions international organizations and institutions might be able to sanction dictators and promote democracy and when they are likely to fail.

A second challenge is the problem of endogeneity. The type of authoritarian regime existing in a country cannot be considered independent from international factors. The type of dictatorship adopted can be powerfully shaped by donors' behavior and their willingness to sanction (Kricheli 2009). Przeworski (2009) argues even further that regime types are epiphenomena, and thus the conditions that foster their creation, instead of the regimes themselves, should be the focus of our analysis.

A third challenge is determining the degree to which authoritarian policy making and regime transitions are influenced by domestic versus international forces. Are they mostly shaped by international factors (Levitsky & Way 2005, Brinks & Coppedge 2006, Gleditsch & Ward 2006, Hyde & Marinov 2008, Wright 2008b), by internal dynamics (Geddes 2006, 2008; LeBas 2006; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006, 2008; Greene 2007, 2010; Arriola 2008; Cox 2008), or by the interaction of domestic and international factors (Solinger 2001, Bjornlund 2004, Hyde 2006)?

A fourth challenge is that the simultaneous expansion of electoral authoritarianism and democracy in the contemporary period raises concerns about the link between political competition under authoritarianism and democratization. Indeed, the extent to which multiparty elections in autocracies are likely to induce democratization has been contested in the literature (Gandhi & Lust-Okar 2009). On the one hand, scholars have emphasized how authoritarian elections might transform citizens' propensities to participate and augment their expectations of government accountability (Pei 1995, Shi 1999, Li 2003, Lindberg 2006a,b, Birney 2007, Wang & Yao 2007); result in gradual institutional transformations that

prepare for the eventual victory of the democratic opposition (Eisenstadt 2004, Howard & Roessler 2006, Lindberg 2006c, Roessler & Howard 2008); or encourage democratization after political breakdown (Bratton & van de Walle 1997, Bunce & Wolchik 2006, Beissinger 2007, Brownlee 2009), all of which, in turn, increase the possibility of democracy. Yet on the other hand, scholars have also questioned the link between political competition under authoritarianism and democratization, suggesting that dominant-party regimes might be rather resilient to democratization (Lust-Okar 2006, 2009; Brownlee 2007; McCoy & Hartlyn 2007, 2009; Kricheli 2009; Greene 2010).

## GUNS AND VOTES

We conclude by reflecting on the fundamental problem of autocratic political order. The perception of autocrats as rulers who provide rents only to the elites while completely neglecting the people seems misguided. In the face of simultaneous threats to their stability from within the elites and from within the masses, choosing to distribute rents only to the elites is not an optimal strategy from the dictator's perspective (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith 2009, Kricheli & Livne 2009). Autocrats thus have to calculatedly distribute resources between the masses and the elites. They face the dilemma of how to efficiently balance their resources between guns and votes so as to maximize their survival prospects. When the autocrat bestows too much power on the elites or relies too much on the military, he becomes vulnerable to threats from within his ruling clique and must mobilize the voters to counterbalance these threats. Yet when he bestows too much power on the citizens, he risks electoral defeat, and will need the military to enforce electoral fraud to ensure his survival.

Although relatively little is known about autocrats' ability to overcome the guns-versus-votes dilemma, scholars agree on important implications of its existence. Dictatorial political order is ultimately based on coercion even when voters can choose between political

alternatives (Przeworski 2009). Thus, a critical moment that defines the passage from authoritarianism to democracy is the one when no political power can reverse the elections' results (Przeworski 1985). Ultimately, therefore, party dictatorships can only be defeated through elections if voters support the opposition *and* if the military does not enable the dictator to steal the elections from them. Magaloni (2009) argues that when the ruling party steals the elections' results despite voters' support of the opposition, the future of the regime crucially depends on the armed forces' strategy: They might back the ruling party and threaten to repress the population; oust the rulers through a coup and rule on their own; or side with the masses, in which case democracy can emerge as a result of a "civil revolution." The military should thus be considered a strategic player who can act self-interestedly against the regime or in support of the masses (Geddes 2006, 2008; Magaloni 2009; Acemoglu et al. 2009; Przeworski & Gandhi 2009).

Electoral fraud is common in many autocracies (Lehoucq & Molina 2002; Schedler 2002, 2006; Lehoucq 2003; Simpson 2005, 2008; Simpson & Donno 2008). However, the fact that the armed forces will not necessarily opt to support the regime in cases of electoral fraud might also explain why autocrats do not always follow this strategy. If the military's support is not guaranteed, electoral manipulation is risky because it might induce the masses to challenge the regime and facilitate the mobilization of the opposition (van de Walle 2002, Thompson & Kuntz 2004, Lindberg 2006a, Beissinger 2007, Donno 2007, Tucker 2007, Bunce & Wolchik 2009, Przeworski & Gandhi 2009).

When the armed forces opt, however, to support the regime and ensure the dictator's electoral victory, electoral violence becomes necessary. Many of the contemporary authoritarian elections are afflicted with hideous violence against voters who accuse the regime of electoral fraud. The 2009 political crisis in Iran, the 2008 presidential elections in Zimbabwe, and the 2005 general elections in Ethiopia are examples of such cases.

Soldiers matter for authoritarian stability, but citizens matter as well. Military officers are more likely to defect the regime if they perceive the masses as being capable of orchestrating a revolution, even a peaceful one.<sup>4</sup> Citizens can sometimes defeat soldiers. As the chief of the Eastern German police, Erich Mielke, said to the party leader, Erich Honecker, in the aftermath of a demonstration joined by a million citizens: "Erik, one just cannot beat that many people" (Przeworski 1991). The same logic was behind the military's defection during the Orange and Rose Revolutions. In these cases, regimes were weakened and ultimately defeated by mass revolts aimed at ousting dictators who had stolen elections. Weingast (1997), Fearon (2006), and Magaloni (2009) explore the factors that allow societies to coordinate against this type of abuse.

Many open questions regarding autocrats' need of both guns and votes still remain. The literature has not yet fully explained when autocrats are likely to be threatened by the elites or by the masses; when they are likely to distribute more rents to the masses at the expense of the elites; or when they are likely to do the opposite. The relationships between the military and the ruling party, as well as the strategies civilian leaders follow to subordinate the military to their authority, are not well understood, although they seem to differ across one-party regimes (Finer 1962, Kolkowicz 1967, Huntington 1975, Perlmutter & LeoGrande 1982). This should be an important avenue for future research.

## CONCLUSION

The literature on one-party rule highlights two mechanisms whereby ruling parties can increase autocrats' survival prospects: Ruling parties mobilize the masses and facilitate the bargaining process with the elites. However, many puzzles regarding the link between ruling

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<sup>4</sup>This part of the review was crucially influenced by a conversation with Adam Przeworski.

parties and authoritarian stability remain unsolved. To fully understand one-party regimes, a comprehensive theory of the conditions that foster the rise and fall of one-party regimes is needed.

Such a comprehensive theory will need to address four sets of questions. The first includes questions regarding the interaction between mass mobilization and elite bargaining. We need to understand how autocrats solve the guns-versus-votes dilemma and distribute resources between the elites and the masses so as to maximize their survival prospects.

The second set of questions relates to the origin of regimes of all types and of one-party regimes in particular. Transitions from one type of authoritarian regime into another deserve more scholarly attention. Moreover, uncovering the conditions that foster the establishment or the collapse of one-party regimes will

enable scholars to fully understand why one-party regimes emerge and why they are more stable than are other forms of authoritarianism.

The third set of questions relates to the relationship between democracy and one-party rule and the variation among party regimes in this context. Do elections under authoritarianism promote democratization or instead foster authoritarian stability? Why are dominant-party regimes more likely to transform to democracy than single-party regimes?

The fourth and last set of questions addresses the role played by international and geopolitical forces in authoritarian policy making and in regime transitions. We need a deeper understating of the global forces that influence the policy decisions made by one-party autocrats and the stability of their regimes, as well as a deeper understanding of the interaction between these forces and domestic forces.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Bob Bates, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, Yair Livne, and one anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments.

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