Authoritarianism, Elections, Democracy?

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The demand for democracy is a pervasive feature of contemporary political discourse. It is a compelling demand, for citizens and elites who rally beneath the banner of "democracy" and for political scientists who study the ways citizens and elites rally beneath banners in order to mobilize, seek, and contest political power. The force of this demand was captured by the cover of our June 2011 issue, which featured a wall in Egypt's Tahrir Square covered with graffiti stating that "Mubarak must go" and calling for "freedom" and "democracy."

The Arab Spring that first broke out in Tunisia at the very end of 2010, and quickly spread like wildfire throughout many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, underscored the fragility of authoritarian regimes and the power of democratic demands to open up political space to robust political competition. The call for free and fair elections was a central demand of these movements. And in the principal sites of the Spring, Tunisia and Egypt, dictators were deposed, competitive elections were held, and new elected governments were installed. But the jury is still out on the consequences of these developments for the course of further democratization. In Egypt, for example, the opening of political space seems clearly to have favored Islamist movements and parties whose commitment to pluralistic democracy remains in question. More importantly, these newly empowered political groupings confront entrenched elites, especially in the military, who are deeply implicated in the old order and suspicious of calls for more democratic governance.

These events underscore the complex relationship between competitive elections and democracy. These complexities have long been understood by political scientists. At least since works such as Robert Dahl's *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1953) and *Polyarchy* (1972), we have known that it is not the mere existence of elections but a certain *threshold of competitiveness* that defines a liberal democracy; that different kinds of electoral institutions structure voting processes in very different ways (the focus of 2011 APSA President Bing Powell's Task Force, whose report we will feature in a future issue); and that competitive elections translate into meaningful democracy only when key centers of power are subject to the electoral process and are not insulated from it or dominating over it. In these ways, and in others, political science scholarship has underscored that, appearances to the contrary, the connections between elections and democracy are far from straightforward. In recent years, as scholars have sought to make sense of the uncertain and disappointing "transitions to democracy" that have occurred in many places subject to the "third wave" of democratization, these insights have been extended by the development of a substantial research agenda centered on the dynamics of authoritarian resilience. These dynamics are central to the first three of this issue's research articles and to many of the book reviews featured in our special review section on "Authoritarianism, Elections, and Democracy."

One of the most important lines of inquiry has focused on the role of elections in sustaining a new, "hybrid" form of regime called "competitive authoritarianism." Steven R. Levitsky and Lucan A. Way have been important contributors to this line of inquiry, and their book *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2010) was the subject of a Critical Dialogue in our June 2011 issue (in dialogue with Dan Slater's *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* [Cambridge, 2010], another important contribution to the scholarship on authoritarianism). In "Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability," Levitsky and Way further develop their approach to analyzing the political dynamics of competitive authoritarianism. Building on the work of Barbara Geddes and others, who have argued that single party regimes are more stable than military regimes or personalistic dictatorships, they argue that "the key to durable authoritarianism is not the existence of ruling parties *per se,* but rather the character of those parties." Whereas "recent scholarship on authoritarianism suggests that ruling parties enhance elite cohesion—and consequently, regime durability—by providing institutionalized channels for elites to advance their careers and access the spoils of power," they argue that "the identities, norms, and organizational structures forged during periods of *sustained, violent, and ideologically-driven conflict* are a critical source of cohesion—and durability—in party-based authoritarian regimes. Although origins in violent struggle hardly eliminate intra-party conflict, they raise the cost of defection and provide leaders with additional (nonmaterial) resources that can be critical to maintaining unity

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and discipline, even when a crisis threatens the party's hold on power. Hence, where ruling parties combine mechanisms of patronage distribution with the strong identities, solidarity ties, and discipline generated by violent origins, regimes should be most durable." Levitsky and Way support this claim through case studies of four post-Cold War African regimes. As they write, "whereas ruling parties in Kenya and Zambia were organized almost exclusively around patronage, those in Mozambique and Zimbabwe were liberation parties that came to power via violent struggle. This difference is critical to explaining diverging post-Cold War regime outcomes: whereas ruling parties in Zambia and Kenya imploded and eventually lost power in the face of crises, those in Mozambique and Zimbabwe remained intact and regimes survived." As they make clear, it is the combination of patronage and ideological mobilization that makes such regimes "more disciplined, less prone to defection, and more capable of repression in the face of crisis." Our Critical Dialogue between Wendy Pearlman and Sharon Erickson Nepstad on violent resistance movements and their limits nicely complements this discussion.

Barbara Junisbai's "Improbable but Potentially Pivotal Oppositions: Privatization, Capitalists, and Political Contestation in the Post-Soviet Autocracies" turns attention to the resilience of authoritarianism in post-Soviet Eurasia. Junisbai focuses on the mechanisms that tie private capitalists to authoritarian regimes, making them "improbable democrats" who typically compete for influence at the margins of authority rather than full-blooded democrats. Combining quantitative data on privatization and political pluralism in all 12 post-Soviet countries with original qualitative data on opposition movements in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan from the early 1990s to the present, Junisbai demonstrates that "post-Soviet capitalists are, in fact, rarely willing to publicly oppose autocrats or to support pro-democracy causes." Drawing heavily "on the experiences and narratives of opposition activists, regime supporters, business owners, and experts," she points to "the complex entwinement of politics and economics known throughout the region as *reiderstvo,* from the English 'to raid,' which involves the hostile takeover or 'raiding' of private property. An understanding of *reiderstvo* helps elucidate the reasons why business actors across the region should be conceived of as improbable opponents of authoritarian rule at best, as well as the rare occasions when they have transformed from unlikely champions of democracy to vocal opposition figures."

While Levitsky and Way insist on the insufficiency of patronage and predation as sources of authoritarian power, Junisbai maintains that, at least in post-Soviet Eurasia, authoritarian elites can typically use their control over weak property rights and rent-seeking to sustain their power. At the same time, she also acknowledges that this form of power is uncertain and is always in danger of overreaching, and in such situations it is "the primacy of politics" rather than simple material interests that will determine whether or not private sector actors defect from the regime. (Rebekah K. Tromble's review of Scott Radnitz's *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* centers on a similar set of dynamics). In emphasizing this primacy of politics, and in underscoring the extent to which it centers on the state's repressive capacities, Junisbai and Levistky and Way have much in common.

The primacy of politics is also at the heart of Kurt Weyland's "The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?" But whereas both Levitsky and Way and Junisbai focus largely on inter-elite dynamics, Weyland focuses on the importance of ideological "heuristics" that embolden opposition activists and their mass followers into premature acts of rebellion whose feedback effects often paradoxically strengthen authoritarian regimes. Echoing Mancur Olson, Weyland analyzes a "logic of collective action." But, drawing on the work of Timur Kuran, his account of this logic centers not on the constraining force of rational calculation but on those cognitive shortcuts that propel people into action in ways that elude standard accounts of rational action. Weyland proceeds from an account of the striking similarities between the Arab Spring and the 1848 "Springtime of Nations". As he states, "these two riptides—far apart in world-historical time—share important features, especially the speed and breadth of horizontal diffusion. The two contagion processes also achieved similar outcomes, namely a low rate of successful advances toward political liberalism and democracy. As the exalted hopes of many revolutionary crowds in 1848 were soon extinguished by resurgent princes, a similar cycle of euphoria and disappointment has played out so far in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) from 2011 onward." After considering the strengths but also limits of conventional approaches—common cause explanations, external influence explanations, and demonstration and contagion effect explanations—Weyland focuses attention on inferential heuristics. As he writes, "In fact, emulative protesters in 1848 and 2011 deviated clearly from rational standards in their information processing and decision-making, as I document below for the Arab Spring and showed in my earlier investigation of the nineteenth-century riptide. Instead of basing their risky challenges against brutal autocrats on reasonably solid, balanced information, protesters were captivated by the precedent event and often acted upon the first available scraps of news, even unfounded rumors. Moreover, they did not assess the similarities and differences between the precedent and the situation facing them with any care, but jumped to the conclusion that these power constellations were equivalent; therefore they believed rather unthinkingly that they could replicate the initial success." As Weyland argues, such heuristics are empowering. But they can also promote overreaching: "These shortcuts focus attention on some aspects while

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filtering out others, and they draw conclusions in simple and quick, yet not fully logical, ways; they therefore risk creating distortions and biases. While these heuristics allow people to react to decisional opportunities and challenges and avoid overload and paralysis, they can easily lead to mistakes and failures, especially in complex, rapidly shifting situations." Weyland himself notes that the jury is still out on the effects of the Arab Spring. But his account clearly leans toward the pessimistic, and suggests, perhaps ironically, that the social psychology of revolt is likely to reproduce authoritarian domination (when I first sat down to draft this demonstrators were storming US diplomatic facilities in Benghazi [Libya], Cairo [Egypt], and Sanaa [Yemen], in protest of an anti-Islamic film that has gone viral online—and Weyland's article offers one very interesting perspective on these developments).

This issue's two book review essays also center on the theme of the sources of authoritarianism.

Scott Mainwaring's "From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism: Hugo Chávez and Venezuelan Politics" is a theoretically rich account of the dynamics of *Chavismo* in Venezuela. The cover of our December 2010 issue featured an unattended microphone at one of the 34 radio stations shut down by the Chávez government in August 2009 for "operating illegally." The anti-liberal and sometimes repressive dimensions of the Chávez regime are major themes of Mainwaring's essay. But equally important are the roles of populism, distributive politics, and the role of the state in both filling the vacuum created by the breakdown of the party system and incorporating political parties in a competitive authoritarian system. As Mainwaring writes, "Chávez is the most prominent, influential, and polarizing Latin American political leader to come on the scene since Fidel Castro in 1959. He brought about huge changes in his country's political system and economy; has governed for a long time (since 1999); has inspired like-minded political leaders to attempt far-reaching changes in a few other countries of Latin America; and has also provoked deep concern in the Venezuelan opposition, in some other Latin American countries, and in the United States." His review essay both analyzes the Chávez regime and addresses what the Venezuelan case tells us more broadly about the gradual "erosion of democracy and [the] consolidation of competitive authoritarianism." In developing these themes, Mainwaring explicitly addresses the work of Levitsky and Way, building upon their account of competitive authoritarianism, and yet also noting that "the Venezuelan experience under Chávez runs counter to Levitsky and Way's generally sound argument that it is difficult to consolidate competitive authoritarianism in the Western Hemisphere because of high linkage to the United States."

Kathryn Stoner's "Whither Russia? Autocracy Is Here for Now, But Is It Here to Stay?" discusses five new books dealing with Russia's transition and raises a broader set of questions about the nature of "Putinism" and the extent to which it represents not simply a form of competitive authoritarianism but a new form of Russian autocracy. Like Stephen Hanson's review essay for us five years ago ("Rationality, Structure, and Agency in Post-Soviet Russian Democratization," *Perspectives on Politics* 5[4]:793–802), Stoner's piece centers on the complex interrelationship among historical legacies, inherited institutional constraints and contingent political choices that has brought Russia to the current moment, marked by a wave of repression and the return to the Presidency of Vladimir Putin. Stoner's conclusion is worth quoting at length: "Russia's developmental problems today are essentially the same as those of 1991—a state with uncertain abilities to deliver public goods and elite competition aimed at maximizing private gain at the expense of the public good. Politically, though, Russia under Putin has evolved ever further away from the promise of democratization of the 1990s. Indeed, by Putin's second term as President (2000–2004) significant rollbacks of electoral and associational rights had been instituted, and according to most metrics, Russia could no longer be considered a democracy at all. Despite the liberalizing rhetoric of Putin's presidential successor (and predecessor) and protégé, [Dmitri] Medvedev (2004–2008), Russia has come to resemble even more closely the autocratic regimes of Central Asia than the consolidated democracies of Eastern Europe that joined the European Union since the collapse of communism. Indeed, Freedom House now classifies Russia in the same 'non-free' category occupied by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan." At the same time, Stoner acknowledges what Junisbai, following Sheri Berman, calls "the primacy of politics," noting that "none of this bodes well for Russia's future development as a democracy, but neither do these findings suggest that Putin's autocracy is necessarily here to stay."

Our special book review section includes a wide range of books that speak meaningfully to the broad theme of the complex relations among authoritarianism, elections, and democracy.

Eric Davis's review of Joseph Sassoon's *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* and Olena Nikolayenko's review of Andrew Wilson's *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* analyze the dynamics of two of the most durable (and notorious) authoritarian regimes in recent history. Florian Bieber's extended review offers a more comparative discussion of post-Soviet authoritarianism, with a focus on the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia/Serbia, and on the impact of the wars of Yugoslavian succession on the political climate in post-Soviet Europe. The reviews by Bieber, Merike Blofield, Sabine Lang, Pierre M. Atlas, and Ami Pedahzur deal, in different ways, with the connections among nationalism, gender, and authoritarian mobilization. And Wolfgang Merkel's extended review broadly addresses the dynamics of

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democratization that render authoritarian regimes vulnerable to contestation.

If the above-mentioned reviews deal with the authoritarianism-parties-elections connection—how different authoritarian regimes repress parties and elections or incorporate parties and elections or draw on other forms of popular mobilization—a number of other book reviews deal with the parties-elections-representation connection in broadly *democratic* contexts.

Robert Huckfeldt's review of Russell J. Dalton and Christopher J. Anderson's *Citizens, Context, and Choice: How Context Shapes Citizens' Electoral Choices*; Ian S. Lustick's review of Michael Laver and Ernest Sergenti's *Party Competition: An Agent-Based Model*; Kenneth A. Shepsle's review of Jonathan Bendor, Daniel Diermeier, David A. Siegel and Michael M. Ting's *A Behavioral Theory of Elections;* and J.S. Maloy's review of Craig T. Borowiak's *Accountability and Democracy: The Pitfalls and Promise of Popular Control* discuss the role of political parties in both structuring and reflecting voter choice (a theme also raised by two research articles in our September issue: Kathleen Bawn et al.'s "A Theory of Political Parties" and Lisa Disch's "Democratic Representation and the Constituency Paradox"). Irfan Nooruddin's review of Eric C.C. Chang, Mark Andreas Kayser, Drew A. Linzer, and Ronald Rogowski's *Electoral Systems and the Balance of Consumer-Producer Power,* and Kelly Blidook's double-review of Christopher J. Kam's *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics* and Lanny W. Martin and Georg Vanberg's *Parliaments and Coalitions: The Role of Legislative Institutions in Multiparty Governance* also address the ways political institutions structure representation. The reviews by Michele P. Claibourn, Fabrice Lehoucq, Richard Davis, and Keena Lipsitz treat these broad questions in an American context, while Charles H. Blake's double review considers them in a comparative Latin American context.

With this issue's book symposium we turn our attention from the basic structure of the state—whether authoritarian, competitive authoritarian, or democratic—to ways that the policy regimes of even democratic states can sustain authoritarian relationships. In *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race,* Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford F. Schram analyze recent changes in US welfare policy as reflections of broader transformations of the "governance" of poverty, arguing that these transformations represent a new form of "neoliberal paternalism" in which race plays a central role. In their view, if one dimension of this "neoliberalism" is the dramatic retrenchment of "the social safety net," another is the equally dramatic rise of what some critics have called "the prison-industrial complex" in the US. The book raises important questions about US politics, and our symposium features five writers—Peter J. Boettke, Rose Ernst, Russell L. Hanson, Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Lawrence M. Mead—who offer very different assessments of the book's arguments.

I turn, finally, to Amel Ahmed and Rudra Sil's important article, "When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism—or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research." I mention this piece last in part because, as a contribution primarily to the broad field of methodology, it works at something of a tangent to the other pieces in this issue. But I also discuss it here because its argument is so congruent with aspects of this journal's editorial mission and philosophy, and briefly discussing it allows me to reiterate this mission and philosophy. Ahmed and Sil proceed from a consideration of the advantages but also the drawbacks of what seems to be a growing orthodoxy within political science that "mixed method research" (MMR) is the wave of the future. Noting that "the uncritical acceptance of MMR as best practice may lead to a new form of method-driven research while marginalizing certain forms of SMR and forfeiting the distinctive benefits these may have to offer," they discuss a number of books that exemplify the limits of mixed methods and then discuss examples of excellent work that adheres more or less to a single method. Their basic point is worth quoting at length: "Thus, if there is a disciplinary 'best practice,' it is likely to be found not in the uniform adoption of MMR or of any given methodological approach, but in ongoing dialogue among scholars employing different methods and being able to translate concepts to make them intelligible to individuals approaching the same question from different perspectives. In this process, MMR is best thought of not as a magic bullet for overcoming trade-offs across methods, but rather as a valuable addition within a diverse repertoire of methodological approaches, one that comes with its own trade-offs."

The "ongoing dialogue" among scholars that Ahmed and Sil endorse is the primary purpose of this journal. Our goal is to review and publish the very best research and writing in political science that is broadly intelligible, alive to the diverse perspectives that constitute our discipline, and generally dialogic in approach. Such work articulates arguments, mobilizes evidence, and validates theories with conviction, challenging previous work and presenting its own arguments and findings as better, truer, more valuable, and more valid. But it is alive to the ongoing importance of scholarly conjecture and refutation as ways of developing knowledge and as ways of seeking understanding. In order for such work to flourish, there must be venues in which it can flourish. We at *Perspectives on Politics* believe that the most important of these venues are publications like this one. And so we are committed to continuing to develop and improve this journal as **a political science public sphere.** Our work can thrive only with the involvement of our colleagues—you—who are our authors, our reviewers, our readers, and our audience, ideal and actual. We are eager to receive more of your excellent work and welcome your participation.

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