Dictators and Rebellious Civilians

András Bozóki

The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics. By Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith. New York: Public Affairs Books, 2011. 352p. $27.99 cloth, $17.99 paper.

Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries. By Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 396p. $95.00 cloth, $30.00 paper.

Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. By Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. 320p. $29.50 cloth, $22.00 paper.

The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy. By William J. Dobson. New York: Anchor Books, 2012. 352p. $28.95 cloth, $16.00 paper.

Thanks to research conducted in the past few years, our understanding has been significantly expanded concerning democracy and authoritarian regimes, as well as the means of both destroying and rebuilding democratic institutions. While there is a clear link between a developed economy and democracy, the relationship is not self-evident in all cases. Also, economic growth is not conducive to the development of democracy under all circumstances, especially when the distribution of wealth is not considered fair by all citizens. In and of itself an election, even a competitive one—long considered a democratic minimum—does not guarantee the survival of a democracy, as strongmen have learned how to run an authoritarian system behind an electoral veil. The majority of autocratic leaders use the concept of democracy as a screen for building a political regime antithetical to the spirit and practice of a real democracy. Autocrats adopt a number of democratic institutions only to subvert their original purposes. While they pose as democrats, instead of a liberal democracy they initially organize a *majoritarian* democracy, followed by an *illiberal* democracy that ignores human rights. This is but one step away from an autocratic turning point, the rejection of all democratic principles. "Potemkin democracies" may even hold (limited) open elections organized so that the outcome will not threaten the foundations of the existing regime.

The books discussed here all call attention to the fact that a wide gray zone has recently opened up between democracy and dictatorship, a zone occupied by hybrid or mixed regimes.[1] Both the autocratic leader and the democratic opposition try to use the narrow public arena existing in these systems to their own advantage; that is, political struggle is defined in terms of competing system alternatives. Not only democrats from various countries but also dictators can learn from each other.[2] The "domino effect" often seen in international politics may work in two ways.[3] In many cases, well-established democratic institutions do not offer a guarantee against the rise of strongmen when such leaders use the system's weaknesses in bad faith. Just as there are "best practices" for the upholding and expanding of a democratic system, there are also those for its destabilization, and today efforts to spread these destructive practices are seen on a global scale.

At the same time, new forms of resistance against autocratic leaders bent on stifling democracy have emerged, and these methods of protest have assumed a global scale as well. Historical research has demonstrated that in most cases, nonviolent civil resistance is significantly more effective than armed confrontation.[4] Civil opposition groups have at their disposal a wide range of new communication technologies to spread their messages and organize demonstrations, though these methods can be used with equal effectiveness by those in power.[5] Both upholding and overturning the powers that be demand organizational and logistical techniques whose acquisition requires professional skills on the part of stakeholders.

The policy whereby Western powers support democratic forces by directly pressuring oppressive states is becoming less and less viable.[6] Not surprisingly, in the past few years a more indirect approach, that is, international support for civic organizations via the transfer of various techniques facilitating resistance and mobilization, has gained increasing importance. The acquisition of know-how aimed at restoring democracy requires the same learning curve as that required for regime maintenance. The authors of the books under review warn that

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doi:10.1017/S1537592713002053
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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

overwhelming popular frustration notwithstanding, dictators may hold on to power for a long time if they manage to rechannel their resources from a wide range of social groups posing no direct threat to the few actors holding the key to their power. By earning the loyalty of the few needed to maintain their grip on power, dictators may control the discontent of many, especially when the opposition is divided or when those in power manage to split opposition forces. At the same time, dedicated and creative civil oppositions can sometimes organize the counterpower to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of dictators, to topple their regimes, and sometimes even to lay the foundations for a process of democratization.

In what follows, I discuss each of the books under review, highlighting common themes and insights. I then conclude with some reflections on the relevance of their approaches to the situation I know best—the current crisis of Hungarian democracy.

1. The Logic of Authoritarian Power

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith's best-seller, *The Dictator's Handbook,* describes the rules for gaining and keeping power. According to the authors, autocratic methods can be applied not only in a dictatorial system but in a democracy as well because these methods govern politics in general, independent of regime type. Moreover, in many respects, autocratic leaders are more successful than democrats because they are better at extending their hold on power. The book follows the precepts of the so-called realist school traced to Machiavelli. Political realism starts with the premise that one cannot afford to see the world, and especially people, in terms of ideals; instead, they must be observed and understood the way they "actually are."[7] Bueno de Mesquita and Smith take it as self-evident that individuals are capable of recognizing their vested interests and that whether in positions of power, aspiring to power, or even as voters, they follow those interests. Their book rests on the foundation of rational choice theory, maintaining that the world of politics is based primarily on rational calculations performed by "political entrepreneurs." It is well known that this approach ignores the fact that politics is not limited to the world of reason and, instead, is built on emotions, passions, identities, and conflicting values where accident and fortune may also enter the picture.[8] And these factors cannot be grasped even by the most charismatic manipulator.

Despite its adoption of the rational choice framework, the book is fun to read, using satire to great effect. The authors' language is deliberately provocative, leaving the reader to make his or her own moral judgment.

The book's central idea is the theory of the *selectorate,* the idea that the key to understanding any society is the identification of that subset of the general populace who have the power to influence political developments and whose interests thus lie at the heart of the strategizing of political elites. In many political systems, whether liberal democratic or competitive authoritarian, the large percentage of citizens who make up the electorate can be regarded as nominal selectors. But because many of these citizens do not go to the polls on a regular basis, they are thus best understood as merely nominal rather than as *genuine* selectors. And indeed, the number of nonparticipant, passive citizens is not smaller in a democracy than in a dictatorship. This gives an opportunity for power-seeking leaders to do their best to keep potential opposition voters at home by demobilizing society. Of course, this does not eliminate the differences between the democratic and authoritarian political systems. For in a democracy, even those who did not cast their vote enjoy legal equality and have certain rights, while in a dictatorship, legal and political accountability hardly exists, and so rules do not necessarily apply even to those legitimizing the nondemocratic system with their vote.

The theory of the selectorate maintains that political leaders will apply administrative and political tools to discriminate between nominal and genuine selectors so as to leave their supporters in a stronger position. These tools include the rewriting of election law and the redrawing of electoral districts (gerrymandering), as well as practices that aim to motivate supporters and demobilize others. If the political leader manages to push these measures through, he faces the next political task: creating a winning coalition among genuine selectors. In a democracy, this means a simple majority of those casting their ballot at the polls. In theory, a winning coalition may consist of relatively few voters, provided the others are kept from casting their vote and the election system does not stipulate a statutory minimum turnout.

According to the authors' game-theoretical approach, a winning coalition is made up of two groups: One group is described as *essentials* and the other as *influentials*. Essentials are people without whom power cannot be gained and maintained. Of course, members of this circle can be replaced over time. There are a number of historical examples showing that different people may be needed in order to gain and to keep power. For instance, the inner circle of Russian Bolsheviks led by Lenin was full of intellectuals (Trotsky, Bukharin, and others), while the single-party state run by Stalin was staffed by party bureaucrats. Individuals may come and go, but a cadre of people essential for maintaining political power remains in place.[9] It may include financiers, secret service agents, police and military officers, personal confidants, business moguls, and the like. In this environment, position and unconditional loyalty to the political leader are equally crucial. Compared to these essentials, the circle of influentials is wider. They are the ones capable of delivering public support needed for a winning coalition, including union and church leaders, as well as the leaders of ethnic groups. Influentials are important. But they are not *essential*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bueno de Mesquita and Smith advise dictators to keep the winning coalition as small as possible, for the smaller the coalition, the fewer people who must be controlled at a lower cost. At the same time, the number of nominal selectors must be kept as high as possible, for in this way, dispensable selectors can be easily replaced. The dictator is also advised to control the flow of revenues; it is always useful if the leader decides who has access to resources rather than letting everyone get close to the pork barrel. The leader may find it convenient to impoverish the majority of the population even as he enriches supporters. To keep their loyalty, the dictator must pay off key benefactors. He should never forget that his close supporters would prefer to take his place than to remain in their current positions. However, in their rivalry, the dictator has the advantage of knowing the source of funds, while the others lack that information. According to the authors, the dictator has a vested interest in providing good public, general education while simultaneously suppressing higher education. This creates a vast pool of well-trained skilled workers serving the regime, while the education system as a whole is prevented from generating a political opposition. In other words, a large number of educated and intellectual people pose a threat to dictators. On the other hand, starving people do not have the energy to turn against their oppressor, although disaffected members of a small coalition may create trouble. And so on.

At the same time, *The Dictator's Handbook* does not suggest that the rules described here apply exclusively to underdeveloped countries run by dictators. Although the authors take most of their examples from the Third World, they emphasize that instead of different political systems, they are more concerned with the intrinsic nature of politics; that is, they believe that despots and leaders of democracies essentially follow the same principles. Democratic leaders *also* want to gain and hold power. None of them is eager to surrender the leading position. In short, if democrats hope to preserve their position, they must be more innovative than their authoritarian colleagues because, due to the more inclusive nature of the system, they cannot reduce the percentage of active voters to a minimum.

Just as the citizens of a democracy exhibit a great variety, the same can be said about their leaders. They are neither good nor bad by nature; they are opportunists and fallible, ready to promote good or evil causes, as the case may be. In a democracy, the arbitrary rule of political leaders is checked by institutions developed by consensus. Reading Bueno de Mesquita and Smith's book, one arrives at the indirect conclusion that in general, successful countries are founded on a democratic system guaranteeing broad representation and free elections. In these countries, the markets are controlled but rarely strangled by direct state intervention, and they have reliable institutional systems respecting contractual agreements. In contrast, in countries with a highly centralized system, the autocratic leader holds on to power with the assistance of a coterie of loyal followers, with the country's economic and social decline but a matter of time. In such a system, the leader shapes the electoral system to make sure that his power is secured with the smallest electorate that can be paid off with relative ease.

An autocratic leader rising to the top through the democratic process or a violent coup d'etat rewrites the constitution to increase his chances for reelection and curtail the participation of the opposition in the legislative process and at the polls. In some special cases, where the president can no longer be reelected, the constitution is amended so as to allow politicians to hold on to power by switching presidential and prime ministerial positions, as we have seen in Russia, in Argentina, and in a number of African and Latin American countries. The branches of government are not separated, and the wheels of power are essentially used by the leader and his clique to pass measures to serve the perpetuation of their own power, and to bully and paralyze the opposition. They pay generously for services rendered by the heads of various agencies and government officials and use power politics whenever necessary. Desertion by officials in the lower echelons of power is relatively rare, as these individuals are typically prone to corruption and blackmailing. The freedom of contracts and the constitutional order are heavily compromised, and althrough ties of family and friendship, public orders (and private resources, whenever possible) are monopolized by a group of businesspeople closely affiliated with a small political elite.

To further their objectives, those with dictatorial power make effective use of official and legislative goodwill and cooperation emanating from the political structure. A system of this kind is kept afloat by corruption. Blatant government intervention, the frivolous use of taxes for political ends, the rejection of contractual terms, the passage of legislation with retroactive effect, and all the resources available to the government serve to corrupt a narrow group of voters needed to secure reelection and increase the personal wealth of those in power. In this system, resources are not put at the service of economic growth, and funds for culture and social programs dry up. Society slides into chaos, vulnerable groups fall further behind, and poverty becomes endemic, a process that eventually engulfs even the most privileged segments of society.

The *Dictator's Handbook* is an unusual book because its enjoyable style stands in sharp contrast to its pessimistic, provocative content. Perhaps this was the exact intention of the authors—to demonstrate the wide gap between political ideals and practices, and the often diabolic nature of politics.

2. Defeating Dictators

The struggle against dictators, while not easy, is also not hopeless. The reader will be reassured of this by Valerie

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bunce and Sharon Wolchik's excellent *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries,* which enriches the international literature of political science by investigating hitherto neglected issues. Among the postcommunist regimes emerging in the past 20 years, one can find democracies (like the new member states of the European Union), and dictatorships (like Russia, Belarus, or Azerbaijan), but also a number of mixed regimes (Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and others). Typically, in the first phase of democratic transition, there is an admixture of democratic and autocratic features.[10] As reform is never an irreversible process, in some cases countries previously considered democratic may gradually adopt the practices of competitive authoritarian regimes. For these countries, Bunce and Wolchik apply the term *mixed regime* (similar to *hybrid regime* discussed in the academic literature). Through specific examples, the authors investigate ways to throw off leaders with dictatorial tendencies in postcommunist mixed regimes who, when given the opportunity to stay in power, may take the system down the road of autocracy.

The authors consider the institution of national elections as an opportunity whereby negative tendencies can be stopped and in many cases reversed. As opposed to the concept of *electoral revolution* (which holds out the prospect of a complete break with the previous era, yet rarely fulfills that promise), they introduce the concept of *democratizing elections*. Linking the concepts of revolution and election leads to an impasse because it loads the process with normative expectations, not to mention that in most cases, no genuine revolution takes place. While elections may represent a milestone in a country's transformation—the authors call such phenomena *breakthrough elections*—even such breakthroughs cannot be described as revolutions.

Democratizing elections may reach their objective, that is, toppling the authoritarian leader and his party, without apparent electoral precedents and in a single step, as demonstrated by the examples of Slovakia (1998) and Croatia (1999). In Slovakia, the international community also played an important role in removing Vladimir Meciar after four years in power.[11] Even though Meciar had the strongest party behind him, a broad coalition of all the democratic forces lifted to power Mikulás Dzurinda, who, between 1998 and 2006, oversaw Slovakia's accession to the EU and became the most successful premier in the history of the country. Croatia represents the exception, in the sense that there was no need to remove the nationalist "nation builder," Franjo Tudjman, from office because he died in 1999 while still president. And then there are cases where a democratizing election is the result of popular protest sparked by a stolen election. These may be described as repeat elections whereby a failed previous election is "rectified" (e.g., Ukraine, 2004).[12]

A paradigmatic breakthrough occurred in Yugoslavia in 2000, and Bunce and Wolchik provide a thrilling account. For a long time, the country's opposition led an all but hopeless struggle to remove President Slobodan Milosevic. As a true opportunist, Milosevic mixed socialist and nationalist ideologies and for years managed to marginalize his nationalist opposition, presenting himself as the "lesser of two evils."[13] He supported the Bosnian Serbs' war with the jingoistic promise of "Greater Serbia," and then at the time of the 1995 Dayton Agreement he presented himself as a pragmatic "peacemaker." To achieve peace in the Balkans, the Clinton administration had no option but to accept him as a negotiating partner. For a time, he was similarly successful in exploiting the mutiny in Kosovo to increase support for his policies in Serbia. Neither the country's rapidly declining economy in the face of international economic sanctions nor NATO's 1999 aerial bombing campaign could shake his hold on power. The democratic opposition was divided and its sway was concentrated primarily in the capital. Milosevic skilfully navigated between his radical nationalist and democratic oppositions, going so far as to allow Belgrade to come under the control of a democratic opposition politician (Zoran Djindjic). Concurrently, with the manipulation of the election process he ensured that the majority of the population living outside the capital would keep him in power. Although he was a dictator, his system showed a closer resemblance to a mixed regime than to a classic dictatorship, featuring competition, elections, freedom of speech, and elements of a multiparty system—a good example of what Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way have called "competitive authoritarianism."[14]

In 1996–97 the *Zajedno* (Together) movement opposed to Milosevic failed due to a fractured opposition. However, the *Otpor* (Resistance) movement, initiated for the most part by young people, managed to overcome disunity and achieve a democratic breakthrough in 2000. (In addition to the account of Bunce and Wolchik, interested readers should view the 2002 documentary film *Bringing Down a Dictator,* produced by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict). Using the categories established by Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, one can conclude that for a long time, the opposition failed to turn Milosevic's dwindling public support to its own advantage because the dictator made sure to consolidate the position of the *essentials* closely allied to him. After some intriguing developments in Yugoslavia, Milosevic took an increasingly self-confident view of elections, as he came to see them as an opportunity to reinforce his "democratic" legitimation. The myth that dictators are afraid of elections was disproved repeatedly; Milosevic managed to win every election up until 2000. (This path has been repeated in Venezuela, where Hugo Chavez took every opportunity to consolidate his power by announcing elections and referendums under his own terms).[15] However, in 2000, Milosevic committed a number of cardinal mistakes. His police took increasingly brutal action

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against demonstrators, which contributed to the consolidation of opposition forces. He underestimated the opposition's mobilizing ability and the fact that Otpor became the catalyst for an opposition alliance. He also ignored a shift in U.S. foreign policy: Instead of a peacemaker, he came to be viewed by the United States as an obstacle to democracy. As a result, the opposition received increasing international material, logistical, and strategic assistance. By the autumn of 2000, the success of a reenergized opposition gave a stunning demonstration that autocratic leaders can be removed from power through nonviolent means. This became all the more relevant when the opposition know-how leading to electoral victories in Yugoslavia was rapidly adopted in Georgia, Ukraine, and other postcommunist countries.[16]

Bunce and Wolchik do more than carefully analyze democratizing elections. They also closely examine the events leading up to such elections and the divergent trajectories that follow them, with a special focus on the international diffusion of democratic experiences. Their book begins with a broad theoretical introduction, followed by comparative case studies of elections that ended in a democratic breakthrough (Slovakia, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan) and those that failed to do so (Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia). The failed cases share a common feature: Despite a unified opposition, external democratic assistance was half-hearted and ineffective, and the authoritarian regime managed to mobilize considerable resources to guarantee its own survival. In Armenia, instead of promoting democratizing elections, U.S. foreign policy focused on gradual change. In Azerbaijan, the regime managed to cut off local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from potential foreign supporters. In Belarus, a transnational effort to promote democracy was successfully countered by Russia's similarly committed campaign aimed at preserving the dictatorial Lukashenka regime. In the third part of the book, the authors provide a detailed comparative analysis of varied election results, election models, the global impact of democratizing elections, various regime trajectories following elections, and, finally, the opportunities and limits of U.S. democracy-building practices.

These authors pay more attention than any other scholars of whom I am aware to the role played by civil society, its institutions, organization, and unity. Their arguments dealing with the success of political movements fighting the Serb Milosevic, and their summary of the achievements and global diffusion of these movements, are among the most intriguing parts of *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. Referring to a large number of empirical analyses and to their own interviews with local civic leaders, the authors claim that in central Europe, NGOs, think tanks, and movements played a crucial role in organizing resistance,[17] and that civic movements in post-Soviet dictatorships and mixed regimes committed to democracy have tried to adopt this model. In their years of research, Bunce and Wolchik spent an enormous amount of time conducting fieldwork in the region. Aside from organizing seven roundtable discussions and inviting politicians and researchers, they conducted more than 200 personal interviews with civic opposition activists, local intellectuals shaping public opinion, and experts and politicians in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Belarus, Georgia, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Serbia, and Ukraine. Of all the recent work dealing with the problems facing postcommunist regimes, this work stands out for its exemplary combination of original theoretical ideas and wide-ranging empirical research.

3. The Strategic Logic of Civil Resistance

Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan's *Why Civil Resistance Works* offers a convincing analysis of the reasons that nonviolent resistance campaigns can bring down dictatorships more effectively than violent ones. In their Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) data set, the authors investigate 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns between 1900 and 2006. In their view the higher success rate of nonviolent action is explained by the fact that compared to classic coup d'états, violent revolts, and revolutions, nonviolence lowers the cost of joining and increases the odds of a positive outcome. Those joining radical movements have two major objectives: to guarantee their own survival and to ensure the success of the movement. Aside from some extreme cases, when supporters join a movement they have no desire to die and strongly hope to realize movement objectives.

A nonviolent campaign offers the means to those ends. When people believe the risk of participation is negligible, the movement has the potential to build a broad-based social coalition opposing incumbent power holders. The more diversified the composition of the movement, the greater the number of society segments with diverse views that can be addressed. A *diverse coalition* has a better chance of reaching prominent opinion leaders, groups, and organizations sympathetic to its cause. From Tocqueville to Charles Tilly, analysts have recognized the centrality of intellectuals and opinion leaders in the unfolding of a "revolutionary situation."[18] A crisis of legitimacy, in which opinion leaders change the public's loyalty from the regime to its opposition, can immeasurably boost the effectiveness of an opposition campaign and reduce the regime's options as it tries to stifle and isolate the initiative at its inception.

Chenoweth and Stephan are methodologically creative, and their work combines quantitative and qualitative analytical methods in useful ways. In almost all cases, they make an effort to look beyond statistical data and base their conclusions on deeper knowledge. For instance, they

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challenge the commonly held claim that nonviolent movements are always successful. What if nonviolent movements reach their goals because they are launched in countries where the regime is already on its last legs? If that were the case, there would be no causal relationship between nonviolent movements and the collapse of a regime, and at best, such movements would be nothing more than incidental to inevitable regime change. And the question may also be reversed: Is it possible that violent movements are more likely to fail because they face regimes where the possibility of (nonviolent) opposition has very little chance to succeed? To answer these questions, the authors make good use of both statistics and narrative analysis.

According to the standard academic literature on transitions, a peaceful transition from a totalitarian system to a democracy is unfeasible because the powers that be are unified in rejecting talks with the opposition and ready to use violence to snuff out all resistance. In such cases, violent resistance appears to have no alternative: If a dictator clings to power, he must be ousted by force. However, when a regime can be described as a "soft dictatorship" (with a divided leadership, a civic society with relative freedom of movement, where at some point the regime's former supporters are ready to turn against the elite and the loyalty of law-enforcement agencies starts to crack), there may be a chance for a peaceful transition through a nonviolent "velvet" revolution.[19] We have seen a number of examples, from Spain in the 1970s through Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1989.[20] According to this argument, a nonviolent movement may succeed only when a totalitarian regime first passes through post-totalitarian or autocratic stages. Structuralist theories assume a similar determinism. On this view, a society is ripe for revolution when the state and the regime merge seamlessly, that is, when the state does not offer legal guarantees to protect the majority from the oppression of the ruling elite but does just the opposite: represent the vested interests of the ruling class.[21] In many cases, the structuralist approach assumes that the success of an opposition movement depends on global factors. It underestimates the political culture of specific countries and ignores the contributions of opposition figures in bringing about change.[22]

Chenoweth and Stephan are skeptical as to the adequacy of structuralist and transitional theories, however. They question whether the nature of oppressive powers or other structuralist factors have any bearing on the success or failure of nonviolent campaigns. They come to the conclusion that revolutions and insurgencies are multi-actor and open-ended processes whereby appropriate strategic decisions taken by insurgents are crucial in fighting oppressive regimes. Their analysis rhymes with Charles Tilly's argument in his 1978 book, *From Mobilization to Revolution.* Tilly distinguishes between *revolutionary situation* and *revolutionary outcome,* and describes a revolutionary situation using the concept of *multiple sovereignty,* which subsumes the following components: 1) the appearance of contenders, 2) the adoption of alternative claims by a significant segment of the subject population, and 3) the repressive incapacity of the government. Yet Tilly insists that a "revolutionary situation" does not guarantee the success of the revolution itself. This comes to pass only if, along with "multiple sovereignty," a "revolutionary coalition" is established between challengers and members of the polity, and the revolutionary coalition controls a substantial segment of the armed forces.[23] In other words, a large part of the population and many opinion makers must side with insurgents, and the ruling elite must develop cracks in relation to the rebels. Chenoweth and Stephan's argument that loyalty shift is much more likely in a nonviolent than in a violent uprising represents a major contribution.

To support their arguments, the authors present four case studies of nonviolent movements that were preceded by failed violent uprisings. While two of those cases—the years of civil resistance campaigns leading to the Iranian Revolution (1977–79) and the Philippine People Power Movement (1983–86)—ended in success, the first Palestinian Intifada (1987–92) was a partial success, while the Burmese Revolution (1988–90) ended in defeat. Whereas participation in violent campaigns is limited to a narrow segment of the population—typically young men—nonviolent campaigns may mobilize hundreds of thousands and even millions, reaching out to students, women, intellectuals, and legal experts, as well as church and union leaders. Such a broad and diverse coalition may leave the oppressive regime few options for keeping things under control. It may also have a larger impact on the international community, encouraging international organizations to intensify their support for nonviolent struggle. The failure of nonviolent resistance in Burma is a test case supporting the authors' thesis: Since the insurgents made no effort to sow division among the military and intellectuals loyal to the regime, they failed to drive a wedge between the regime and its own social, political, and military base. There was no loyalty shift, and the ruling bloc remained intact; this, in turn, increased the cost of joining the movement for its sympathizers. The regime preserved its oppressive capacity, and it could not be offset by weak international support for the opposition. As international organizations found no effective means to intervene, a combination of all the factors delineated here led to the movement's demise.

Chenoweth and Stephan offer clear analyses and their conclusions are on the mark. The authors make no claim that nonviolent struggle leads to success in all cases. In fact, such struggle involves an uphill battle against great odds: Aside from the number and diversity of participants, international support, and the switched loyalty of

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former regime supporters, a resistance movement must also develop a set of flexible tactics. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* greatly contributes to the comparative analysis of local social movements and nonviolent resistance on a global scale.

4. Dictatorship and Democracy as Learning Experiences

Unlike the academic works treated in this essay, William J. Dobson's *The Dictator's Learning Curve* is a work of political journalism. Over a period of two years, the author visited a number of authoritarian regimes (China, Malaysia, Russia, Egypt, and Venezuela) to report on the salient actors and features of civic resistance. Dobson reports from the front line, making it clear how much civic courage, strategy, and technical innovation is needed to undermine increasingly sophisticated authoritarian leaders and regimes. He interviews a Russian opposition leader, an Egyptian soldier defecting to the insurgents, a former pro-Chávez Venezuelan politician, a prominent Chinese opposition figure, an American theoretician of nonviolent civic resistance, and a veteran of the Serbian opposition movement.

One of Dobson's major claims is that the success of antiestablishment groups cannot be described in general sociological terms, for the determining factor is whether opposition players have a good grasp of current developments, whether they can build a wide-based coalition and take action at the appropriate time. The author notes that in the past decade, the number of democracies has not increased; the global change described by Samuel Huntington as the third wave of democratization has come to an end.[24] While the number of regimes presenting themselves as democracies is on the rise, in reality dictatorial practices are becoming entrenched behind a democratic façade. The future of such authoritarian regimes and the fate of nonviolent opposition movements bent on their overthrow are shrouded in uncertainty.

According to Dobson: "[R]egimes that once seemed on the brink remain in power. Dictatorships no one expected to collapse disintegrated in a matter of days. There are no clear correlations to be drawn between a regime's brutality, economic hardship, ethnic makeup, or cultural history and the probability of revolution today, tomorrow, or ten years from now. What matters is how you play the game" (p. 9). The author presents cases of the opposition's finding room for action even in the most seemingly hopeless situations. He also discusses situations where the expansion of certain kinds of civil freedom can reinforce authoritarian elites. Quoting one of the Russian opposition figures, Boris Nemtsov, Dobson points out that the major difference between communism and Putinism lies not in the disparity between dictatorship and democracy (pp. 19–20):

> Putinism looks smarter because Putinism comes just for your political rights but does not touch your personal freedom. You can travel, you can emigrate if you want, you can read the Internet. What is strictly forbidden is to use TV. Television is under control because TV is the most powerful resource for ideology and the propaganda machine. Communists blocked personal freedom plus political freedom. That is why communism looks much more stupid than Putinism. . . . It's like the Soviet Union without the lines, deficits, and with open borders.

While today's Russian antidemocratic system offers the opposition more opportunities to organize than was the case in the Soviet Union (with the exception of the Gorbachev era), simultaneously it makes every effort to keep these movements under tight state control. It denies them contact with potential internal and external supporters, be they the foreign sponsors of NGOs or liberal-minded Russian oligarchs. It warns activists that it monitors their every move; that is, it can resort to deterrence and isolation without sending them to prison. However, whenever deemed necessary, it goes into action using hired guns, ordering the beating and liquidation of journalists and activists. On the surface, all is done without the knowledge and participation of the state, although it is telling that all such acts of vengeance serve the survival of the regime.

Dobson, like Chenoweth and Stephan, considers nonviolent resistance more effective than violent revolt. For in the latter case, the opposition tries to conduct its fight where the state has more resources and, thus, an overwhelming advantage. A violent uprising can succeed only when a majority of law-enforcement forces joins the insurgency. However, the time when a military coup against even a detested regime could enjoy widespread popular support appears to be over. Whenever a military coup is successful, the initiative remains in the hands not of the people but of military leaders who may not have a vested interest in reforming the system. In other words, a successful strategy must build on grassroots demands and must realize the objectives of the oppressed. Nonviolent movements have the best chance to achieve these goals, especially in autocracies hiding behind the veil of "democracy." Dictators can continue to rule only as long as people obey their orders. Once society withdraws its confidence from regimes and starts to act as a collective in a unified nonviolent manner, dictators are bound to fall and their regimes will collapse.

5. Conclusion. Defending Democracy in the Gray Zone: A Hungarian Perspective

Many of the dynamics of power and opposition outlined in the previous sections can be seen in the case of postcommunist Hungary, often considered, with some good reason, a shining example of nonviolent democratic transition. By means of a complicated process combining political crisis, civil opposition, and roundtable negotiations between ruling and opposition elites, in 1989–90 the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hungarian Communist regime relinquished power, and the society embarked on a "handshake transition" to liberal democracy. Between 1990 and 2010, Hungary evolved into a functioning liberal democracy when judged against the principles and practices of a modern, Western-type democracy—that is, characterized by competition among political parties, the participation of civil society, and respect for civil rights. And yet as this period came to a close, Hungary entered a "gray zone" in which its future as a fully functioning democracy has been placed in doubt.

After the 2010 elections, in which the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his ruling party, Fidesz,[25] received 53% of the votes—which translated into two-third majority of seats in the parliament—the process of consolidating democracy was halted, and liberal democracy fell into a crisis in which it has remained. In the eyes of many commentators and observers, from the European Commission to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to the International Monetary Fund and Freedom House, Orbán has embarked on a project to destroy the components of a consensus-based liberal democracy in the name of a majoritarian democracy with strong illiberal components. This project is based on five Fidesz-supported commitments that together lay the foundations for increasingly authoritarian political practices: 1) ethno-national unification, 2) the centralization of power, 3) the periodic replacement of political elites, 4) power politics tinged with ideological antagonism, and 5) an appeal to an emergency situation and "revolutionary circumstances."[26]

First, almost all of Orbán's important messages are based on the notion of "national unification," which has both symbolic and literal importance. He expressly criticizes the Treaty of Trianon that concluded World War I, as well as the legacy of the communist system and the forces of globalization, which together he takes to be the most important political issues of the day. Orbán suggests that the "nation," understood as an ethnic entity, serves as the bastion that offers protection against these forces. He believes that the civic right to freedom, membership in the European Union, and political alliance with the West are important only insofar as these do not contradict the priorities of national unification. Concerning domestic politics, "national unification" refers to the "system of national cooperation" (a set of "unorthodox" policies combining statism, ethno-nationalism, and neoliberalism) that has emerged as an alternative to liberal democracy. Yet while Orbán appeals to "national unity," the priorities of his "system" of "cooperation" do *not* involve improving the livelihood of the poor or the standing of the marginalized and Roma communities, or strengthening of the concept of the "Republic" and respect for social and cultural diversity. Through his words, Orbán wishes to give the impression of uniting the nation, yet in reality his words divide society. In his vocabulary, the term "people" is defined not as a pluralistic political community but as an ethno-national, historical category.

Second, Orbán's notion of a "central arena of power" eliminates the idea of political competition endorsed by all major protagonists during the transition to democracy. He wants to create a system based on the monopolization of the most important elements of political power and also on the elimination of power checking, that is, independent institutions. Modern democracy includes competition, participation, and civil liberties. If from these three components of liberal democracy the option of competition is removed (through the modification of electoral laws) and if the institutions that safeguard the rule of law are destroyed, hardly anything is left of democracy. That which remains resonates from the era of state socialism: the "people's democracy." Orbán does not need economic, cultural, and political alternatives; he strives to establish his own unitary system of values. Yet where no alternatives exist, there is no room for democracy either.

Third, Fidesz has sought to radically alter the administrative elites by replacing top administrative, economic, and cultural leaders tied to the experience of previous decades. The aim here was to dismantle the political independence of institutions and to put a group of Orbán loyalists in key positions. Anticommunism was the ideology bolstering this move, which today is no more than a cover for this quest for power. This endeavor to solidify political clientelism sent the message that life outside the "system of national cooperation" was unthinkable.

Fourth, the Orbán government has pursued an agenda that uniquely blends pure power politics with a residue of ideological antagonism. On the one hand, the prime minister routinely declares that "the era of ideologies has ended," and his policies embody an iconoclastic mix of elements. Orbán is in no way a conservative thinker; he is an opportunistic politician. Instead of ideas, he believes in maximizing power. At the same time, he believes that he embodies the traditional, patriarchal values of hundreds of thousands of rural Hungarians, and he regularly appeals to populist and xenophobic imagery when it suits his purposes. It can even be said that he has created a "winning coalition" that joins together his political cronies and a broader "selectorate" of followers who believe in his notion of a "restored Hungary." Those who identify with this mind-set tend to be individuals who combine servility toward their superiors with scorn toward those beneath them. Orbán unapologetically stokes the flames of political *ressentiment*. He skillfully attacks the banks (most of them are in foreign hands), the multinationals, the foreign media, and the officials of the European Union on the grounds of economic nationalism and a Hungarian "sovereign democracy" governed by Hungarians rather than "outsiders," an appealing notion. In the meantime, he has introduced a flat tax, restricted the rights of both the employed and the unemployed, divided the trade unions,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nationalized local schools, and eliminated the autonomy of the universities. In this situation, there is not much difference between "privatization" and "nationalization" because the state itself has been captured by partisan interests. In the name of "the people," Orbán has created a new elite linked to his political party. The party-state has been revived.

So there is little surprise that the prime minister insists on interpreting his party's electoral victory as "revolutionary." This has allowed him, with a two-thirds parliamentary majority in hand, to employ exceptional methods by making claims to exceptional circumstances (i.e., "revolutionary conditions"), the fifth commitment. As a result, Orbán has deployed warlike, offensive tactics, pushing legislation through parliament that has quickly and systematically rebuilt the entire public legal system. Fidesz often refers to the ideas espoused in the1848 Revolution led by Lajos Kossuth (i.e., "revolution and struggle for freedom"); however, Fidesz's own "revolutionary struggle" has undermined freedom. In its stead, Fidesz has established a single-party state, where power rests with the party and the prime minister himself. The state is captured by a closed group of like-minded politicians, homogeneous new elites who use the state to extract resources for their own particular goals under the aegis of the "common good" and the "public interest."

Hungary, a member state of the European Union, which used to be a consolidated democracy, has suddenly found itself skating on thin ice. The uniqueness of the situation lies in the fact that no EU member state has ever returned from democracy to dictatorship. There is no example for a reverse transition within the EU so far. Perhaps the most troublesome development of this reverse trend was the constitutional coup d'état which created a one-party Hungarian constitution that went into effect on January 1, 2012. Quoting Kim Lane Scheppele, the "revolutionary" legislation went through in the following way:

> [Fidesz] won two-thirds of the seats in the Parliament in a system where a single two-thirds vote is enough to change the constitution. Twelve times in a year in office, it amended the constitution it inherited. Those amendments removed most of the institutional checks that could have stopped what the government did next—which was to install a new constitution. The new Fidesz constitution was drafted in secret, presented to the Parliament with only one month for debate, passed by the votes of only the Fidesz parliamentary bloc, and signed by a President that Fidesz had named. Neither the opposition parties nor civil society organizations nor the general public had any influence in the constitutional process. There was no popular ratification. . . . By James Madison's definition, Hungary is on the verge of tyranny. . . . Fidesz [as a] political party has gathered all of the powers of the Hungarian government into its own hands, without checks from any other political quarter and without any limits on what it can do.[27]

This antiliberal democratic turn did not emerge out of the blue: It was a direct response to the hectic, incoherent reforms implemented between 2006 and 2010, as well as the corruption and the economic crisis that ensued. The rise of the Orbán regime has deeper roots as well, ones that point to structural, cultural, and political factors that evolved over the period of posttransition Hungary. These include the early institutionalization of a qualified majority consensus, which has obstructed reforms over the past two decades; a plethora of informal practices, ranging from tax evasion to political party financing, that have stalled formal democratic institution building; and the emergence of a cartel of parties (i.e., the phenomenon of "partocracy"), which has gradually killed off the willingness of civic groups to engage in politics and has instilled a hatred in the populace toward politicians and politics. The survival of privileged and influential social groups on the other side of the transition has also destroyed networks of solidarity, thereby further discrediting democracy. Finally, the failure of meaningful economic reforms made the country defenseless against the global financial crisis that exploded in 2008. Taken together, these circumstances have produced a perfect political storm.

While opinion polls indicate substantial popular dissatisfaction with the Orbán government, the opposition is heavily fragmented and there exists no viable political alternative. And within Fidesz, there is no visible group of dissidents critical of Orbán who could offer an alternative vision for the Right. As such, the will of the leader is largely binding and faces no internal limits. Large segments of society remain silent, but opposition parties have begun to organize in response to the political crisis. On a number of occasions uncoordinated civil resistance movements have successfully brought tens of thousands of citizens out on the streets to protest the government's policies. On January 10, 2011, the group entitled One Million People for the Freedom of the Press! sent 10,000 protestors to the streets; by March 15 and October 23, two of Hungary's most important national holidays, the number of protesters had swollen to 30,000 and 70,000, respectively. Labor unions organized larger gatherings in April and June. On October 1, the Hungarian Solidarity Movement was formed, which organized a demonstration of 30,000 people in front of parliament; in December it announced that it would become a countrywide organization. A day before Christmas 2011, representatives and activists of the opposition Green Party (LMP) chained themselves around the parliament building to prevent members from entering. They aimed to draw attention to the legislation that was being passed by parliament that threatened the rule of law. The police, in Ukrainian and Belorussian style, accused the protestors of "restricting personal freedoms."

On January 2, 2012, about a hundred thousand people protested against the new constitution and the rise of autocracy. In response, the Orbán regime organized an officially sponsored, so-called civil, pro-government demonstration, the *Békemenet* (Peace March), which was presented

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713002053 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by the government television station as the response of the "Hungarian people" to the previous demonstrations.

What we observe in Hungary today is a power struggle. The future of liberal democracy hangs in the balance. Parties of the democratic opposition are establishing (or reestablishing) themselves.[28] While the opposition still plays a game called "democracy," the Fidesz party-state already performs another game, "autocracy." This causes strategic difficulties among the ranks of the opposition. As democrats, they want to stick to democratic principles and procedures. But they do not want to be seen as naive dreamers. Approaching the 2014 elections, Hungarian opposition parties certainly need better organization and closer cooperation with one another to combat the Fidesz party-state in the hope of success. To achieve this, they can learn a great deal from the activities of democratic oppositions in Chile, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, and other countries, and also from the valuable lessons of the books reviewed here. For as these books make clear, the "game" of politics is an ongoing contest in which both strategies and values come into play, and in which the creative civic initiatives of democratic citizens can never be counted out.

Notes

1 See the Critical Dialogue on this subject between Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, and Dan Slater in *Perspectives on Politics* 9(2), June 2011, pp. 383–89.
2 Koesel and Bunce 2013; Cooley 2013.
3 For the positive direction of change, see Meyer 2009.
4 Howes 2013.
5 Lynch 2011.
6 Carothers 2004.
7 For the classical analysis, see Weber 1962 .
8 della Porta and Keating 2008.
9 For a more detailed analysis, see Djilas 1957.
10 This topic was discussed famously by O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986.
11 This was discussed by the same authors previously: Bunce and Wolchik 2010.
12 Cf. Aslund and McFaul 2006; Nodia 2005.
13 Cf. Brankovic 1995.
14 Levitsky and Way 2010.
15 Ellner and Hellinger 2003.
16 Cf. Beissinger 2007.
17 See also Forbrig and Demes 2007.
18 Tilly 1978.
19 On the strategy of nonviolent resistance, see Sharp 1973, 2010; Schock 2005.
20 Cf. Diamond and Plattner 2002.
21 For example, Skocpol 1979.
22 For the structure vs. agency debate in explaining revolutions, see Foran 1997.
23 Tilly 1978.
24 Huntington 1991.
25 Fidesz (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, Alliance of Young Democrats) was founded in 1988 as a liberal, anticommunist youth party. Now taking the name Fidesz: Hungarian Civic Union, it is the major populist conservative party in Hungary.
26 My full argument can be found in Bozóki 2012.
27 Scheppele 2013.
28 The Hungarian democratic opposition includes the following parties: Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Together 2014 – Dialogue for Hungary (E14-PM), Democratic Coalition (DK), Social Democratic Party (MSZDP), Politics Can Be Different (LMP), Movement for Modern Hungary (MOMA), Liberals (MLP), and others.

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