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The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism

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1 A specter is haunting the developing world—the specter of electoral author-
2 itarianism. The good thing is that scaring off specters is an easy assignment,
3 in particular for those who fail to believe in scary metaphysical creatures.
4 The bad thing is that the specter is a metaphor, while electoral authoritari-
5 anism is a reality.¹ A large number of political regimes in the contemporary
6 world, ranging from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, from Russia to Singapore,
7 from Belarus to Cameroon, from Egypt to Malaysia, have established the
8 institutional facades of democracy, including regular multiparty elections
9 for the chief executive, in order to conceal (and reproduce) harsh realities
10 of authoritarian governance. Although in historical perspective the authori-
11 tarian use of elections is nothing new, contemporary electoral authoritarian
12 regimes take the time-honored practice of electoral manipulation to new
13 heights.

14 This book contains original comparative research into the conflictive
15 interaction between rulers and opposition parties in the central arena of strug-
16 gle under electoral authoritarianism—the electoral battlefield. This introduc-
17 tory chapter addresses three analytical core issues with which the emergent
18 comparative study of electoral authoritarian regimes is grappling: the concept
19 of electoral authoritarianism, its observation and measurement, and its en-
20 dogenous dynamic. The first section, on conceptual issues, explains how stu-
21 dents of comparative democratization have responded to the proliferation of
22 political regimes that couple formal democratic institutions (multiparty elec-
23 tions) with authoritarian practices. In addition, it offers and justifies a formal
24 definition of electoral authoritarian regimes that looks at both constitutional
25 properties and democratic qualities of electoral processes. The second sec-
26 tion, on issues of measurement, discusses a fundamental methodological
27 problem: in electoral authoritarian regimes, official election results are the
28 combined outcome of two unknown and unobservable variables—popular
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2 Electoral Authoritarianism

30 preferences and authoritarian manipulation. We can resolve this observa-
31 tional problem either by using the competitiveness of opposition parties as
32 a proxy for authoritarian manipulation, or we may seek to gather extensive
33 knowledge about the case at hand in order to reach a comprehensive judg-
34 ment about the overall democratic quality of a given electoral process. The
35 third section, on the endogenous dynamic of electoral authoritarianism,
36 analyzes authoritarian elections as “creative” institutions that constitute a
37 certain set of actors (citizens, opposition actors, and ruling parties), endow
38 them with certain sets of strategies, and push them into a conflictive “nested
39 game” in which the competition for votes *within* given rules takes place
40 alongside the competitive struggle *over* the rules of the game.

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43 The Concept of Electoral Authoritarianism

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45 The early 1990s were a time of democratic optimism. South America had
46 completed its journey to electoral democracy, the Soviet empire had disin-
47 tegrated in relative peace, and sub-Saharan Africa was passing through an
48 unprecedented series of multiparty elections. We were reading about the
49 end of history, the triumph of democracy, and the liberal world order. Both
50 academic and political observers, however, are trained to be skeptics. Few,
51 if any, ever embraced teleological illusions about the expansion of democ-
52 racy. If the world was ever to become overwhelmingly liberal, democratic,
53 and peaceful, it would not happen at once, but in bits and pieces, ups and
54 downs, and over the long run. From its very inception, the idea of global
55 “waves” of democratization was accompanied by warnings against “reverse
56 waves” of authoritarian regression. Waves come and go.²

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58 Since the Portuguese Revolution of the Carnations in 1974, the politi-
59 cal drama that marks the official starting point of the “third wave” of global
60 democratization, the number of democratic regimes worldwide has roughly
61 doubled. Although different counts yield different pictures, the overall trend
62 is quite clear. For instance, the annual Freedom House report on political
63 rights and civil liberties in the world identified forty-two “free” countries in
64 the year 1974. Three decades later, in 2004, it judged eighty-nine countries
65 to be free (out of a total of 118 countries it classified as “electoral democ-
66 racies”).³ Without a doubt, these numbers are impressive. The breadth and
67 resilience of the third wave of democratic expansion is without precedent in
68 the history of the international system. However, today the flurry of opti-
69 mism that accompanied the end of the Cold War has subsided. The resur-
70 gence of ethnic violence in former communist countries and sub-Saharan
71 Africa explains part of the new skepticism, as does the terror unleashed
72 inside advanced democracies by the transnational crime syndicate Al-
73 Qaida. Persisting realities of authoritarian rule explain the other part.

73

74 One the one hand, a significant number of old autocracies survive in
75 different parts of the world, untouched by the stirs of regime crisis. This is
76 true, for example, for the single-party regimes of Cuba, China, Laos, North
77 Korea, Vietnam, Eritrea, Libya, and Syria; for the military regimes of Pak-
78 istan, Myanmar, and Sudan; and for the traditional monarchies of the Arab
79 world (despite some facile talk about the “Arab spring” after the January
80 2005 legislative elections in Iraq). On the other hand, numerous transition
81 processes, even if they led to an initial opening crowned by free and fair
82 elections (as in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet Union),
83 ended up in new forms of authoritarianism behind electoral façades. They
84 ended up establishing what today represents the modal type of political
85 regime in the developing world: electoral authoritarianism.

86 Electoral authoritarian regimes play the game of multiparty elections
87 by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legisla-
88 tive assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom
89 and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instru-
90 ments of authoritarian rule rather than “instruments of democracy” (Pow-
91 ell 2000). Under electoral authoritarian rule, elections are broadly inclusive
92 (they are held under universal suffrage) as well as minimally pluralistic
93 (opposition parties are allowed to run), minimally competitive (opposition
94 parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and min-
95 imally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression,
96 although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and inter-
97 mittent ways). Overall, however, electoral contests are subject to state
98 manipulation so severe, widespread, and systematic that they do not qualify
99 as democratic. Authoritarian manipulation may come under many guises,
100 all serving the purpose of containing the troubling uncertainty of electoral
101 outcomes. Rulers may devise discriminatory electoral rules, exclude oppo-
102 sition parties and candidates from entering the electoral arena, infringe
103 upon their political rights and civil liberties, restrict their access to mass
104 media and campaign finance, impose formal or informal suffrage restric-
105 tions on their supporters, coerce or corrupt them into deserting the opposi-
106 tion camp, or simply redistribute votes and seats through electoral fraud.⁴

107 An incomplete list of contemporary examples of electoral authoritarian
108 regimes (as of early 2006) includes, in the former Soviet Union, Armenia,
109 Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan; in North
110 Africa and the Middle East, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen; in sub-
111 Saharan Africa, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia,
112 Guinea, Mauritania, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia; and in South and East
113 Asia, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Given their contradictory mix of
114 democratic procedures and authoritarian practices, these new authoritarian
115 regimes have unsettled the conceptual routines of comparative politics. To
116 make sense of the institutionalized ambiguity that characterizes electoral
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4 Electoral Authoritarianism

118 authoritarian regimes, scholars have adopted three alternative conceptual
119 strategies. They have conceived those regimes either as defective democ-
120 racies, hybrid regimes, or new forms of authoritarianism.

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122 1. *Defective democracies.* Since the early days of the third wave of
123 democratization, we have been witnessing the emergence of political
124 regimes that fulfill the minimum conditions of electoral democracy but lack
125 essential attributes of liberal democracy. In order to capture such deviations
126 from best practices, authors have been attaching distinctive adjectives to the
127 multifaceted “diminished subtypes” of democracy they observed (see Col-
128 lier and Levitsky 1997). The specific labels they have chosen to describe
129 such “democracies with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky 1997) are meant
130 to draw attention to specific structural deficits and weaknesses. For exam-
131 ple, “delegative” democracies lack checks and balances (O’Donnell 1994),
132 “illiberal” democracies fail to uphold the rule of law (Zakaria 2003), and
133 “clientelist” democracies are weak on programmatic party politics (Kit-
134 schelt 2000). However, in the face of regimes that fail to comply even with
135 democratic minimum norms, the notion of “diminished subtypes” of de-
136 mocracy loses its validity. When applied to nondemocratic contexts, rather
137 than sharpening our grasp of democratic deficits, it weakens our sense of
138 authoritarian realities (see also Levitsky and Way 2002, Howard and
139 Roessler 2006).⁵

140 2. *Hybrid regimes.* If we describe nondemocratic regimes as instances
141 of democracy, however deficient, we commit the methodological sin of
142 “conceptual stretching” (Sartori 1984). Conscious of this menacing pitfall,
143 some authors have been treating the substandard electoral regimes that
144 inhabit the contemporary world as genuine midpoints between democracy
145 and authoritarianism. Because these regimes combine democratic and
146 authoritarian features, scholars locate them at the very center of the concep-
147 tual spectrum and as a result consider them to be neither democratic nor
148 authoritarian. Concepts such as “hybrid regimes” (Diamond 2002), “semi-
149 democracy” (Smith 2005), “semi-authoritarianism” (Ottawa 2000), “semi-
150 dictatorship” (Brooker 2000: 252), and “the gray zone” (Carothers 2002)
151 express the idea of genuinely hybrid regimes situated in the messy middle
152 ground between the poles of democracy and dictatorship.

153 3. *New authoritarianism.* A third way of dealing with the new forms of
154 authoritarian rule is to recognize them as such, as instances of nondemo-
155 cratic governance. As scholars have been introducing concepts such as
156 “pseudodemocracy” (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1995: 8), “disguised dicta-
157 torship” (Brooker 2000: 228), and “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky
158 and Way 2002), they have abandoned the assumption that these regimes
159 somehow still keep touch with the liberal-democratic tradition. Quite to the
160 contrary, they have described them as instances of nondemocratic rule that
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162 display “the trappings but not the substance of effective democratic partic-
163 ipation” (Marshall and Jagers 2002: 12). They have analyzed them as
164 regimes that practice “democracy as deception” (Joseph 1998b: 59), as they
165 set up, to quote from John Stuart Mill, “representative institutions without
166 representative government” (1991: 89).

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168 Clearly, the notion of “electoral authoritarianism” that provides the
169 guiding concept of this book inscribes itself in the latter perspective. It
170 involves the claim that many of the new electoral regimes are neither dem-
171 ocratic nor democratizing but plainly authoritarian, albeit in ways that
172 depart from the forms of authoritarian rule as we know it. The notion of
173 electoral authoritarianism takes seriously both the authoritarian quality
174 these regimes possess and the electoral procedures they put into practice.
175 The emphasis on authoritarianism serves to distinguish them from electoral
176 democracies and the emphasis on elections to set them apart from “closed”
177 autocracies. Electoral democracies lack some attributes of liberal democ-
178 racy (such as checks and balances, bureaucratic integrity, and an impartial
179 judiciary), but they do conduct free and fair elections, which electoral
180 authoritarian regimes don’t. The residual category of closed autocracies
181 designates all nondemocratic regimes that refrain from staging multiparty
182 elections as the official route of access to executive and legislative power.

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184 As the incipient literature on electoral authoritarian regimes has centered
185 its attention on the controversial borderline that separates them from
186 electoral democracies (see Schedler 2002b), here I wish to examine the
187 frontline that separates them from their authoritarian neighbors, grouped
188 together in the broad category of “closed autocracies.” The key question is:
189 How distinctive are electoral authoritarian regimes within the broader
190 “spectrum of nondemocratic regimes” (see Snyder, Chapter 13 in this vol-
191 ume)? Surely, the use of democratic forms and rhetoric by nondemocratic
192 regimes is nothing new. Even before the current wave of democratization,
193 political elections, the core institution of representative democracy, were
194 almost universally in use. As Guy Hermet, Richard Rose, and Alain
195 Rouquié stated in the preface to *Elections Without Choice*, as of the late
196 1970s elections were “held in nearly every country in the world” (1978:
197 viii). In addition, almost all regimes, democracies and dictatorships alike,
198 claimed to embody the principle of popular sovereignty. Yet, whereas elec-
199 toral authoritarian (EA) regimes open up top positions of executive and leg-
200 islative power to elections that are participatory as well as competitive in
201 form, other types of authoritarian regimes, if they take recourse to electoral
202 processes at all, do so in much more limited ways.

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203 Unlike authoritarian regimes that permit limited forms of pluralism in
204 civil society, EA regimes go a step further and open up political society (the
205 party system) as well to limited forms of pluralism. Unlike Bonapartist

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206 regimes that orchestrate occasional plebiscites to demonstrate popular con-
 207 sent on constitutional matters or policy issues, EA regimes invite citizens to
 208 partake in electoral processes serving (officially) as selection devices for
 209 highest office. Unlike competitive oligarchies, as in nineteenth-century
 210 Latin America or South Africa under apartheid, EA regimes do not control
 211 elections by restricting the franchise but operate on the basis of universal
 212 franchise. Unlike traditional monarchies (as well as some military regimes
 213 like Brazil between 1964 and 1989 and Pakistan since 1999), EA regimes
 214 subject the head of government to electoral confirmation, not just the leg-
 215 islative assembly (or local government, as in Taiwan under the Kuomintang
 216 [KMT]). Unlike single-party regimes that organize one-party (or national
 217 front) elections, either with or without intraparty competition, EA regimes
 218 allow for organized dissidence in the form of multiparty competition.

219 The notion of electoral authoritarianism places its emphasis on the
 220 access to power (through popular elections), whereas conventional typolo-
 221 gies of authoritarian rule place their emphasis on the exercise of power
 222 (except for the category of monarchies, which is defined by hereditary suc-
 223 cession).⁶ They ask about the identity of rulers and their modes of gover-
 224 nance and legitimation. For instance, Juan Linz's seminal distinction
 225 between totalitarian and authoritarian rule (Linz 2000), revolved around the
 226 structure of power relations (monism versus pluralism), strategies of legit-
 227 imation (ideologies versus mentalities), and the treatment of subjects
 228 (mobilization versus depoliticization). More recent typologies of nondem-
 229 ocratic rule tend to focus on the nature of the governing coalition. For
 230 instance, the widely used distinction between military regimes, single-party
 231 regimes, and personal dictatorships asks about the organizational bases of
 232 authoritarian governance (see, for example, Brooker 2000, Geddes 1999
 233 and 2004, Huntington 1991, Morlino 2005: Chapter 2).

234 As the notion of electoral authoritarianism shifts its analytical focus
 235 from the nondemocratic exercise of power to the nondemocratic access to
 236 power, questions about authoritarian governance (who rules how) do not
 237 become irrelevant; rather, they become *contingent* (and may therefore serve
 238 to differentiate various subtypes of electoral authoritarian regimes).⁷
 239 Besides, issues of access to power and exercise of power interact. On the
 240 one side, over the long run, the authoritarian exercise of power is incompat-
 241 ible with democratic procedures of access to power. Authoritarian rule
 242 tends to subvert the conditions of freedom democratic elections demand.
 243 On the other side, authoritarian elections cannot constrain rulers the same
 244 way democratic elections are supposed to constrain them. If it is not popu-
 245 lar preferences but manipulative skills that determine election outcomes,
 246 elections will fail to serve as mechanisms of accountability. The same way
 247 authoritarian governance engenders authoritarian elections, authoritarian
 248 elections feed authoritarian governance.
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250 **The Observation of Electoral Authoritarianism**

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252 How do we recognize an electoral authoritarian regime when we see one?

253 It seems to be easier to define the concept of electoral authoritarianism than

254 to measure it for the purpose of cross-national comparison. As they preach

255 democracy but practice dictatorship, electoral authoritarian regimes tend to

256 provoke intense debates within individual countries about the “true” nature

257 of their political system. As a simple rule, incumbents try to sell their

258 regime as democratic (or at least as democratizing), while opposition actors

259 denounce it as authoritarian. The more repressive, exclusionary, and fraud-

260 ulent a regime, the more likely it is that disinterested observers of good

261 faith converge in their assessments and extend certificates of authoritarian-

262 ism in accordance with opposition accusations. In more messy cases, how-

263 ever, drawing the dividing line between electoral democracy and electoral

264 authoritarianism may prove to be complicated and controversial, and noth-

265 ing close to an “expert consensus” may emerge. Yet, if the dense knowl-

266 edge of competent observers does not suffice to settle disputes over the

267 classification of “hard cases,” how shall we ever be able to classify large

268 numbers of political regimes in valid and reliable ways?

269 Standard methodological advice tells us to base our measurement deci-

270 sions on “observations, rather than judgments” (Przeworski et al. 2000: 55).

271 I understand that to mean that we are to partition the complex enterprise of

272 conceptualization and measurement into two phases. In the first stage, we

273 are to make all the judgments necessary to select and define the empirical

274 phenomena we admit as observational evidence, as well as to devise the cod-

275 ing rules that permit us to assign categories or numbers to cases. In the sec-

276 ond stage, by contrast, we are to ban judgmental elements and limit our-

277 selves to applying our self-made rules of codification in a mechanical

278 fashion. The first phase is deliberative, demanding the intersubjective justi-

279 fication of conceptual and operational decisions; the second one is observa-

280 tional, demanding the transparent collection of information and the quasi-

281 bureaucratic application of rules.

282 In order to establish such a functional separation between deliberation

283 and observation, we need empirical indicators that are valid, visible, and

284 readable. The empirical evidence we are looking for must make theoretical

285 sense across time and space (validity); it must be open to ocular inspection

286 (visibility); and it must be sufficiently obvious to be processed on the basis

287 of simple rules of interpretation that transform eventual ambiguities of

288 meaning into operational clarity (readability). Clearly, the main method-

289 ological difficulty in identifying electoral authoritarian regimes lies in the

290 obstacles they establish to the *visibility* of their manipulative practices.291 In their widely (and justly) acclaimed *Democracy and Development*,

292 Adam Przeworski and his collaborators identify democratic regimes on the

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294 basis of three institutional attributes: (1) executive selection: the head of
 295 government is elected in popular elections; (2) legislative selection: the leg-
 296 isature is elected; and (3) party pluralism: there is more than one party (for
 297 a synthesis, see Przeworski et al. 2000: 28–29). Until this point, their oper-
 298 ational definition of democracy is identical with the definition of electoral
 299 authoritarianism I proposed above. What distinguishes EA regimes from
 300 electoral democracies are not the formal properties of political elections,
 301 but their authoritarian qualities. It is not on the surface of formal electoral
 302 institutions that electoral authoritarian regimes differ from electoral democ-
 303 racies, but in the surrounding conditions of political freedom and legal
 304 security. Electoral authoritarian regimes, just like their democratic counter-
 305 parts, hold multiparty elections for presidents and legislative assemblies.
 306 Yet, as they subject these processes to systematic authoritarian controls,
 307 they deprive them of their democratic substance. Formal institutional facts
 308 are easy to ascertain. By contrast, practices of electoral manipulation are
 309 much less accessible to public inspection.

310 What we can see in electoral authoritarian regimes are election results,
 311 the official distribution of votes and seats among parties and candidates.
 312 Under authoritarian conditions, however, electoral figures cannot be taken
 313 as reliable expressions of “the will of the people.” Rather, they represent
 314 the product of authoritarian manipulation and popular preferences. With v
 315 standing for votes, i for the integrity of elections, and p for citizen prefer-
 316 ences, we can write:

$$v = p * i$$

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 320 Under conditions of electoral integrity ($i = 1$), election results corre-
 321 spond to popular preferences; under conditions of electoral manipulation
 322 ($i = 0$), the official distribution of votes distorts the actual distribution of
 323 citizen preferences. In the former, democratic case, the institutions and
 324 practices of electoral governance are fundamentally neutral, in the latter,
 325 authoritarian case, they are gravely redistributive.⁸ The problem, for the
 326 purpose of regime classification, lies in the fact that two of the three vari-
 327 ables in the equation are unknown. Official election figures may be a “de-
 328 forming mirror” (Martin 1978: 127), unreliable and imprecise, but at least
 329 they are out there, the tangible products of some central state agency. Acts
 330 of authoritarian manipulation and patterns of popular preferences, by con-
 331 trast, are shadows in the dark.

332 To a significant extent, electoral manipulation is an undercover activity.
 333 Some things we can see, such as the enactment of discriminatory election
 334 laws, the repression of protest marches, or the exclusion of candidates from
 335 the ballot by administrative fiat. Such manipulative efforts take place in
 336 broad daylight, mobilize agents of the central state, and invoke the language
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338 of legality and public reason for their justification. By contrast, many other
339 authoritarian strategies of electoral control, such as the alteration of elec-
340 toral lists, the purchase and intimidation of voters, or the falsification of
341 ballots on election day, constitute more decentralized activities that involve
342 myriads of public and private agents trying to do their job without leaving
343 public traces. For all the knowledge we may be able to gather, be it episodic
344 or systematic, narrative or statistical, the hidden realm of authoritarian elec-
345 tioneering constitutes an impenetrable black box we can (almost) never
346 whiten in its entirety. Only few regimes have the panoptic aspirations of the
347 Fujimori-Montesino regime in Peru, whose comprehensive system of extor-
348 tion, surveillance, and videotape recording allowed the public to inspect the
349 black box of authoritarian maneuvering at least after the fact, once the
350 regime had fallen. Normally, however, we will not even remotely know
351 what nondemocratic actors are up to on the invisible backstage of electoral
352 politics, and even if we knew everything, we could not know that we know
353 everything. The logic of distrust that prevails under authoritarian rule
354 would make us uphold the suspicion that the worst may be hidden from our
355 eyes. The WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) rule never works
356 under authoritarianism. Political actors know that usually what they see is
357 *not* what they get from the authoritarian regime. They know that, if they
358 wish to survive, they must practice the ancient art of *dietrologia*, the study
359 of politics behind the scenes.⁹

360 With respect to popular preferences, the third variable in our electoral
361 authoritarian equation, we face a similar situation of partial knowledge built
362 upon foundations of fundamental ignorance. We may learn something about
363 popular preferences, be it through access to “local knowledge” (Geertz 1983)
364 or through representative public opinion surveys. Yet, under authoritarian
365 conditions, we never know to what extent citizens engage in the public fal-
366 sification of their private preferences (see Kuran 1995). We do not know
367 either to what extent their genuine private preferences are endogenous to
368 authoritarian governance. In the absence of individual autonomy and free-
369 dom, popular attitudes are always suspected as the products of authoritarian
370 manipulation. Authoritarian rule distorts the formation of popular prefer-
371 ences as well as the expression of popular preferences.

372 We may deal with these problems of imperfect information in two
373 ways. We may limit ourselves to the factual realm of official election
374 results. Knowing that we cannot take official figures as simple expressions
375 of voter preferences, we may treat them as proxies for electoral manipula-
376 tion. The weaker the opposition parties are, the stronger we take the author-
377 itarian controls to be. Alternatively, we may expand our scope of vision and
378 gather evidence about either electoral manipulation or popular preferences
379 or both. If election data are available, learning about one of our unknown
380 variables (electoral manipulation, voter preferences) should allow us to
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382 estimate the other. Similarly, we may combine information about all three
383 variables in order to reach broad judgment about the authoritarian quality of
384 the electoral process under scrutiny. I shall briefly discuss the “alternation
385 rule” proposed by Adam Przeworski and colleagues (2000) as exemplifying
386 the former alternative (the use of election data as proxies for manipulation)
387 and Freedom House indicators of political rights as representative of the
388 latter (the use of multiple sources of information to reach judgment on the
389 authoritarian quality of elections).

390 According to the alternation rule introduced by Adam Przeworski, a
391 regime should not be classified as democratic if it fills executive and leg-
392 islative offices by elections, but the ruling party never loses elections (Prze-
393 worski et al. 2000: 27). Democracy involves the possibility of alternation in
394 power, but without the actual experience of alternation, we cannot know
395 whether a ruling party would be willing to give up office peacefully in the
396 case of electoral defeat. Taking election results and, in particular, alterna-
397 tion in office as primary evidence of procedural integrity runs the risk of
398 misclassifying some regimes—a risk the authors readily acknowledge. Still,
399 the alternation rule makes sense in normative-democratic terms; offers a
400 clear-cut, easily discernible criterion of classification; avoids the uncertain-
401 ties that come along with counterfactual reasoning; and allows the analyst
402 to stick with simple observables, rather struggling to make sense of a myr-
403 iad of diverse facts.

404 Przeworski and his coauthors hold that passing judgment on the author-
405 itarian quality of elections is an elusive enterprise, as attempts “to assess the
406 degree of repression, intimidation, or fraud . . . cannot be made in a reliable
407 way” (2000: 24). If their skepticism is meant to indicate that our judgments
408 on the democratic quality of elections are often controversial, at least in
409 complex and ambiguous cases, they are right. They err if they mean to imply
410 that disinterested election observers are generally unable to reach conver-
411 gent, or at least overlapping, assessments that have a good chance of surviv-
412 ing public interpellations by actors as well as experts. Take, for instance, the
413 annual reports on political rights in the world offered by Freedom House in
414 New York since 1973. Despite its notorious penchant for methodological
415 opacity (see Munck and Verkuilen 2002), Freedom House does a reasonable
416 job in evaluating the democratic quality of electoral regimes.

417 In its assessments of political rights, Freedom House asks more ques-
418 tions than we need, yet still asks the right questions, in order to judge the
419 democratic quality of electoral processes. Some items on its “political
420 rights checklist” relate to the exercise of power rather than the access to
421 power we are interested in here. In particular, Freedom House asks about
422 the sovereignty, integrity, and accountability of elected decisionmakers.
423 Yet, the questions that come first in the political rights survey concern the
424 procedural integrity of elections: Are the chief executive and the national
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426 legislative assembly, the Freedom House survey team asks, elected “through
427 free and fair elections”? Do citizens enjoy freedom of association, and are
428 there “fair electoral laws, equal campaign opportunities, fair polling, and
429 honest tabulation of votes”? In addition to electoral procedures, Freedom
430 House considers electoral outcomes as well, as it inquires into the intensity
431 of electoral competition: Is the political system, the survey team asks, “open
432 to the rise and fall of . . . competing parties”? Do we observe “a significant
433 opposition vote, de facto opposition power, and a realistic possibility for the
434 opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections”?¹⁰

435 Freedom House formulates its normative and empirical questions at a
436 fairly high level of abstraction. Naturally, translating them into concrete
437 assessments of national political processes demands a good sense of judgment,
438 in addition to empirical knowledge and moral sensitivity. Still, by
439 evaluating procedural and substantive information with recourse to a broad
440 range of evidence and sources, the Freedom House team is able to reach
441 judgments on the quality of electoral processes that seem fundamentally
442 reasonable. In particular, the qualitative evaluations of political rights that
443 Freedom House offers in its country reports commonly assess in their
444 opening sentence whether “citizens are able to change their government
445 through regular elections.” With no recent exception I am aware of, these
446 summary judgments about the effectiveness of electoral processes are
447 sound and defensible in the light of available evidence and democratic
448 norms.

449 Despite their apparent validity, there are obvious methodological problems
450 associated with using Freedom House political rights scores as a basis
451 for classifying regimes. As mentioned above, for the particular purpose of
452 distinguishing electoral democracies from electoral authoritarian regimes,
453 their level of aggregation is too high, as they bundle concerns about elections
454 (the access to power) with concerns about governance (the exercise of
455 power). Besides, because the measurement effort is multidimensional, it is
456 not clear how qualitative judgments on various dimensions translate into the
457 seven-point scale Freedom House uses, and it is also not clear what specific
458 scores and differences between scores are meant to mean. For the same reason,
459 any effort to translate the numerical scale (from one to seven) into qualitative
460 regime categories is bound to raise suspicions of arbitrariness.

461 Nevertheless, because its survey questions address the core concerns
462 that motivate our distinction between electoral democracies and electoral
463 authoritarianism, Freedom House data serve reasonable well to identify
464 electoral authoritarian regimes, if complemented with some basic electoral
465 data. For example, we may (quite safely) classify as electoral authoritarian
466 all those regimes that (1) hold multiparty elections to select the chief executive
467 as well as a legislative assembly and (2) earn average Freedom House
468 ratings between four and six (see Schedler 2004). Such simple rules of
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470 delimitation (which some authors in this book use as well) seem to do a
471 reasonable job of identifying electoral authoritarian regimes.¹¹

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474 **The Dynamic of Electoral Authoritarianism**

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476 Electoral authoritarian regimes set up the whole institutional landscape of
477 representative democracy. They establish constitutions, elections, parlia-
478 ments, courts, local governments, subnational legislatures, and even agencies
479 of accountability. In addition, they permit private media, interest groups, and
480 civic associations. Although none of these institutions are meant to constitute
481 countervailing powers, all of them represent potential sites of dissidence and
482 conflict. Without ignoring these multiple sites of contestation, the notion of
483 electoral authoritarianism privileges one of them—the electoral arena. It
484 assumes elections constitute the central arena of struggle (see also Levitsky
485 and Way 2002: 54).

486 Designating elections as the defining feature of a distinct category of
487 nondemocratic regimes makes sense only if they are more than mere adorn-
488 ments of authoritarian rule. Talking about electoral authoritarianism
489 involves the claim that elections matter, and matter a lot, even in contexts
490 of authoritarian manipulation. Still stronger, it involves the claim that it is
491 the intrinsic “power of elections” (Di Palma 1993: 85), more than anything
492 else, that drives the dynamic of stability and change in such regimes. In
493 electoral authoritarian regimes, if they are to deserve their name, elections
494 are more than rituals of acclamation. They are *constitutive* of the political
495 game. Even if they are marred by repression, discrimination, exclusion, or
496 fraud, they are constitutive of the playing field, the rules, the actors, their
497 resources, and their available strategies.

498 Even though electoral authoritarian regimes establish competitive elec-
499 tions as the official route of access to state power, they do not, as a matter
500 of course, establish electoral competition as “the only game in town.” At
501 the same time they set up the electoral game (competition for votes), they
502 introduce two symmetrical metagames: the game of authoritarian manipu-
503 lation, in which ruling parties seek to control the substantive outcomes of
504 electoral competition, and the game of institutional reform, in which oppo-
505 sition parties seek to dismantle nondemocratic restrictions that choke their
506 struggle for votes. Authoritarian elections thus are not conventional games
507 in which players compete within a given institutional framework, known,
508 accepted, and respected by all. They are fluid, adaptive, contested games
509 whose basic rules players try to redefine as they play the game itself. In the
510 language proposed by George Tsebelis, they form “nested games” in which
511 strategic interaction *within* rules goes hand in hand with strategic competition
512 *over* rules (1990). Formal institutions do not represent stable equilibria, but
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514 temporary truces. If the substantive outcomes of the game change, or if its
515 underlying correlations of force change, actors will strive to alter its basic
516 rules—either to prevent or to promote more democratic outcomes. The par-
517 tisan struggle for votes is embedded in a partisan struggle over the funda-
518 mental conditions of voting (see also Schedler 2002a). Because authoritar-
519 ian elections constitute the game of electoral competition, perpetually put
520 into question by the metagames of manipulation and reform, they are also
521 constitutive of its component parts, in particular, its lead actors and their
522 available strategies.

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Citizens

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By opening the peaks of state power to multiparty elections, electoral authoritarian regimes establish the primacy of democratic legitimation. They may feed themselves from various ideological sources of legitimacy: revolutionary (the creation of a new society), transcendental (divine inspiration), traditional (quasi-hereditary succession), communitarian (nation building, anti-imperialism, ethnic mobilization), charismatic (magical leadership), or substantive (material welfare, public integrity, law and order, external security). In the last instance, however, popular consent carries the day. Competitive elections recognize subjects as citizens. They endow them with “the ultimate controlling power” (Mill 1991: 97) over who shall occupy the summit of the state. By establishing multiparty elections for highest office, EA regimes institute the principle of popular consent, even as they subvert it in practice.

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The institutional concessions EA regimes make to the principle of popular sovereignty endow citizens with normative as well as institutional resources. Most importantly, elections open up avenues of collective protest. They provide “focal points” that may create convergent social expectations and thus allow citizens to overcome problems of strategic coordination. Elections constitute citizens as individual carriers of political roles, but they also enable them to turn into collective actors, be it at the polls or on the streets.¹²

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Opposition Parties

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By admitting multiparty competition for positions of state power, EA regimes legitimate the principle of political opposition. They may still try to shape the field of opposition actors to their own liking. Some regimes create official opposition parties and even assign convenient ideological positions to them, as in Egypt under Anwar Sadat and Senegal under Léopold Senghor. Others exclude uncomfortable opposition parties and candidates at their convenience, which is a standard operating procedure in

558 the post-Soviet regimes of Eurasia. Yet they still have to live with opposi-
 559 tion forces that enjoy at least minimal degrees of autonomy. By the simple
 560 fact of instituting multiparty politics, they abandon ideologies of collective
 561 harmony, accept the existence of societal cleavages, and renounce a monopolistic
 562 hold on the definition of the common good. Subjecting the opposition
 563 to repressive treatment does not affect its basic legitimacy embodied in
 564 the formal institution of competitive elections. Quite to the contrary, once
 565 regimes recognize the principle of pluralism, silencing dissidence is likely
 566 to turn counterproductive; it is likely to augment the status of opposition
 567 forces, rather than diminishing it.

568 Because EA regimes are systems in which opposition parties (are supposed
 569 to) lose elections, electoral contests are a profoundly ambiguous
 570 affair for opposition parties. To the extent that they serve to legitimate the
 571 system and demonstrate the power and popularity of the ruling party as
 572 well as the weakness of its opponents, elections tend to demoralize and
 573 demobilize opposition forces. To the extent that they allow opposition
 574 forces to get stronger and to demonstrate that the emperor is naked, that his
 575 grip on power is based on manipulation rather than popular consent, elections
 576 tend to reinvigorate opposition parties. In any case, authoritarian elections
 577 do not provide any of the normative reasons for accepting defeat losers
 578 have under democratic conditions. They fail to display the procedural
 579 fairness and substantive uncertainty that makes democratic elections norma-
 580 tively acceptable, and they fail to offer the prospects of a government
 581 pro tempore losers may hope to replace after the next round of elections.
 582 What remains is a calculus of protest in which opposition actors have to
 583 weigh the uncertain pros and cons of different strategic options both inside
 584 and outside the electoral arena. Most importantly, as authoritarian rulers
 585 convoke elections, opposition forces have to decide whether to enter the
 586 game of unfree competition or to boo from the fences (participation versus
 587 boycott). Once the polls have closed and official results are published, they
 588 have to decide whether to swallow the outcome or to take their complaints
 589 to the media, the courts, the streets, or the international arena (acceptance
 590 versus protest).¹³

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Ruling Parties

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EA regimes may display “sultanistic tendencies,” with patrimonial rulers ratifying themselves in power through periodic multiparty elections. The organizational demands of authoritarian elections, however, limit the degree of personalism they can afford. Rulers who wish to govern through controlled multiparty elections need a party (as well as a subsidiary state) to mobilize voters, and they need a state (as well as a subsidiary party) to control elections.¹⁴ Electoral authoritarian regimes do not rest upon single parties, but on parties they rest.

602 Elections are ambivalent tools, as much for the ruling party as for the
603 opposition parties. They create opportunities for distributing patronage, settling
604 disputes, and reinforcing the ruling coalition, but they also mobilize
605 threats of dissidence and scission. Like their opponents in the opposition
606 camp, rulers have to take some key decisions regarding their strategic
607 behavior in the electoral arena. Most importantly, they have to decide how
608 to mix electoral manipulation and electoral persuasion in order to keep winning
609 electoral contests. To what extent should they rely on authoritarian
610 controls, and which strategies are they to pick from the variegated menu of
611 electoral manipulation? And to what extent should they rely on the persuasion
612 of voters, and which strategies are they to choose from the variegated
613 menu of electoral mobilization?¹⁵

614 Authoritarian elections are creative institutions insofar as they constitute
615 these three classes of actors (citizens, the opposition, and ruling parties) and
616 their respective bundles of core strategies. They are not deterministic, however,
617 insofar as the actual outcomes of the conflictive interaction between
618 the three groups is open. The nested game of authoritarian elections may
619 facilitate gradual processes of democratization by elections, as in Senegal
620 or Mexico. It may lead to democracy through the sudden collapse of
621 authoritarianism, as in Peru and Serbia in 2000. It may provoke an authoritarian
622 regression, with a breakdown of the electoral cycle through military
623 intervention, as in Azerbaijan in 1993 and Côte d'Ivoire in 1999. It may
624 also lead to extended periods of static warfare in which authoritarian
625 incumbents prevail over opposition parties that neither succeed in gaining
626 terrain nor accede to disband and abandon the unequal battle.

627 Under which conditions do authoritarian elections fulfill a “stabilising”
628 role (Martin 1978: 120), and when do they act as “subversive” forces
629 (Schedler 2002a)? Under which conditions do government and opposition
630 forces succeed in maintaining their coherence and act as unitary actors?
631 Under which conditions do rulers and opposition parties adopt which kind
632 of strategies and to what effect? When are they successful, and when do
633 they lead to failure? How do their strategic decisions in the conflictive
634 game of authoritarian elections shape their correlations of force? To what
635 extent do the nature of the actors and their choices respond to the endogenous
636 dynamics of “unfree competition” and to what extent are they molded
637 by structural conditions, institutional factors, and external actors?

638 This book does not pretend to respond these questions about the internal
639 dynamic of EA regimes either exhaustively or conclusively. Yet, each
640 chapter addresses one particular analytical puzzle within the large dynamics
641 of electoral authoritarianism. The chapters strive to explain the emergence
642 of actors, their relations of force, their conflictive interaction, and their
643 institutional constraints under electoral authoritarian regimes on the
644 basis of careful cross-national comparison, covering either a specific region
645 or a cross-regional subset of cases.

646 **The Outline of the Book**

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648 “If I were to write a book on comparative democracies,” Juan Linz writes
 649 in his fresh introduction to the 2000 book edition of his seminal essay on
 650 totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, “it would have to include a section
 651 on failed transitions to democracy, defective or pseudodemocracies, which
 652 I would rather characterize as ‘electoral authoritarian’ regimes . . . where a
 653 democratic façade covers authoritarian rule” (2000b: 33–34). This book,
 654 while expectant of the piece we hope Juan Linz will write at some point,
 655 offers thirteen chapters of original reflection and research on electoral
 656 authoritarian regimes.

657 Part 1 discusses some basic conceptual problems and measurement
 658 issues that have been haunting the emergent study of electoral authoritarian
 659 regimes. Dissolving the dichotomy of democracy and dictatorship, the cat-
 660 egory of electoral authoritarian regimes occupies an intermediate position
 661 along the continuum of political regimes. It is sandwiched between two
 662 broad concepts, electoral democracies on the democratic side and closed
 663 autocracies on the authoritarian side. As both neighboring categories are
 664 afflicted by fuzzy frontiers, issues of boundary delimitation have been dom-
 665 inating the conceptual debate on electoral authoritarianism. In Chapter 2,
 666 on the construction of intermediate concepts, Gerardo L. Munck frames the
 667 discussion in new terms by identifying the generic problem underlying the
 668 controversy. Conceptualizing electoral authoritarianism as an intermediate
 669 category of regimes between the poles of democracy and dictatorship,
 670 Munck argues, involves the systematic construction of measurement points
 671 grounded in explicit relations of conceptual difference and equivalence. He
 672 illustrates his methodological point by drawing upon the twin dimensions
 673 of Robert Dahl’s seminal conception of democracy—participation—and
 674 contestation.

675 If we succeed in defining generic attributes that allow us to distinguish
 676 systematically between democratic and authoritarian elections, we still face
 677 the challenge of taking our abstract criteria to the concrete, operational ter-
 678 rain of empirical observation. As noted above, authoritarian regimes are
 679 opaque regimes that do not lend themselves to easy observation. Much of
 680 their manipulative maneuvering takes place in the hidden backstage of pol-
 681 itics. In Chapter 3, Jonathan Hartlyn and Jennifer McCoy discuss the sys-
 682 tematic difficulties and paradoxes involved in the observation and evalua-
 683 tion of elections, be it from the perspective of participants (political parties)
 684 or observers (independent domestic or international election monitors).
 685 Specifically, the authors examine the problem of divergent and shifting nor-
 686 mative standards, the challenge of choosing the appropriate scope of obser-
 687 vation, the trade-off between comprehensiveness and firmness of judgment,
 688 the irritating yet inevitable impact substantive outcomes have on procedural
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690 judgments, and the frequent contamination of normative assessments by
691 strategic calculations. Accordingly, an open mind, balanced judgment, and
692 methodological refinement are indispensable for reaching defensible con-
693 clusions about the democratic or authoritarian nature of particular electoral
694 processes. Despite the incremental sophistication and professionalization
695 the business of electoral observation has experienced over almost two
696 decades, the assessment of electoral manipulation, Hartlyn and McCoy con-
697 clude, remains “an enterprise filled with the potential for uncertainty.”

698 Part 2 of this book studies the logic of actor formation under conditions
699 of electoral authoritarianism. In particular, it addresses problems of strate-
700 gic coordination both ruling parties and opposition parties face. In her
701 account of subsequent elite splits within the ruling Kuomintang in Taiwan
702 and the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico, Joy Langston empha-
703 sifies the centrality of the electoral arena for generating divisions within the
704 ruling party. Under electoral authoritarianism, dissidents within the govern-
705 ing coalition need not risk their lives in armed insurgency or military rebel-
706 lion. Rather, they may take their chances in an effort “to beat the official
707 . . . candidate and win the presidency via elections.” Especially in critical
708 moments of leadership succession, Langston argues, electoral contests may
709 encourage elite ruptures as they offer low-cost exit options for discontented
710 regime politicians.

711 In Chapter 5, on the dynamics of opposition coalescence in sub-Saharan
712 Africa, Nicolas van de Walle analyses the interplay between regime cohe-
713 sion and opposition cohesion as a “tipping game” that may lead to rapid
714 shifts from an authoritarian equilibrium, in which the regime is united and
715 the opposition fragmented, to a democratizing situation, in which the
716 regime disbands and the opposition gets together. In accordance with the
717 literature, van de Walle observes “a clear correlation” between opposition
718 cohesion and electoral victory. Yet, as he argues against the literature, the
719 coalescence of the opposition camp appears to be “not a cause of transition
720 but rather a consequence of a growing probability of transition.” As they
721 derive from the complex and contingent coordination of social expecta-
722 tions, tipping games are typically “over-determined” processes in which
723 multiple events, actors, and factors intervene and intermingle. The author
724 reviews some structural and institutional factors that affect tipping dynam-
725 ics: electoral systems, forms of government, previous democratic experi-
726 ence, ethnic fragmentation, and external pressures. As he finds, two-round
727 majority systems in presidential elections seem to bear a “decisive effect”
728 on the ability of opposition actors to forge effective antiregime coalitions.

729 Part 3 of the volume turns its attention to core conflicts and strategic
730 choices faced by ruling parties and opposition actors on the “electoral bat-
731 tlefield.” In Chapter 6, on the variegated practices of electoral authoritarian
732 governance in Southeast Asia, William Case describes the region as the
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734 homeland of electoral authoritarianism. In order to reconstruct the differing
735 degrees of effectiveness of manipulative strategies, the author introduces
736 the distinction between “skillful” and “clumsy” manipulation. The former
737 are expressions of strategic rationality, whereas the latter are instances of
738 strategic miscalculation. As the author contends, the “countervailing set of
739 historical legacies, social structures, and cultural outlooks” that character-
740 izes Southeast Asian countries provides solid structural foundations for
741 electoral authoritarian rule. The ambivalence of electoral authoritarianism
742 as the modal regime type in the region is rooted in the structural contradic-
743 tions of Southeast Asian societies. When these regimes come under stress,
744 though, as in economic crises, authoritarian rulers may either respond “skill-
745 fully”—with intelligence, foresight, and empathy—or they may respond
746 “clumsily”—with stupidity, myopia, and arrogance. As Case claims, skill-
747 ful manipulation has been a recipe for regime survival, but clumsy manip-
748 ulation has worked as a trigger of regime crisis—leading to democratic
749 change in the presence of a strong opposition (as in Thailand, the Philip-
750 pines, and Indonesia) or to authoritarian involution in the absence of a
751 strong opposition (as in Burma).

752 In their chapter on the logic of electoral theft, Mark R. Thompson and
753 Philipp Kuntz ask about the conditions and calculations that may drive
754 authoritarian rulers to “steal” an election they happen to lose. Although
755 authoritarian rulers tend to “hold elections only because they expect to win,
756 they sometimes make mistakes” (Przeworski et al. 2000: 25). As Thompson
757 and Kuntz argue, the incipient literature on EA regimes has been trying to
758 explain the origins, but not the consequences, of “stunning” defeats author-
759 itarian incumbents may suffer in presidential elections. As their compara-
760 tive review of emblematic cases suggests, quitting executive power after
761 defeat may be a painful choice for the party in power, but clinging to the
762 presidency and trying to steal an election is a highly “risky option” too.
763 When presidents break off the electoral game the moment they stop win-
764 ning, they step into “dangerous territory.” Rulers have to weigh the costs of
765 abiding by the rules and conceding defeat against the costs of interrupting
766 the electoral cycle and defending their grip on power in open defiance of
767 the express will of the people. In their calculations, they have to take into
768 account at least three aspects: the prospects of legal prosecution for abuses
769 in power, the probable loss of economic privilege and patronage, and the
770 eventual discontinuity of their policy programs, in case they pursued any.
771 After revising these utility calculations, Thompson and Kuntz conclude that
772 electoral thieves are most likely to be found at the apex of “electoral Sul-
773 tanism”—highly repressive and weakly institutionalized regimes in which
774 personal rulers have too much to lose from losing an election.

775 In electoral authoritarian regimes, citizens are the arbiters of last
776 instance in the electoral arena. However, the police and the military are the
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778 arbiters of last instance *over* the electoral arena. Because the nested game
779 of authoritarian elections is inherently conflictive, the security apparatus
780 often has the last word (or the last bullet) in deciding the grave conflicts
781 they provoke. In Chapter 8, John F. Clark, examines the “contributing con-
782 ditions” of military intervention in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. His
783 discussion of military intervention in electoral authoritarian regimes
784 focuses on “the all-important question of legitimacy.” Authoritarian elec-
785 tions are standing invitations to military intervention to the extent that they
786 create the typical conditions of military intervention: situations of political
787 confrontation in which civilian actors “knock at the barracks,” asking the
788 military to restore social peace and political order by resolving the conflict
789 in their favor. Clark’s systematic analysis of military coups and democratic
790 legitimacy (as measured indirectly by annual Freedom House scores of
791 political liberties and civil rights) bears out his principal hypothesis, albeit
792 with a twist: In sub-Saharan Africa between 1993 and 2003, backsliding
793 regimes that held free and fair first elections while subjecting subsequent
794 elections to authoritarian controls were most vulnerable to military coups.
795 Stable democracies that continued their democratic trajectory after success-
796 ful transitions were almost “invulnerable” to military unrest. However, mil-
797 itary behavior in countries that underwent more limited transitions from
798 single-party rule to electoral authoritarianism, without a democratic inter-
799 lude, seemed largely determined by exogenous variables, such as economic
800 performance and external support.

801 The strategies authoritarian incumbents pursue are fundamental to the
802 topography and trajectory of electoral authoritarian regimes. Yet, rulers do
803 not play their political games alone. If an “autocrat” is someone who holds
804 “uncontrolled authority; an absolute, irresponsible governor; one who rules
805 with undisputed sway,”¹⁶ then rulers in EA regimes are not properly
806 described as autocrats. Their authority is “essentially contested”; their power
807 is constrained, at least to some extent, by the existence of elections; and in
808 conducting government they have to take into account the players they
809 empower by convoking elections: citizens and opposition actors.¹⁷ In Chap-
810 ter 9, Staffan I. Lindberg analyzes the sources and consequences of opposi-
811 tion behavior in sub-Saharan Africa’s electoral authoritarian regimes. His
812 comprehensive dataset, covering ninety-five executive and 125 legislative
813 elections held between 1989 and 2003, registers whether opposition parties
814 participate in or boycott elections and whether they acquiesce to or protest
815 electoral outcomes. His empirical findings run counter to the widespread
816 expectation that opposition protest drives democratization. Quite to the con-
817 trary, Lindberg concludes, it is neither boycott nor protest but “opposition
818 participation and acceptance of the outcome” that are “associated with the
819 transformation of electoral autocracies into democracies over a sequence of
820 multiparty elections.” As the author suggests, if parties withdraw and
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822 protest, they do so out of resignation, in a position of weakness. Opposition
823 boycott and protest, it seems, are acknowledgments of defeat rather than
824 weapons of democratization.

825 Part 4 of the book switches its analytical focus from the strategic inter-
826 play between rulers and opposition parties to exogenous factors, both insti-
827 tutional and international, that condition their correlations of force in the
828 electoral arena. In his chapter on the impact of state capacity on regime
829 dynamics, Lucan A. Way extends the common argument, according to
830 which “a strong state is essential for democracy,” to nondemocratic rule. As
831 he argues, a strong state is essential for authoritarianism, too. If the control
832 of leaders over their subordinates is put into question, centralized efforts
833 of authoritarian manipulation are likely to dissipate. Exemplifying his argu-
834 ment with the experiences of post-Soviet Belarus (1992–1994), Moldova
835 (1992–1999), and Ukraine (1992–2004), the author shows how failures in
836 establishing “control over coercive agencies and local governments” tends
837 to frustrate authoritarian schemes designed to distort and contain electoral
838 competition. In all three cases, alternation in government was less an indi-
839 cation of democratic success than a sign of authoritarian failure; rather than
840 an expression of democratic commitment, it was a consequence of admin-
841 istrative incapacity. Unable to impose their authoritarian impulse on the
842 state apparatus under their nominal command, chief executives found that
843 they could not rely on their security forces to suppress dissidence or on
844 local public officials to coerce voters or stuff the ballot boxes.

845 Just as the strength of the state bureaucracy matters for the dynamics of
846 political regimes, the strength of the legislative assembly matters, too. In
847 his analysis in Chapter 11 of the causal impact legislative powers have on
848 regime trajectories, M. Steven Fish shows a striking association between
849 weak legislatures and authoritarian governance in the post-Soviet world.
850 His use of the Legislative Power Index, a new continuous measure of leg-
851 islative strength based on expert assessments, cuts across the discussion of
852 presidential versus parliamentary forms of government, and his empirical
853 findings invert standard assumptions of constitutional debate. Authoritarian
854 systems, the literature tends to assume, choose weak legislatures. The causal
855 arrow, however, seems to go the other way round: weak legislatures produce
856 authoritarian systems. As the author states, although “the origins of choices
857 about the powers vested in legislatures varied across cases, the consequences
858 of those choices did not.” Post-Soviet countries that established strong leg-
859 islatures at the moment of achieving their (either *de jure* or *de facto*) inde-
860 pendence embarked on a trajectory of democratization; those that estab-
861 lished weak legislatures bought a ticket to enduring authoritarian rule.
862 Substantive initial differences in legislative powers translated into dramatic
863 subsequent divergences in regime trajectories. As these findings suggest,
864 strong legislatures tend to consolidate democracy and subvert electoral
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866 authoritarian governance, whereas weak legislatures tend to erode democ-
867 cracy and reproduce authoritarianism. The key causal mechanism, Fish sug-
868 gests, lies in the negative incentives powerless assemblies entail for the
869 development of political parties. Weak legislatures weaken political parties,
870 and by doing so, they end up undermining both “horizontal” and “vertical”
871 forms of accountability. The author illustrates his causal argument through
872 the paired comparison of two contrasting countries: Bulgaria, a case of suc-
873 cessful democratization driven by a strong parliament and strong parties,
874 and Russia, a case of authoritarian regression driven by an executive unen-
875 cumbered by either legislative or partisan checks.

876 Whereas most authors in this book embrace the domestic perspective
877 on regime dynamics that has dominated the comparative democratization
878 literature, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way shift the explanatory focus
879 from internal to international actors and factors. In Chapter 12, they strive
880 to explain why democratizing pressures by international actors have borne
881 divergent consequences in different settings. The key to success, they argue,
882 lies in two factors that vary with relative independence of each other—link-
883 age, “the density of economic, political, social, organizational, and commu-
884 nication ties,” and leverage, the “vulnerability” of national governments to
885 international pressures. If both are high, as in Latin America and Central
886 Europe, democratization is likely to ensue. If both are low, as in parts of the
887 Middle East, Central Asia, and East Asia, the most likely outcome is stable
888 authoritarian rule, with or without the adornment of electoral façades.
889 Finally, if both diverge, we may expect “mixed regimes” (electoral author-
890 itarian regimes) to survive, at least for some time, and muddle through the
891 mixed signals of the international environment. In this respect, the authors’
892 argument echoes William Case’s contention (itself an echo of Harry Eck-
893 stein’s notion of “congruence”) that ambivalent societal settings tend to
894 sustain the political ambivalence of electoral authoritarianism.¹⁸

895 In his concluding chapter, Richard Snyder, while lauding the emerging
896 empirical research on new forms of authoritarianism, issues a plea for
897 broadening the agenda beyond the study of electoral authoritarian regimes.
898 His principal concerns are threefold. First, he warns against overlooking
899 old forms of authoritarian rule that have continuing empirical relevance. At
900 present, a large share of the world population continues living under single-
901 party regimes, military dictatorship, and traditional monarchies. The author
902 also warns against obliterating the profound differences between these
903 regimes by stuffing them in the residual conceptual box of “closed”
904 regimes. Second, Snyder warns against limiting our attention to routes of
905 access to power. If we place all emphasis on the electoral arena, we are
906 neglecting the questions about the exercise of power that animated the vast
907 literature on totalitarianism, bureaucratic authoritarianism, Sultanism, and
908 other forms of nondemocratic rule. As the author argues, old concerns about
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910 the goals and instruments of authoritarian rule and about the relationship
 911 between rulers and subjects have not lost their analytical relevance. Third,
 912 the author pleads for placing the conflictive electoral games we study in
 913 their structural context. In particular, he argues for “bringing the state back
 914 in” to the study of electoral regimes. We may ask about the consequences
 915 of electoral contests for state capacity, as elections may have state-building
 916 as well as state-subverting functions. Yet, in the first place, we should ask
 917 about the structural prerequisites of electoral contests in terms of state
 918 capacity. It makes no sense to study elections as routes of access to state
 919 power in contexts where there is nothing resembling a state. No state, no
 920 regime. Richard Snyder concludes his critical review by outlining the con-
 921 tours of a future agenda of research. The standard phrase summarizes the
 922 state of things pretty well: much research needs to be done on contempo-
 923 rary nondemocratic regimes.

Notes

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1. A disclaimer of originality: The metaphor of the political specter, widely used in the literature on populism and other elusive threats to public tranquility, was originally introduced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the introduction to their 1948 *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. They described the “specter of communism” as a “fairy tale” they strove to counter through their public declaration of principles (see www.marxists.org).

2. Actually, waves are not supposed to change the sea level. On the “third wave” of democracy, see, among others, Huntington (1991), Diamond (1999: Chapter 2), and Doorenspleet (2005). For a contrasting view that observes a gradual accretion of democracies, rather than the occurrence of waves, see Przeworski et al. (2000).

3. Freedom House 1975 and 2005 *Annual Report on Political Rights and Civil Liberties* (www.freedomhouse.org). As the number of nation-states has increased, in particular with the disintegration of the Soviet Empire in 1991, the proportions become somewhat less impressive.

4. On the normative foundations of democratic elections and the corresponding menu of manipulative strategies that undermine these foundations, see Schedler (2002b).

5. For a recent discussion of defective democracies, see the April 2004 issue of the journal *Democratization*.

6. On the distinction between access to power and exercise of power and its relevance to the literature on political regimes, see Mazzuca (forthcoming).

7. For instance, attention to the institutional bases of authoritarian rule (who rules) may lead us to distinguish between “party-based” EA regimes, which reproduce themselves through well-institutionalized ruling parties; “military” EA regimes, in which elections ratify military domination of politics, and “personalist”

EA regimes, which concentrate state power in the hands of one individual (see also Thompson and Kuntz, Chapter 7 in this volume).

8. On neutral (impartial) versus redistributive (discriminatory) institutions, see Tsebelis (1990: 117). On the notion of electoral governance, see Mozaffar and Schedler (2002).

9. I owe the notion of *dietrologia* to Philippe Schmitter (see his corresponding entry in *Les Intraduisibles: The Dictionary of Untranslatable Terms in Politics*, www.concepts-methods.org). On the generic research problems generated by secrecy under dictatorship, see Barros (2005).

10. The quotes are from the “Political Rights and Civil Liberties Checklist” in the methodological appendix to the Freedom House 2002 survey of political rights and civil liberties (Karatnycky, Piano, and Puddington 2004: 697).

11. Of course, no codification rule is perfect, and a rigid reliance on Freedom House scores is bound to produce false positives at the lower end. Freedom House assigns double scores of four (in the realms of political rights and civil liberties) to some regimes that are not in the grip of dictators exercising centralized authoritarian controls but are under the pressure of violent rebellion, organized crime, or military unrest that call into question the authority of elected state actors. Examples are Colombia in the late 1990s and Guatemala in more recent years.

12. On the role of stolen elections in coordinating citizens and triggering protest movements, see Thompson and Kuntz (2004).

13. For a somewhat more extensive discussion of opposition choices and dilemmas, see Schedler (2002a).

14. On the organizational demands of electoral fraud, see Chapter 10 in this book.

15. On the menu of electoral manipulation, see Schedler (2002b). On the menu of electoral mobilization, along the guiding distinction between “clientelistic” and “programmatic” campaign offers, see Kitschelt (2000).

16. “Autocrat,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.

17. With apologies to W. B. Gallie (1956) for transposing his notion of “essential contestation” from the realm of ideas to the sphere of power.

18. On Eckstein’s theory of congruent authority patterns, see Eckstein (1992).

Electoral authoritarianism characterises regimes that present an illusion of multi-party democracy at the local and national levels while effectively stripping elections of efficacy. The result known in advance, elections can be held frequently. In Algeria, for instance, officials have been able, against all odds, to organise more than 12 polls during the civil strife that broke out when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win the 1991 and subsequently cancelled legislative elections. Under electoral authoritarian regimes, elections are subject to such state manipulation as to stri

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