Constraining Dictatorship
From Personalized Rule to Institutionalized Regimes

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"The simplest political system is that which depends on one individual. It is also the least stable."
Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968, p. 18)

1.1. Two Puzzles About Authoritarian Institutions

As newly independent states, Tanzania and Guinea seemed to be on the same trajectory of durable authoritarian rule. Tanzania, under the founding presidency of Julius Nyerere, was a single-party state, led by the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) party. TANU politicians filled the National Assembly, which met on a regular basis. Presidential and legislative elections have been held every five years, like clockwork since 1965, as stated in the constitution.

This stability has lasted for decades. Nyerere, the first post-independence leader, retired after the 1985 presidential elections. Power was swiftly handed over to Nyerere's handpicked successor, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, and the ruling party continued to control over the government. The same regime remains in power today. The ruling TANU/CCM[1] party continues to dominate Tanzanian politics – even surviving the introduction of multi-party elections in 1995. Since independence, the country has undergone four peaceful leadership transitions and is one of the longest reigning autocracies in Africa.

Like Tanzania, Guinea had a ruling party, legislature, and regularly held elections as a newly independent state. Under the founding presidency of Ahmed Sekou Toure, Guinea was a single-party regime, led by the *Parti democratique de Guinee* (PDG) party. PDG politicians filled the National Assembly, which conducted two regular sessions every year. Presidential

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[1] TANU was renamed Chama Cha Mapindui (CCM) in 1977, following the merger of Tanzania and Zanzibar, although the party remained largely the same.

elections were held regularly in 1961, 1968, 1974, and 1982, and National Assembly elections were held in 1963, 1968, 1974, and 1980, as stated in the constitution.

Yet these institutions did not provide long-term stability in Guinea. In 1984, Sekou Toure died of a heart attack after being airlifted to Cleveland, Ohio for emergency heart surgery while on a trip in Saudi Arabia. Before succession plans could be finalized, the military seized power in a coup d'état and the leader of the coup, Colonel Lansana Conte, claimed the presidency. The PDG was immediately disbanded, the National Assembly was dissolved, and the constitution was abolished. In short, the regime died with its leader.

Why did regime outcomes in Tanzania and Guinea diverge so drastically? Why was the authoritarian system in Guinea unable to survive the death of the leader, even with a full set of nominally-democratic institutions in place? Sekou Toure had a ruling party, a legislature, and regularly held elections. He was even a socialist who aimed to replicate the Soviet state. Nonetheless, the regime fell in Guinea, and these institutions themselves were swiftly wiped out after the death of the leader.

These vignettes raise the first puzzle of the book: *What explains differences in authoritarian regime outcomes, if not differences in quasi-democratic institutions?*

One possible consideration is that we need to look beyond the most common types of quasi-democratic institutions—such as parties and legislatures, which are quite prevalent across authoritarian regimes—and consider more subtle forms of variation. Indeed, Guinea and Tanzania *did* differ in one important institution: adoption of executive constraints.

Since independence, presidents in Tanzania have had a number of institutional constraints on their authority. In 1977, under the tenure of the founding president Nyerere, term limits and detailed leadership succession procedures became enshrined in the constitution, and these rules

remain in place today. According to the constitution, presidents are limited to two terms in office

(Article 40), and in the case of the president's death or incapacitation, the vice president is sworn

in as the successor (Article 37). The presidential cabinet, which is filled with TANU party elites,

exists as a genuine power-sharing organization, rather than a hallow endorsement device. Since

independence, all presidents have maintained fully functional cabinets, and all key cabinet

positions, such as the vice presidency and defense ministry, have been appointed to elites on a

regular basis. Critically, appointments for the position of vice president are infrequently shuffled,

which endorses elites in this position as a clear and stable successor, in accordance with

constitutional rules regarding succession.

By contrast, Sekou Toure faced very few constraints on his presidential authority. The

constitution of Guinea did not specify clear succession procedures, promoting the image that

Sekou Toure was an irreplaceable leader, nor did it include term limits.[2] Within the presidential

cabinet, Sekou Toure maintained clear dominance. The offices of the prime minister and defense

minister were eliminated over half the time he was in office. When a defense minister was

appointed, elites who filled this position were shuffled frequently.[3]

Moreover, although the regime in Guinea under Sekou Toure had a ruling party,

legislature, elections, and a constitution, these institutions did not function to tie the leader's

hands. In fact, Sekou Toure exploited these institutions to amplify his own power. The ruling

party, the PDG, was used primarily as a mouthpiece to promote the leader's own ideology and

policies, rather than as a forum for elite power sharing (Adamolekun 1976, Camara 2005).

Although the National Assembly of Guinea met regularly twice a year, its only function was to

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[2] In fact, the constitution stated explicitly that the president may be re-elected without mention of term restrictions.

[3] The average tenure an elite was appointed to the defense minister position under Sekou Toure was under three years.

formally endorse legislation and budgetary requests that were put forth by Sekou Toure. As described by Jackson and Rosberg (1982): "Most laws originate simply and swiftly in the decrees and edicts of the ruler. As the supreme authority in the land, not only do his opinions prevail over all others, but they 'become laws as they are uttered'" (212). In this case, institutions clearly did not constrain the leader.

In sum, although Tanzania and Guinea had similar looking parties and legislatures on the surface, these two cases had very different patterns of executive constraints that shaped the power of the president.

This raises a second puzzle of the book: *Why do some authoritarian rulers adopt executive constraints while others do not?*

This book will offer new insights on both of these puzzles. The primary thesis of this study is that *autocratic regime institutionalization* – the creation of rules and procedures that tie the leader's hands by empowering other elites – is key to understanding patterns of regime durability in dictatorships. Concrete examples of such measures include constitutional rules specifying the leadership succession order or term limits, in addition to the appointment of elites to high ranking cabinet positions, such as the vice presidency. I will demonstrate that these institutions provide *explicit* constraints on executive power by providing high-level state access to other elites, therefore *empowering* them with resources and their own independent influence.

This argument stands in contrast with the conventional wisdom that nominally-democratic institutions, such as parties, legislatures, or elections, drive authoritarian stability. A key assumption in much existing scholarship is that these institutions generally have the organizational capacity to constrain leaders and facilitate elite power-sharing. As this chapter will show, parties and legislatures have become extremely commonplace in dictatorships, yet

most are organizationally weak and overly reliant the influence of particular leaders. Rather than assuming that the existence of parties or legislatures can effectively constrain leaders, this book examines the creation of explicit executive constraints within constitutions and presidential cabinets. While it is certainly true that not all autocratic institutions are merely instances of window dressing, it is also important to recognize that not all institutions successfully constrain leaders.

Importantly, this book addresses the key question of *how certain types of institutions constrain leaders*. After all, a leader who can create an institution can also disassemble it as well. How do institutions have any bite in dictatorships? I argue that institutions can credibly constrain leaders only when they change the underlying distribution of power between leaders and elites. When an elite is appointed to a key cabinet position, such as vice president or the minister of defense, he is given access to power and resources that allows him to consolidate his own base of support. The appointment of elites to these key cabinet positions creates a *focal point* around these individuals and identifies them as credible challengers to the incumbent. Over time, the delegation of authority shifts the distribution of power away from the incumbent by identifying alternative leaders that elites can rally around if the president were to renege on distributive promises. Institutions that *empower and identify specific challengers* help to solve elite coordination problems, therefore allowing them to better hold incumbents accountable. Institutionalization limits executive power by creating conditions that actually *threaten* the leader.

My theory underscores the point that it is that the existence of a democratic façade is not of primary importance. Rather, institutions constrain when they change the underlying distribution of power within the ruling coalition. When a leader institutionalizes the regime, she

hands the (figurative) sword to someone else while pointing it at herself. This helps to explain

why nominally-democratic institutions cannot necessarily explain why some regimes are

institutionalized systems while others remain personalist dictatorships. This is especially true

when parties or legislatures are empty vehicles that simply *amplify* the authority of an

incumbent, rather than constraining them.[4] Institutions matter, not because they establish de jure

rules, *but when they affect de facto political power*.

The theme of how political order becomes established and institutionalized has long been

a fundamental question in the study of comparative politics. In a seminal study, Huntington

(1968) first emphasized the concept of political institutionalization, arguing that the strength of

societies depends on the strength of political organizations and procedures. This durability

depends on the extent to which these organizations and procedures are institutionalized – the

process by which the institutions themselves acquire 'value' and 'stability'. Importantly, he

highlights the need to separate institutions from leaders:

> "so long as an organization still has its first set of leaders, so long as a procedure
> is still performed by those who first performed it, its adaptability is still in doubt.
> The more often the organization has surmounted the problem of peaceful
> succession and replaced one set of leaders by another, the more highly
> institutionalized it is" (Huntington 1968, 14).

This book approaches Huntington's "organization" as the authoritarian regime

itself, and examines how executive power in dictatorships can become institutionalized,

such that the regime does not depend on any particular set of leaders to survive. How

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[4] I do not claim that *all* parties and legislatures are window dressing institutions that do not
constrain leaders. Some autocracies, such as in China, the former Soviet Union, or Mexico under
the PRI, have well organized parties and legislatures that do not merely rubber-stamp legislation.
However, in many autocracies, these institutions are incredibly weak and do not serve to
empower specific elites.

does an authoritarian regime evolve from a government run by "*big men*" to a system run

by *rules*?

1.2. Examining Regime Outcomes: Personalist Rule and Institutionalized Systems

The world of authoritarian regimes[5] varies considerably in the extent to which politics is

governed by set rules, procedures, and norms or controlled by a single personalist strongman.

Consider, for example, the well-known cases of highly institutionalized dictatorship in twentieth

century China and Mexico. The People's Republic of China, which was established in 1949 by

Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China (CCP), is characterized as a hierarchical system,

with established norms and procedures that govern leadership promotion. The state constitution

is considered the highest law – its authority stands above the leader and the ruling party. Since

1949, the regime has undergone four peaceful leadership transitions and remains in power today.

Mexico under the rule of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) can be

characterized similarly as a regime run by established rules and norms. Stable authoritarian rule

was established in Mexico in the years following the end of the Mexican Revolution. In 1929,

President Plutarco Elías Calles founded the ruling party[6] as a means of institutionalizing elite

power-sharing that had been established in the resolution of the revolution. Under these

agreements, presidents serve one six-year term in office and never seek reelection. The

incumbent also handpicks their successor, who then becomes the next president. Elite politics in

Mexico would run like clockwork according to these rules for the next seventy years. The PRI

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[5] This book uses the terms "dictatorship", "authoritarian regime", and "autocracy"
synonymously.
[6] The party was initially called the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR). It was eventually
renamed the PRI in 1946.

regime remained in power until 2000, when it lost the presidential election to an opposition

party, the National Action Party (PAN).

In both of these cases, the regime lasted beyond the dictatorship of a single individual to

become a system run by rules. Importantly, the process of leadership succession was routinized,

allowing for the continuity of the regime beyond the founding leader. Yet, such stable outcomes

are not always the story in the world of dictatorships.

Now consider the Democratic Republic of Congo under the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese

Seko or the Dominican Republic under Rafel Trujillo – regimes where a highly personalist leader

ruled without constraints on his power. Mobutu seized power in the Democratic Republic of

Congo through a coup, five years after independence was granted in 1960. During his rule,

Mobutu centralized power around himself, rather than sharing it with other elites. He named

himself the head of all important political institutions[7] and single-handedly decided all

appointments and promotions within the regime, often purging elites at will. Mobutu remained in

office for 28 years until he was deposed by Laurent-Désiré Kabila during the First Congo War in

1997.

The Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic was a similar story. Rafael Trujillo came

to power through a coup in 1930. Upon taking office, he concentrated his personal authority by

declaring martial law and killing regime opponents.[8] By the end of his rule, Trujillo had more

public statues of himself on display in the Dominican Republic than any other world leader at the

time. After 31 years in power, Trujillo was assassinated in 1961. Three years later, a

democratically elected leader took office but was deposed in a coup four months later.

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[7] Including the Ministry of Defense
[8] It is estimated that 500,000 people were killed by the regime's Secret Police during the Trujillo
era.

In both of these cases, the regime failed to survive past a single strongman leader. Yet it is important to remember that single leaders can sometimes remain in office for relatively long periods of time, and this perceived longevity speaks nothing to the institutional quality of the regime. Mobutu and Trujillo both remained in power for three decades. During those periods, the regime retained a façade of stability through the leaders' iron-tight personalist grip on power. However, as Huntington cautioned, this "simple political system" that depended on one individual was, in reality, the least stable form of autocracy. The regime simply could not stand without its leader.

These broad patterns extend beyond a few individual cases. Despite a surge in scholarship on authoritarian stability, the world of dictatorships is filled with Mobutus and Trujillos. Leaders often take power (and lose power) via coups, which occur with tremendous frequency. In fact, coup d'états make up the vast majority of non-constitutional exits from office for dictators (Svolik 2012). From 1950 to 2014, a total of 235 failed coup attempts and 236 successful coups were carried out in dictatorships. In 1963 and 1966, 12 successful coups were carried out in a single year. In 1991, 10 coups were attempted but failed, in addition to four successful coups that were carried out. Figure 1.1 displays the number of attempted and successful coups that have been carried out in dictatorships between 1950 and 2014.

Beyond persistent threats to incumbents, leadership transitions are often violent and disruptive, and many regimes fail to survive past the departure of individual leaders. Figure 1.2 displays the number of peaceful and violent leadership transitions over time. From this graph it is easy to see that violent leadership transitions are extremely common. From 1946 to 2008, almost
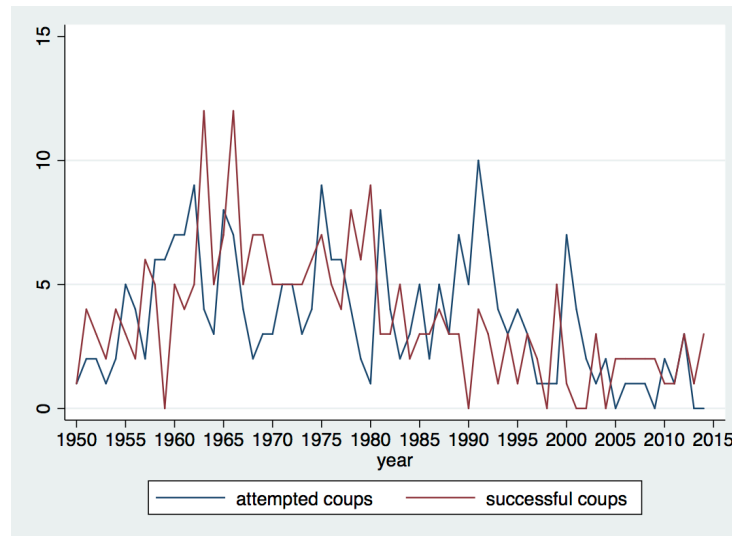
Figure 1.1. Number of attempted and successful coups in autocracies

half (44 percent) of all autocratic leadership transitions did not occur peacefully.[9] Even when

dictators manage to remain in office until voluntarily retirement or a natural death, elites often

wait in the wings, eager to usurp power forcefully, as in the case of Guinea after Sekou Toure.

The *continuity* of the average authoritarian regime, when faced with a leadership transition, is far

from guaranteed. In sum, the stability of authoritarian regimes varies widely across countries and

over time. Differences in stability stem both from threats to leaders while they are in power as

well as the durability of the regime in light of leadership transitions. While some dictatorships

cease to exist after the death of a single personalist leaders, other regimes develop into stable and

institutionalized systems.

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[9] I define a peaceful transition as one where the outgoing leader exits power via regular means *and* the incoming leaders enters power via regular means - to be defined more precisely later (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009).
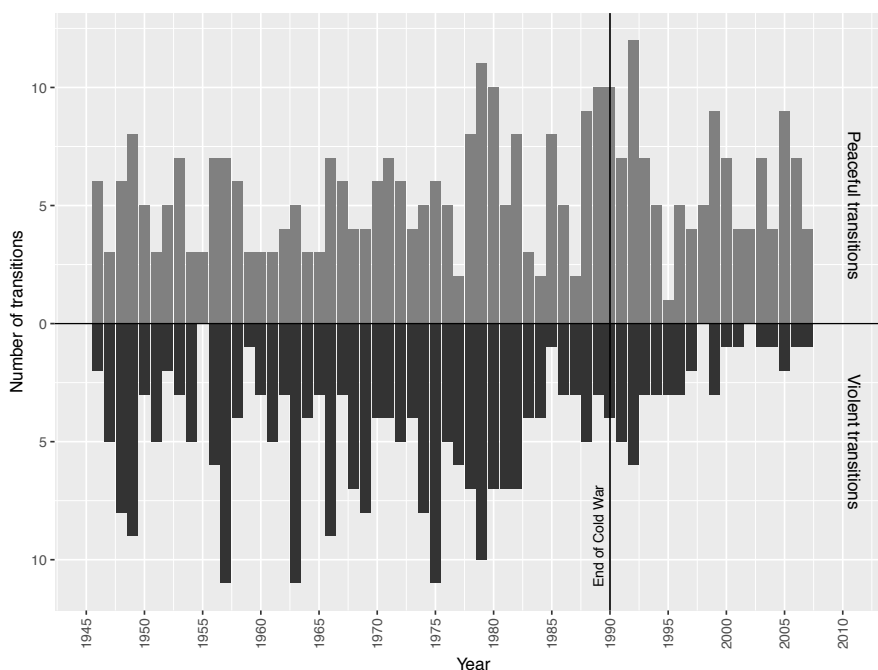
Figure 1.2. Number of violent and peaceful leadership transitions in autocracies

1.3. Sometimes Window Panes, But Often Window Dressing

To explain variation in regime outcomes, recent studies of dictatorship have focused on the role of nominally-democratic institutions[10] – such as parties and legislatures – in order to promote authoritarian durability.[11] The general consensus is that institutions matter, even in autocracies. This finding has been hugely important in advancing theories of authoritarian rule – earlier works on dictatorships had completely written off parties, legislatures, and elections as shams. As Gandhi (2008) notes, prior work tended to assume that the presence of authoritarian institutions was little more than "mere window dressing" (xv). The recent "institutional turn"[12] in

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[10] This book uses the terms "quasi-democratic" or "nominally-democratic" institutions in autocracies and "authoritarian institutions" synonymously.
[11] See Bracanti (2014), Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009), Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018), Gehlbach, Sonin, and Svolik (2016), Lagace and Gandhi (2015), Magaloni and Kricheli (2010), and Pepinsky (2014) for recent surveys of the literature on authoritarian institutions.
[12] Phrase borrowed from Pepinsky (2014).
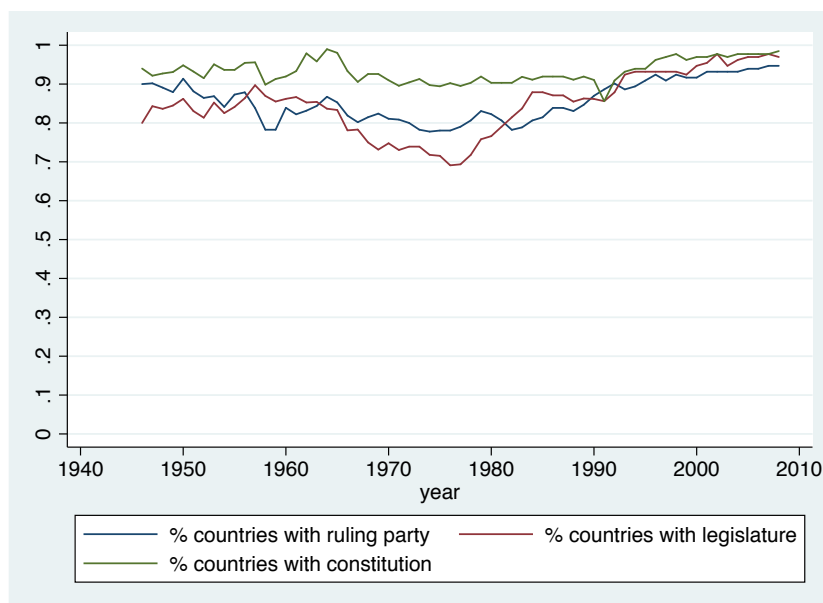
Figure 1.3. Proportion of autocratic countries with nominally-democratic institutions

comparative authoritarianism has rightfully renewed attention to the role of formal institutions in autocracies by highlighting ways in which leaders can benefit strategically from these institutions.

Despite these important advancements in the literature on authoritarian institutions, the presence of parties, legislatures, and elections cannot explain variation in regime outcomes simply because *most* contemporary dictatorships employ a wide range of institutions. From 1946 to 2008, autocratic leaders maintained a ruling party 87 percent of the time. During that same period, authoritarian regimes had legislatures 85 percent of the time (Cheibub, Gandhi, Vreeland 2010). Figure 1.3 displays the proportion of autocratic countries with ruling parties and legislatures over this period. It is clear that the vast majority of these countries have these institutions in place.

Autocratic constitutions and elections have been just as common. From 1946 to 2008, 93 percent of all autocracies had constitutions (Elkins, Ginsburg, Melton 2014). During that same

period, a total of 2,122 elections were held in 124 countries – 707 presidential elections and

1,415 legislative elections. (Hyde and Marinov 2012).[13]

These numbers are *not* simply being driven by a post-Cold War proliferation of

institutions. From 1946-1990, 84 percent of authoritarian regimes had parties, 80 percent had

legislatures, and 92 percent had constitutions. Moreover, 1,165 elections were held during that

time period– 338 presidential elections and 827 legislative elections. The typical post-World War

II autocracy has had parties, legislatures, elections, and constitutions while in power. In other

words, the presence of authoritarian institutions is simply *unremarkable* and there really is

minimal variation in the existence of institutions in modern autocracies.

Moreover, most ruling parties fail to outlive the death of the founder. 61 percent of ruling

parties do not survive more than a year past the founding leader's death or departure from office,

as illustrated in Figure 1.4. Even conditioning on cases where the first leader experienced a non-

violent exit from power, only 58 percent of ruling parties outlive the leader. Furthermore, 43

percent of ruling parties that are coded as part of dominant-party regimes fail to survive a year

past the departure of the first leader (Meng, forthcoming). In sum, the existence of many ruling

parties seems to rely heavily on the influence of a single leader.

We then have a contradiction. On one hand, existing theories argue that these institutions

are supposed to help regimes survive. Yet, the data shows that authoritarian institutions are

incredibly common and frequently do not outlive individual leaders. The average authoritarian

regime often cannot survive independently of particular leaders and regime instability has

persisted.

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[13] The percentage for ruling parties, legislatures, and constitutions are calculated as the percentage of country-year observations that had the institution. The election numbers are presented as counts.
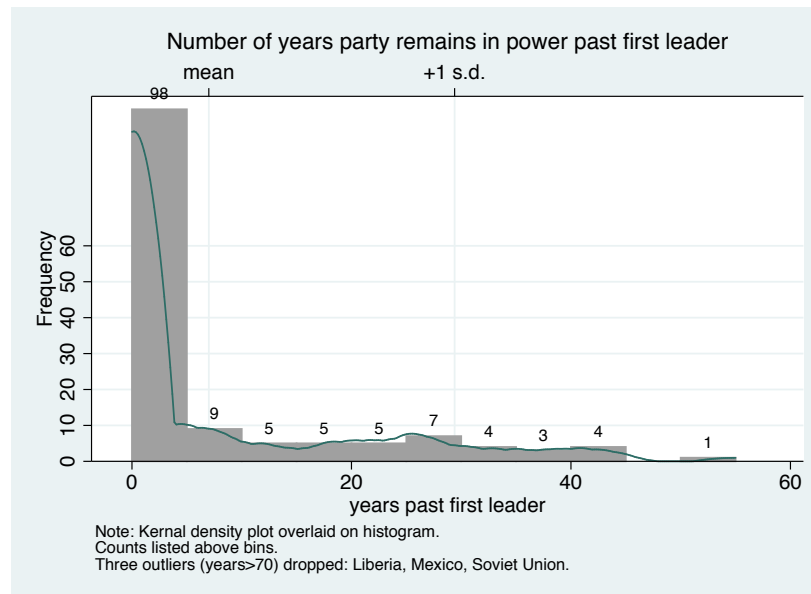
Figure 1.4. Number of years ruling parties remain in power past the founding leader

I argue that this seeming contradiction exists because scholars have been focusing on the *existence* of institutions, rather than the *content* of these institutions – in particular whether the leader is constrained. Simply having a ruling party or legislature does not necessarily mean that the rules or procedures governing these organizations are institutionalized. In fact, the *appearance* of democratic-like institutions, such as ruling parties, often obscures the true lack of constraints on the executive.

This book examines the causes and consequences of autocratic regime institutionalization. The first half of the book presents a theory of how institutionalized regimes emerge by explaining the conditions under which autocratic leaders choose to implement constraints on their authority after coming into power. In examining the origins of institutionalized regimes, this book provides a clear mechanism for the question of *how* institutions constrain leaders in dictatorship. After all, if autocratic leaders can create institutions, then they can also dismantle them as well. How then, do rules and procedures have any bite

within inherently weakly institutionalized environments? The second half of the book shifts from explaining the causes of regime institutionalization to examining the consequences of institutionalization on key outcomes, such as leader tenure, coup vulnerability, and leadership succession.

1.4. Autocratic Regime Institutionalization: A Deeper Look

Since regime institutionalization is a key concept of this book, I first provide a brief discussion of this term. I define autocratic regime institutionalization as the creation of rules and structures that govern the distribution of power and resources within the ruling coalition. Importantly, within authoritarian systems, institutionalization depersonalizes the ways in which the regime is run by constraining the leader's ability to make arbitrary decisions in the future. Institutionalized regimes are autonomous organizations, capable of functioning regardless of which leader is in power. One of the key features of an authoritarian state is that power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites – and often times – in the hands of a single dictator. Since institutions are especially prone to predation by autocratic leaders, institutionalization strengthens regimes by implementing rules, procedures, and structures that promote organizational autonomy and permanence. When we think about the durability of an autocratic regime, the extent to which there are structures and procedures in place to guard against personalist rule is critically important.

Institutionalization can occur at many levels of government and within any kind of organization. Scholars of party system institutionalization, for instance, argue that parties can be more or less institutionalized depending on the extent to which competition occurs, whether the organizations have stable roots in society, and whether the parties are perceived to be legitimate

(Mainwaring and Scully 1995). When regimes, organizations, or procedures become embedded and valued within society, the interests of the masses become tied to the organizations and rules themselves. As a result, it becomes difficult to for elites to single-handedly revoke or alter existing institutions.

So why does this book focus on elite politics and the institutionalization of power at the very top, rather than the process by which these rules become embedded into societal interests? This study focuses on institutionalization at the very highest echelons of power because the ability to solve the problem of leadership succession is a first order challenge facing all dictatorships. Regimes cannot become institutionalized without first constraining the leader – it is a necessary first step in order to transform a regime of one man into a self-sustaining organization. Before institutionalization at the societal level can occur, rules and procedures must first gain stability and permanence at the elite level. This study therefore focuses on the institutionalization of elite politics – notably the creation of procedures that regulate leadership transitions and mechanisms of elite appointments within presidential cabinets.

To measure regime institutionalization, I present original cross-sectional time-series data on executive constraints in all countries within Sub-Saharan Africa from 1960 to 2010. Sub-Saharan Africa has a long and dynamic history of personalist regimes, military dictatorships, and party-based rule, providing a rich setting in which to examine variation in regime institutionalization. I collect historical data on state constitutions and presidential cabinets, for which I have comprehensive yearly records for 46 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. From these historical records, I document the creation of executive constraints, hierarchical positions, and implementation of rules and procedures that structured the distribution of power. Since institutionalized regimes are those that can outlive individual leaders, my measures focus on the

creation of an autonomous state, including the development of formal leadership succession

policies. I document whether term limits and formal succession policies exist within the

constitution. A regime with constitutional rules specifying how leaders will be replaced and the

length of their tenure represents a more highly institutionalized organization because it has

internal mechanisms to perpetuate itself beyond the lifespan of a single leader.

Beyond formal constitutional rules, I also consider the development of norms

surrounding regular presidential cabinet appointments as measures of *informal*

institutionalization. In particular I focus on whether top ministerial posts – the positions of vice

president, prime minister, and the minister of defense – are filled on a regular basis. The

appointment of elites to key "power positions" demonstrates a willingness of the leader to

delegate authority and share power. The appointment of key posts to other elites is not a trivial

matter when it comes to presidential cabinets within Sub-Saharan Africa. Presidents frequently

eliminated cabinet positions or appointed *themselves* to top cabinet posts because they were

hesitant to share power with other elites.[14] Cases in which presidents appointed top cabinet

positions to other elites represent regimes with higher levels of institutionalization because

decision-making authority is not concentrated entirely within the hands of the leader.

Furthermore, by delegating responsibility and authority to other elites within the cabinet,

ministerial appointments allow the regime to function independently of the leader.

This appointment of elites to key cabinet positions, especially over ministries that control

valuable resources, is not a small or meaningless handout. The goal of capturing power,

especially within Sub-Saharan Africa, is to control the state. Having access to the state provides

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[14] Jose Eduardo dos Santos, for instance, the first president of Angola, named himself as his own
vice president for a number of years while he was in power. Hastings Banda, the first president
of Malawi, appointed himself as the Minister of Defense during his entire tenure, from 1964 until
1993.

elites with the ability to control the economy. This was especially true during the decades

immediately following independence, due to the agricultural and subsistence nature of most

African economies. The government was and continues to be the main source of funding for

development projects, employment, and the distribution of scarce resources to localities. Having

authority over a piece of the central government represents a great deal of power for elites.

By examining norms surrounding regular cabinet appointments, this book argues that

institutionalization can occur when informal institutions[15] constrain leaders – the process is not

solely restricted to the domain of formal constitutional rules. When the appointment of cabinet

officials becomes regularized, for instance, this creates the expectation that the president will

delegate cabinet positions to other elites in the future. The appointment of elites to the

presidential cabinet represents a dimension of institutionalization that is informal, yet plays a key

role in constraining executive power. Regime institutionalization can be achieved even in the

absence of ruling parties or legislatures.

Figure 1.5 displays the proportion of autocratic countries in Africa with executive

constraints from 1960 to 2010. When we conceptualize regime institutionalization in this way,

the frequency with which dictators are constrained suddenly looks very different – especially

when compared with Figure 1.3. In the first decade after independence, less than a quarter of

countries within Sub-Saharan Africa had any constitutional constraints in place. This contrasts

sharply with statistics of the frequency of ruling parties or legislatures during the same period,

which were in place upwards of 80 percent of the time. Even in the two decades after the end of

the Cold War, only about 50 to 80 percent of countries in Africa had formal executive

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[15]Following existing studies, I define informal institutions as unwritten rules that are "created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 727).
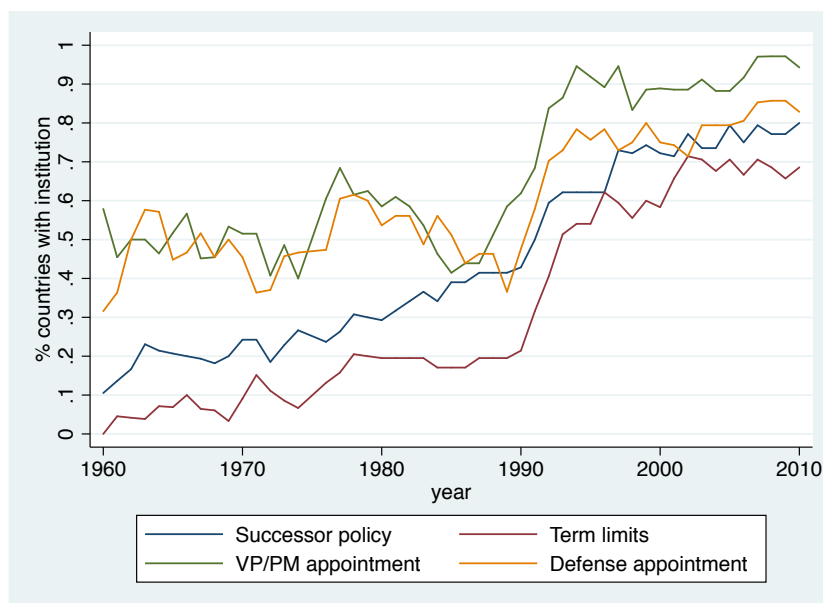
Figure 1.5. Proportion of autocratic countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with executive constraints

constraints, compared with over 90 percent of countries that have parties, legislatures, and constitutions during this period.

This book provides an alternative perspective on democratization in Africa. Almost three decades after the introduction of multiparty elections, true democracy continues to elude most African nations. Despite the high expectations of these seemingly democratic institutions, elites still continue to control the system in many countries. By contrast, this book contends that *the real story of Africa in the 1990s was not democratization; it was institutionalization.* As Figure 1.5 illustrates, one of the most dramatic changes that occurred at the end of the Cold War is that authoritarian regimes in African became much more institutionalized – along constitutional dimensions as well as through cabinet appointments. Many leaders went from being unconstrained in their rule to accepting formal limits on their authority in constitutions. Presidents went from serving as their own vice president and defense minister to delegating these powers to other elites. This book will show that the most dramatic change that occurred in Africa

in the 1990s was not that ordinary citizens could vote in multiparty elections.[16] *It was that elites recalibrated the political system amongst themselves to entrench their stability.[17]* Credible elite power sharing set the stage for more durable authoritarian rule, *even with* the introduction of nominally democratic institutions.

1.5. Part I: Causes of Regime Institutionalization

1.5.1. Why do some leaders adopt executive constraints?

The first half of the book tackles the question of how institutionalized forms of dictatorship emerge. Why do leaders choose to institutionalize their regimes after coming into power if institutionalization ties their own hands and under what conditions would they do so?

Building on insights from prior scholarship I argue that regime institutionalization is a mechanism that allows autocratic leaders to create a semi-autonomous structure that can enforce joint rule. I present a formal model in which regime institutionalization shifts the distribution of power against the leader in the future period of a two-period bargaining game. Institutionalization alleviates commitment problems in elite bargaining by empowering elites therefore providing them with the ability to hold autocrats accountable for promises made about future rent distribution.

1.5.2. How do institutions constrain?

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[16] Although the introduction of multiparty elections was indeed an important movement towards political liberalization – prior to the end of the Cold War, single-party elections dominated the political landscape in most African regimes.

[17] This argument echoes Albertus and Menaldo's (2018) recent study of elite-driven democratization.

A key question that emerges in this discussion is *how* institutions provide commitment power in dictatorships. After all, one of the defining characteristics of an authoritarian regime is that there is no independent authority that can guarantee promises to divide spoils. Authoritarian regimes are, by definition, weakly institutionalized environments. Moreover, a leader who can create an institution can also disassemble it as well. How do institutions have any bite in dictatorships?

I argue that institutions can credibly constrain leaders *only when* they change the underlying distribution of power between leaders and elites. Institutions matter, not because they establish de jure rules, *but when they affect de facto political power*. In the context of this book, the establishment of executive constraints empower elites by providing them with access to the state. When an elite is given a key cabinet position, such as vice president or the minister of defense, he is given access to power and resources that allows him to consolidate his own base of support. Elites who are appointed to positions of authority within the regime then become *focal points* for other elites – they become obvious potential challengers to the incumbent if she were to renege on promises to distribute rent. This is particularly true if a particular appointee, such as the vice president, is designated in the constitution as the legal successor to the incumbent. In such a case, a particular elite is publicly declared the number two authority within the regime, allowing other elites to coordinate around them. Even when leaders have the ability to *choose* who they appoint to these key positions – as they often do – the simple act of delegating authority shifts the underlying distribution of power between the leader and his appointees. In the model, this mechanism is formalized as a shift in the future distribution of power against the leader. When a president institutionalizes the regime, she voluntarily helps to solve the *elite*

collective action problem by identifying and empowering particular individuals who become more capable of unseating her in the future.

If regime institutionalization seems to *weaken* leaders, why would any autocrat choose to tie their own hands after coming into power? The model shows that autocratic leaders are most likely to place constraints on their own authority when they are most vulnerable and highly susceptible to being deposed. Because per-period transfers are often insufficient to buy quiescence from exceptionally strong elites, weak leaders remain in power only by delegating authority to elites as an accountability mechanism that guarantees their access to future rents. On the other hand, exceptionally strong leaders who have already consolidated power by the time they come into office have no incentives to create institutionalized mechanisms for rent distribution because they face very low likelihoods of being deposed. A weak autocratic leader is therefore better off taking actions to tie her own hands because doing so lengthens her time in office. It is important to clarify that these constraints are essentially *forced* on weak incumbents – they reluctantly institutionalize under duress when faced with elites who can credibly remove them.

My theory stresses the *path dependent* nature of regime institutionalization. How a leader enters power and the extent to which they have already consolidated their authority when they enter office determines, in large part, whether regime institutionalization will occur. In the model, even if the leader receives a particularly weak draw of power in the initial period, and is on average much stronger relative to elites, commitment problems that arise in the present swamp future distributive considerations. Leaders make decisions about institutions at the *start* of their tenure, and *these institutional decisions shape the rest of their rule*.[18]

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[18] In this sense, the initial period of a leader's tenure can also be considered a critical juncture.

This theory suggests an ironic twist of fate. Initially strong leaders are never incentivized to build credible ruling organizations because they are able to remain in power without making institutional commitments to other elites. Yet personalist strategies of rule are ultimately destabilizing in the long run, especially upon the death of the ruler. Conversely, initially weak autocrats who lack a strong basis of support must pursue the counter-intuitive strategy of committing to give power away when they are most vulnerable. Doing so allows such leaders to buy support from elites who would otherwise jump at the opportunity to depose them. Yet at the same time, these self-interested actions generate stable power-sharing institutions, setting the stage for durable authoritarian rule.

Empirical patterns of institutionalization in Sub-Saharan Africa support this argument. Founding presidents who came into office immediately following independence – especially those who were influential leaders of mass independence movements – benefitted from extreme legitimacy and high levels of popular support. Such leaders, like Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire or Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, were seen as the "founding fathers" of the newly independent African states. Both leaders, like most other founding presidents, did not appoint a vice president during their tenure and lacked constitutional constraints on their power.

Presidents who came into power via coups, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire or Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, were also much less likely to institutionalize their regimes along formal and informal dimensions. One of the most precarious risks to any civilian incumbent is the threat of a military takeover. When the leader is the head of the military, however, this threat is diminished. Autocrats who successfully come into power through coups demonstrate that they have control over the coercive apparatus that allowed them to launch a successful coup in the

first place. Since they retain control over the military, coup leaders do not need to institutionalize the regime in order to remain in power.

The end of the Cold War was also a watershed event that changed the dynamics of regime institutionalization. Beginning in the 1990s, international norms abruptly shifted towards favoring democratization and political liberalization. Leaders who had ruled as single strongman dictators were now facing condemnation in light of changing international norms, therefore shifting the distribution of power in favor of elites. As a result, levels of formal and informal institutionalization increased sharply. This discontinuous jump in the levels of institutionalization after 1990, as illustrated in Figure 1.5, is very evident when graphed over time (especially when compared with minimal changes in the existence of parties, legislatures, and constitutions, as illustrated in Figure 1.3). In fact, this sharp increase in institutionalization also explains why leadership transitions have become increasingly peaceful in the post-Cold War era.

1.6. Part II: Consequences of Regime Institutionalization

1.6.1. Do executive constraints promote autocratic stability?

After taking into account the endogenous emergence of executive constraints, the book re-examines the debate over the relationship between institutionalization and autocratic durability. Does the creation of executive constraints have stabilizing properties for autocratic leaders and regimes? The second half of this book examines these questions for a number of key regime outcomes: length of leader tenure, coup vulnerability, and leadership succession.

Despite the general consensus that institutionalized forms of dictatorship tend to be more stable, the empirical record of the relationship between institutions and regime stability has been

surprisingly mixed. In a seminal study, Geddes (1999a) finds that single-party regimes remain in power for longer periods of time compared with personalist regimes. Since then, many scholars have expanded on this argument that ruling parties can prolong the lifespan of authoritarian regimes because they serve as number of stabilizing functions.

At the same time the empirical finding in Geddes (1999a) has been challenged by other scholars who do not find a statistically significant relationship between strong parties and regime longevity. Smith (2005), for instance, shows that the significant effect of single-party regimes is driven primarily by two outliers – Mexico and the Soviet Union. Using a different dataset, Gandhi (2008) does *not* find evidence of a statistically significant relationship between the presence of parties and legislatures and autocratic survival. She argues that we should not observe a significant effect because leaders endogenously respond to threats with "appropriate" degrees of institutionalization.

How do we make sense of these divergent empirical findings? *Should* we observe a significant effect of institutionalization on stability? This book heeds Pepinsky's (2013) call to address the "nagging problem" that remains within the scholarship on authoritarian institutions. He notes: if "institutions under authoritarian rule are vulnerable to manipulation because political actors believe that institutional manipulation can shape political outcomes in their favor, then it is also true that factors that explain the origins of (and changes in) dominant parties also directly affect those political outcomes" (631). When we consider the effects of institutionalization on regime stability, we must consider that leaders make decisions to institutionalize *based on underlying threats to their authority.*

The first half of this book makes the case that leaders make strategic decisions about whether to institutionalize their regimes, depending on their strength, vis-à-vis other elites.

Because institutionalization is an endogenous process, executive constraints should only have an observable effect when we condition on leader strength. Strong leaders who have already consolidated power when they take office do not need to rely on power-sharing institutions to remain in power. Their rule is secure with or without institutional mechanisms. We therefore should observe little or no effect of institutionalization on regime durability for *strong* leaders.

For leaders who are weak, however, building an institutionalized regime does promote stability. Leaders who are highly vulnerable to being deposed by their fellow elites require executive constraints in order to make credible commitments to share power and resources. Institutionalization *should* therefore lengthen the time horizons and lessen coup risk – *but primarily for weak leaders*.

Since initially strong leaders are likely to be able to remain in power *regardless* of whether they institutionalize or not, a regression model that regresses institutionalization on regime stability without taking into account differential effects based on leader type will likely result in either a *diminished* effect of institutionalization or a *null* effect – both of which would be inaccurate.

To address this endogenous institutional choice, I incorporate an interaction term between regime institutionalization and leader strength, which accounts for differential effects of institutionalization based on whether the leader was initially strong or weak. Using founding presidents and post-coup leaders as proxies for strong leaders, I find when we condition on initial leader strength, institutionalization does indeed have a stabilizing effect for weak leaders but little or no effect for strong leaders.

1.6.2. Are institutionalized regimes more likely to undergo peaceful leadership transitions?

Finally, I also consider whether highly institutionalized regimes are more likely to undergo peaceful leadership transitions. The central challenge facing the survival of all authoritarian regimes is how the regime can transform from a dictatorship of one man to a self-sustaining system that is governed by rules. Dictatorships inherently lack mechanisms of electoral competition and leadership succession. Incumbents often remain in office for long periods of time, making it difficult to establish norms of leader turnover. Elections – even when they exist – are largely meant to *sustain*, rather than disrupt, the incumbent's regime. As a result, the process of peacefully transferring power from one leader to another is often quite precarious in dictatorships.

I argue that the creation of constitutional succession rules and the designation of a de facto successor play a critical role in regulating the process of authoritarian succession. Take the case of the first presidential succession from Jomo Kenyatta to Daniel arap Moi in Kenya in 1978. The Kenyan constitution includes an provision that reads: "If a President dies, or a vacancy otherwise occurs during a President's period of office, the Vice President becomes interim President for up to 90 days while a successor is elected." Near the end of Kenyatta's rule, a faction within the ruling KANU party tried to contest the authority of then-vice president Moi on the grounds that he was not a member of the dominant ethnic group. Moi and his supporters were able to dispute these claims by relying on the constitutional procedure governing presidential succession (Karimi and Ochieng 1980, Tamarkin 1979, Widner 1992).

Importantly, however, I argue that only certain *types* of rules are effective in promoting leadership succession. Constitutional rules that identify *a clear line of succession* are the most effective in regulating the transfer of power because such policies establish certainty and predictability about the actors who are expected to come into office. This provides elites with a

stake in maintaining the existing regime in order to reap rewards from the succession order.

Term limits, on the other hand, are much less effective in facilitating peaceful leadership

transitions because they do not *empower* specific elites in the way that succession policies do by

designating an heir apparent. Because term limits do not identify an alternative leader that elites

can coordinate around, term limits do not resolve the collective action problem elites face in

holding the incumbent accountable.

This distinction between term limits and succession procedures is an excellent illustration

of the following property that mentioned at the start of the chapter: *Institutions matter, not*

because they establish de jure rules, but when they affect de facto political power. On paper, it

would seem like term limits are an extremely powerful tool to prevent executive overreach. In

practice, however, it is *less effective* of an institutional constraint compared with succession

procedures because term limits alone do not change de facto political power.

It is also important to note that the peaceful transition of power is an *unintended*

consequence of strategic institutionalization by leaders. Incumbents plan for succession not out

of concern for the stability of the regime after they die, but because they do not want to be

preemptively deposed by elites who will compete for the presidency in the absence of a

designated successor. Although incumbents institutionalize in order to stabilize their own rule,

these self-interested actions benefit their successor, who, once appointed, has every incentive to

remain loyal to the current regime in hopes of becoming the next incumbent. In turn, these self-

reinforcing succession plans promote regime stability in the long run.

In an analysis of all post-independence leadership transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa, I

show that regimes with constitutional succession procedures and a designated successor are

significantly more likely to undergo peaceful leadership successions. A regime that has

constitutional leadership succession rules is about 60 percent more likely to undergo a peaceful

transition compared with one without any formal rules regulating succession. The designation of

an informal succession has a similar effect.

Altogether these results suggest that institutionalization *does* indeed matter for regime

longevity – as long as we condition on the endogenous emergence of institutions. In fact, an

important lesson of this book is that parties, legislatures, constitutions, and elections can matter

greatly, but the effectiveness of these institutions depends crucially on the strength and level of

institutionalization of these institutions themselves.

1.7. This Book's Contributions: Authoritarian Regimes

This book makes a number of contributions to studies of authoritarian regimes. First, it

highlights – both theoretically and empirically – the importance of examining the content rather

than existence of authoritarian institutions. By providing data on the *details* of these institutions,

I am able to examine the extent to which autocratic leaders truly tie their hands via formal or

informal rules and procedures. Despite the prevalence of parties or legislatures, there *are*

important differences in the institutional makeup of dictatorships.

This study reveals these differences by presenting new evidence of how regime

institutionalization varies along key dimensions of executive constraints. In doing so, I

operationalize a key variable to which many scholars have referred, but often do not carefully

define nor measure systematically. These measurement decisions have important substantive

implications – both for our understanding of the frequency of institutionalized forms of

dictatorship but also for our ability to accurately test arguments centering on the relationship

between institutional strength and regime durability. The literature on authoritarian parties, for

instance, has made the case that ruling parties may play an important role in regulating

leadership succession. However, this argument has had limited empirical verification due to data

limitations. By contrast, I show that constitutional succession rules and the designation of a

successor (which are *sometimes* but not *always* embedded in party-based regimes) positively

associate with regulated transitions. Ruling parties, without taking into account the quality of the

institutional arrangements, simply have no effect on their own.

This measurement contribution builds on Geddes' (1999a) path-breaking work on regime

typologies. In a seminal study, she classifies all autocracies into regime types: party, personal,

military, or hybrids of these categories. This classification scheme was one of the earliest studies

to codify differences in the institutional quality of dictatorship and stimulated a large body of

work that followed. However, the regime typologies framework is subject to a number of

measurement concerns. First, placing regimes into time-invariant categories obscures

institutional change over time.[19] This is a significant limitation because leaders within the same

regime often make very different decisions about the extent to which they are willing to defer to

institutions. Take China as an example. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) currently rules

China as a strong and autonomous party machine. The CCP has an extensive organizational

hierarchy and well-defined norms regarding promotion within the party ranks. By contrast, China

under the rule of its founding leader, Mao Zedong, was significantly less institutionalized than it

is today. Mao arbitrarily purged and promoted party officials at will and launched political

campaigns, such as the Hundred Flowers Movement and the Cultural Revolution, in order to

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[19] Although it is possible for countries to be coded as different regimes over time, most are not. Furthermore, this coding scheme does not allow for variation *within* regimes. See Chapter 2 for the full discussion.

eliminate his rivals. According to the regime typology framework, China is coded as a single-party regime since 1949, despite this institutional variation over time.

Furthermore, regime typologies are composed of mutually exclusive categories that are often insufficiently nuanced to capture differences between countries coded within the same category (Svolik 2012). China under the rule of the Communist Party is very different compared with Guinea under the (superficial) rule of the PDG, though both are coded as single-party regimes. Rather than creating mutually exclusive categories, this book creates *disaggregated* indicators of regime institutionalization that captures changes in institutional quality *over time.*

Moreover, the measures presented in this book are objectively coded in a transparent way that can be verified and replicated. Although Geddes (2003) outlines a clear set of guidelines that were employed to categorize regimes into different categories, a number of these criteria used to code regime types require the researcher to make subjective decisions about how to code the regime.[20] It is also not clear what the individual responses to these criteria were, making it difficult to interpret regime categories that are an aggregation of these individual criteria. By contrast, the measures presented in this book are all disaggregated and were constructed by simply observing whether certain constitutional rules or cabinet appointments existed.[21] The coding scheme therefore does not require the researcher to make subjective judgment calls and is easily replicable by other researchers.

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[20] Examples of subjective criteria include: "Does the party have functioning local level organizations that do something reasonably important, such as distribute seeds or credit or organize local government?" or "Has rule of law been maintained?". The possibility of measurement error based on subjective coding rules is also heightened by the fact that the dataset spans multiple regions and time periods and often rely on information from various country experts.

[21] My approach is similar to the measurement strategies used in Gandhi (2008) and Svolik (2012).

In fact, I demonstrate that regime institutionalization is not synonymous with the presence of nominally democratic institutions. Very often data on the *presence* of institutions has substituted for data on the *content* of institutions. However, comparisons of my institutionalization measures with existing datasets that focus on the existence of autocratic institutions verify that simply having parties or legislatures does not mean that executive constraints on the leader exist. Moreover, many regimes that have been coded as dominant-party regime types are also not very institutionalized. Even aggregate POLITY scores of executive constraints ("XCONST") display massive inconsistencies when compared to the presence of constitutional term limits and succession procedures. In sum, existing variables of autocratic institutions are poor predictors of regime institutionalization and do not reflect the extent to which the leader is constrained.

This book also contributes to the literature on comparative political institutions by developing a theory of why dictatorships vary in institutional strength. I build on a small but growing literature that explains the causes and consequences of institutional weakness in developing or transitional states (Gryzmala-Busse 2007, Helmke 2017, Levitsky and Murillo 2009). This book also highlights the role of *informal* institutions in regulating political power (Gryzmala-Busse 2010, Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006, Lauth 2000, Mershon 1994) – a topic that has received very limited attention within the autocratic context (Tsai 2007). It addresses the topic of institutional change and examine how and when institutions become self-reinforcing in otherwise weakly institutionalized settings (Greif and Laitin 2004, Mahoney and Thelen 2010, Nalepa 2010, Negretto 2013, Pierson 2000, Przeworski 2014, Thelen 2004). Importantly, I am able to present quantitative evidence of this, in contrast with most existing studies that have either been entirely theoretical or primarily based on case studies.

As a second key contribution, this book ties the *origins* of institutions to their *consequences* in a comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of autocratic regime institutionalization. Scholars have only recently begun to examine why some leaders create institutional arrangements rather than relying on private transfers to maintain elite support. Early studies either took the existence of a dominant party as exogenous (as noted explicitly in Magaloni (2008)[22]) or identified multiple strategies of rule (repression, informal cooptation, or institutions) without specifying the conditions under which leaders would choose to rule with or without institutions (Haber 2006). As Reuter (2017) notes, "we know much more in political science about the equilibrium characteristics of dominant parties…than we do about how these equilibria come to be established in the first place" (13).

A growing number of studies are now considering how institutional equilibria emerge in dictatorships. Gandhi (2008) and Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) first highlight the notion that institutions emerge endogenously when they benefit leaders. Brownlee (2007) argues that intra-elite conflict during the early years of the regime necessitates the creation of dominant parties, and Slater (2010) argues that elites create strong states and durable parties when they face "endemic threats" to their existences. Other studies have highlighted the role of revolutionary conflict and external threats that create conditions to facilitate the development of strong party institutions (Huntington 1968, Levitsky and Way 2012, 2013, Smith 2005). Three recent studies have dealt with this question of institutional creation most directly and point to the key mechanism of commitment problems between leaders and elites that motivates the creation of power-sharing institutions (Boix and Svolik 2013, Gehlbach and Keefer 2011, Reuter 2017).

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[22] She states: "A key question that emerges from this discussion is why not all dictators create political parties if these play such powerful roles at minimizing their risk of being overthrown by members of the ruling coalition. My account does not address the question of origins – how successful and credible political parties get established in the first place" (11).

This book differs from these existing accounts by examining the origins of executive constraints in constitutions and presidential cabinets, rather than the origins of the parties and legislatures. In fact, historical evidence often suggests that *many ruling parties are not strategically created*, but instead, inherited by leaders. Within my sample of African countries, for instance, virtually all leaders came into power with a pre-existing party in place immediately following independence. These ruling parties were created prior to decolonization not as elite power-sharing devices, but rather as pro-independence organizations (Bienen 1970, 1978, Zolberg 1966, 1969) or parties that were used to participate in pre-independence elections (Collier 1982). Rather than arguing that leaders make strategic decisions to create institutions, this book argues that leaders make strategic decisions to *institutionalize* their regimes after coming into power.

In providing a comprehensive account of both the causes and consequences of institutionalization, this book is able to take into account endogenous decisions to institutionalize when estimating the effects of these institutions. Scholarship examining the effects of institutions on regime durability has generally developed in isolation from studies of the origins of these institutions. *Yet the consequences of institutions are intimately related to where these institutions come from.* This book considers how the strategic origins of institutionalization have an effect on the consequences of such rules and procedures. In doing so, I aim to separate the effects of institutions on regime outcomes from the effects of the underlying power distributions that drove leaders to create these institutions in the first place.

1.8. Why Africa? This Book's Contributions to African Politics

To study regime institutionalization, this book takes a broad look within a particular region: I examine all 46 countries within Sub-Saharan Africa from the end of independence through 2010. To my knowledge, this is one of the few studies of authoritarian politics within Sub-Saharan Africa[23] – and one of the few that is comprehensive in the coverage of countries within the region.

It is a bit surprising that Sub-Saharan Africa as a region has been underrepresented in the study of authoritarian politics. Every country within Africa was an authoritarian state following independence in the 1960s.[24] The majority of countries within Africa remain authoritarian today. Countries like Tanzania, Cameroon, and Mozambique have been governed by the same group of elites that took power after independence was granted. These ruling elites were able to retain power despite the emergence of democratic pressures that surfaced at the end of the Cold War, and these regimes remain clearly authoritarian today. Even a country such as Botswana that is considered by many to have fair elections is a single-party dictatorship that has been governed by the same ruling party since independence in 1966. In short, the politics of dictatorship *has been*, and in many cases, *continues to be* the politics of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Beyond current authoritarian regimes in Africa, this book is also important for understanding the politics of countries that are newly democratized, such as Malawi or Kenya, or those that are in the process of democratizing, such as Liberia. Pressures to democratize did not arise in Africa until the 1990s and transitions away from authoritarianism have occurred very recently, with many still ongoing. The legacies of authoritarian rule often persist in these new or

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[23] Some notable studies have examined the effect of authoritarian legacies on democratization in Africa, without focusing explicitly on the politics of authoritarian rule (Bleck and van del Walle 2018, Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Cheeseman 2015, LeBas 2011, Riedl 2014).

[24] Only the island of Mauritius has been considered a democracy since it gained independence in 1968.

fledgling democracies and frequently hinder the consolidation of democratization. This study is

in conversation with studies of democratization in Africa by examining the authoritarian

backdrop in which political reforms take place (Arriola 2013, Bleck and van de Walle 2018,

Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Cheeseman 2015, LeBas 2011, Riedl 2014). Studies of newly

democratized African countries indicate that party systems and the strength of opposition parties

in the democratic era are shaped by the activities of these parties from the authoritarian era

(LeBas 2013, Riedl 2014). Leaders often use cabinet positions to buy off opposition politicians,

therefore hampering the creation of strong opposition coalitions. Importantly, they are able to do

so without explicitly violating any electoral rules (Arriola, De Varo, and Meng 2017, Buckles

and Gandhi 2017). Incumbency advantages gained during the authoritarian period allow

incumbents to subvert genuine democratic competition while still allowing for multi-party

elections. This book is also in conversation with Roessler (2011, 2016), which examines which

types of elites (out-groups versus in-groups) leaders choose to share power with in order to

balance between threats of coups and civil wars. By contrast, this study examines the conditions

that motivate leaders to delegate authority to other elites in the first place. In sum, the study of

dictatorships in Africa both past and present is essential for our understanding of politics in

Africa today.

In studying Africa through the lens of authoritarian politics, this book challenges a

number of conventional wisdoms that have prevailed in the study of African politics. Scholars

have historically argued that regimes in Africa have often dominated by "big men" (Bienen

1970, 1978, Decalo 1976, 1990, Jackson and Rosberg 1982, Zolberg 1966, 1969) and that

leaders rely primarily on informal patronage-based rule to stay in power (Arriola 2009, Francois,

Rainer, Trebbi 2015). In contrast with these dominant perspectives, I provide empirical evidence

that some African autocrats do indeed rule through institutionalized mechanisms that regulate

and depersonalize power – even during the most authoritarian decades prior to the end of the

Cold War. Institutions are not uniformly weak in Africa, and variation exists both across

countries and over time.

This book provides a surprising perspective on democratization in Africa. Despite the

introduction of multiparty elections across most African nations in the early 1990s, democratic

consolidation remains stubbornly out of reach in the region today (Bleck and van de Walle

2018). This book explains why. As my data on executive constraints demonstrate, following the

end of the Cold War, regimes in Africa became much more institutionalized, as leaders

established power-sharing mechanisms in order to maintain support from fellow elites. Rather

than offering citizens true access to power, incumbents and elites consolidated their stranglehold

on political power, all while keeping the appearance of governing through democratic-seeming

institutions. This resulted, among many other things, in a dramatic decrease of coups and

dictatorships based on extreme repression. *Rather than ushering in true citizen-led democracies,*

the institutionalization of African regimes in the 1990s introduced more durable rule-based

forms of authoritarianism.

There are also important advantages to theorizing about authoritarian stability by

examining African dictatorships. There have been many seminal studies of authoritarian

institutions and strategies of rule in twentieth-century China and Mexico[25] – countries that *do*

indeed have exceptionally strong institutions and have been very long-lived. It is undoubtedly

important to understand these cases: China has the largest population in the world, and Mexico

under the rule of the PRI was one of the longest-lived modern autocracies. However, the

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[25] One cannot say the same, for instance, of Djibouti or Mauritania.

emphasis on these countries has likely biased our existing theories. As a result of a large number of studies that focused on a limited set of countries, theories were often built around cases that resemble *outliers*, rather than the modal authoritarian country. This is also especially problematic when arguments that were constructed around especially successful cases are then generalized using broad large-N variables (such as the presence of parties) when these data cannot adequately capture institutional quality.

By contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa as a region provides a uniquely good opportunity in which to theorize about authoritarian politics more broadly due to variation in institutional quality across regimes and over time. Authoritarian rule in Africa has ranged from stable and highly institutionalized regimes, such as in Kenya or Mozambique, to military forms of government, such as in Ghana or Benin, to personalist one-man dictatorships, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire or Idi Amin of Uganda. In other words, this book does not focus solely on regimes that are stable and long-lived. Moreover, states within Sub-Saharan Africa share a number of economic and historical similarities, allowing me to hold a number of macro-conditions constant.

The post-colonial nature of African states also provides an ideal setting in which to study the *emergence* of institutionalized systems. The enterprise of governing in Sub-Saharan Africa after decolonization was primarily one of state building. The institutions that had been set up by colonial administrations were primarily used to extract, rather than to govern. When African leaders finally came to power, they had to reconstitute institutions of authority, and this provided the opportunity for these leaders to shape presidential power. The post-colonial experience in Africa, like many other post-colonial nations, allows researchers to examine how contemporary institutions are created in new states.

I focus my analysis on regimes within Sub-Saharan Africa but maintain a broad

comparative approach by including all countries within the region in my study, rather than

focusing on a single case study. This design allows me to collect and analyze country-level data

on executive constraints, without relying on broad measures that do not provide enough detail or

accuracy. At the same time, I am able to retain a comparative approach by studying 46 countries

over a time span of 50 years, which is more amenable for making generalizable arguments about

authoritarian regimes more broadly.

In addition, this book takes a multi-method approach by combining formal theory, time-

series cross-sectional data analysis, and illustrative case evidence. There has been a recent push

towards studies that link formal and empirical analysis. The combination of different approaches

helps scholars triangulate between various types of evidence that have different comparative

advantages (Aldrich, Alt, Lupia 2007, Granato and Scioli 2004). The advantage of applied game

theory is that formal models "make arguments more transparent both to those making them and

to those to whom the arguments are made" (Powell 1999, 29). Using a model, I am able to

identify clear tradeoffs leaders are faced with when deciding whether to institutionalize the

regime, as well as consider the effects of other competing factors. I am also able to clearly

identify assumptions that model is making and validate these assumptions using empirical

evidence. By collecting time-series cross-sectional data on executive constraints, I am able to test

the theoretical arguments produced by my model. While the model's aim is to establish internal

validity, statistical analyses helps to establish external validity. In addition, by taking

measurement very seriously, this book is able to examine the consequences of institutionalization

on a wide range of outcomes that has had limited empirical verification due to limitations on

existing data. Finally, this book also uses illustrative case evidence to provide examples of

mechanisms and specific cases that exemplify broader trends that are found in the data. In doing

so, I can provide a more concrete sense of the different types of strategies autocratic leaders used

to retain power over the last five decades within Sub-Saharan Africa. Altogether, it is my hope

that the combination of multiple types of inquiry and different kinds of evidence help to build a

thorough and compelling case.

1.9. Plan of the Book

The aim of this book is to explain how executive constraints on autocratic leaders emerge

and examine the effects of institutionalization on regime durability. I alternate between treating

regime institutionalization as the dependent variable and independent variable. Chapters 2 and 3

focus on institutionalization as the *dependent* variable by explaining how executive constraints

emerge and how they become self-sustaining. Chapter 4 lays the groundwork for the empirical

analysis of this book. It discusses how I conceptualize regime institutionalization, describes my

dataset, and compares my measures against other existing datasets on authoritarian institutions.

Regime institutionalization remains the *dependent* variable in Chapter 5, which provides

empirical evidence of the relationship between leader strength and regime institutionalization.

Chapters 6 and 7 treat regime institutionalization as the *independent* variable by examining

whether executive constraints promote autocratic stability and peaceful leadership succession.

While the first three chapters of the book are largely theoretical, Chapters 4 through 7 are

primarily empirical.

Chapter 2: Why do leaders institutionalize?

This chapter presents a theory of why and when leaders institutionalize their regimes after coming into power. I argue that leaders institutionalize their regimes in order to make credible commitments about future rent distribution to other elites. I present a formal model in which institutionalization shifts the future distribution of power away from the leader in a two-period bargaining game. The model shows that autocrats who enter power in a position of strength relative to other elites will not institutionalize the regime because they never face commitment problems in bargaining. Weaker leaders without such guarantees of stability are more likely to pursue a strategy of institutionalization because doing so provides benefits of stable rule.

Chapter 3: Two illustrative cases

This chapter presents two illustrative case studies: Cameroon (a highly institutionalized regime) and Côte d'Ivoire (a weakly institutionalized regime). The first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, entered power extremely weak. Ahidjo was not an influential independence leader – he was a close ally of the French colonial administration who inherited his position of power upon independence. To compensate for extremely low levels of popularity, Ahidjo used cabinet appointments as a means to buy support from other elites. By contrast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of Côte d'Ivoire, entered power already extremely influential. He had been a renowned independence fighter for decades and there were no other elites of similar political stature in Côte d'Ivoire by the time he took office. Houphouët remained in power for three decades as a personalist strongman ruler, but the regime collapsed soon after his death due to the absence of institutionalized structures.

Chapter 4: How should regime institutionalization be measured?

This chapter lays the empirical groundwork for the central concept of the book. I discuss how I conceptualize and operationalize autocratic regime institutionalization, presenting the dataset and explaining in detail the coding strategy. I show that other commonly used datasets of authoritarian institutions, such as regime typologies and POLITY scores, do not accurately measure the extent to which leaders are constrained.

Chapter 5: What are the causes of regime institutionalization?

This chapter provides a cross-national test of the theory that was presented in Chapter 2. I show that initial leader strength systematically determines patterns of regime institutionalization. Leaders who were influential independence movement leaders or those who came to power via a coup tend to institutionalize less because these types of leaders enter office with distinct advantages of other elites. I also show that the end of the Cold War is associated in a sharp increase of institutionalization as African leaders lost access to military and economic aid from external sponsors.

Chapter 6: What are the consequences of institutionalization on autocratic stability?

This chapter examines the effects of institutionalization on autocratic stability by examining leader tenure and coup threats. I find that executive constraints lengthen the tenure of weak leaders but have no effect on leaders who are strong. Similarly, I find that weak leaders who institutionalize are significantly less likely to face coup attempts, but there is not a strong effect of institutionalization on coup vulnerability for strong leaders. These results show that

institutionalization does indeed matter for regime durability – as long as we condition on the

endogenous emergence of institutions.

Chapter 7: What are the consequences of institutionalization on leadership succession?

This chapter provides evidence that regime institutionalization matters greatly for the

most critical regime outcome: peaceful leadership succession. I argue that institutionalized

succession procedures regulate the process of peaceful leadership transitions. I show that regimes

that have formal succession rules written into the constitution and leaders who designate a clear

successor are significantly more likely to undergo successful leadership transitions.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The final chapter concludes by summarizing five key claims made in this book. I discuss

each of the claims in detail and highlight the empirical and theoretical contributions of these

findings. I then consider the implications of autocratic regime institutionalization for future

studies of institutional design, democratization, and democratic backsliding.