

STEVEN LEVITSKY AND LUCAN WAY

THE VIOLENT ORIGINS  
OF DURABLE  
AUTHORITARIANISM



REVOLUTION &  
DICTATORSHIP



# Revolution and Dictatorship

THE VIOLENT ORIGINS OF  
DURABLE AUTHORITARIANISM



*Steven Levitsky*  
*Lucan Way*

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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**Steve dedicates this book to Liz Mineo and Alejandra Mineo-Levitsky**

**Lucan dedicates this book to Victor (*dziadzio*) Erlich (1914–2007)**



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Lucan dedicates this book to his step grandfather, Victor (*dziadzio*) Erlich (1914–2007). Victor was a toddler in Petrograd during the Russian Revolution, suffered the death of his father to Stalinist repression, and barely escaped the Holocaust before migrating to the United States, where he had a long and distinguished career as a professor of Russian literature. Despite his brush with some of the twentieth century's worst tragedies, Victor was preternaturally happy, eminently approachable, and exuded an infectious warmth and humor that persisted until his final breath. He is sorely missed.



# A Theory of Revolutionary Durability

IN JUNE 1941, SOVIET POWER hung by the barest of threads. Overwhelmed by invading Nazi armies, the Soviet Union ceded vast tracts of territory as entire Russian divisions lost contact with their commanders. Across the country, the Red Army disintegrated into bands of fugitives seeking to escape German encirclement. In the central corridors of power, panicked confusion reigned.<sup>1</sup>

One might have expected the Soviet regime to collapse, falling prey to either an uprising by citizens who had suffered years of starvation and repression or a coup by army officers angry at Joseph Stalin's brutal purges and catastrophic meddling in military affairs. Indeed, military disaster during World War I had precipitated the fall of the tsarist regime. Moreover, the devastating first weeks of the invasion could be traced directly to Stalin's leadership. He had refused to prepare for an invasion despite numerous intelligence reports that an attack was imminent; in fact, he had ordered the dismantling of existing defense fortifications in the east, leaving the Soviet army largely defenseless in the rear.<sup>2</sup> Several days after the German invasion, Stalin retreated to his dacha, leaving the rest of the leadership in the lurch. A small group of Politburo members ventured out to see him uninvited—a risky move in Stalinist Russia.<sup>3</sup> According to one account, the Soviet leaders found Stalin alone in the dark, slumped in an armchair, seemingly expecting arrest.<sup>4</sup> He later admitted that “any other government which had suffered such losses of territory . . . would have collapsed.”<sup>5</sup> Yet Stalin's government survived, and Soviet communism endured for another half century.

The Soviet regime's survival amid extreme adversity highlights a broader phenomenon of great significance. Revolutionary autocracies—those born of violent social revolution—are extraordinarily durable. Soviet communism lasted seventy-four years; Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime ruled for eighty-five years; revolutionary regimes in China, Cuba, and Vietnam remain in power today after more than six decades. Among modern states, only a small handful of Persian Gulf monarchies match this longevity.

Revolutionary autocracies do not merely persist over time. Like the Soviet Union, most of them have survived despite external hostility, poor economic performance, and large-scale policy failure. The Chinese Communist Party held on to power in the face of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward and the “Great Chaos” unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. Vietnam's Communist regime endured the devastation caused by thirty years of war; Cuba's revolutionary regime survived a U.S.-backed invasion, a crippling trade embargo, and the economic catastrophe that followed the Soviet collapse; and the Islamic Republic of Iran endured four decades of intense international hostility, including a bloody eight-year war with Iraq.

Finally, most revolutionary regimes survived the global collapse of communism. During the 1990s, the loss of foreign patrons, economic crisis, and unprecedented international democracy promotion undermined autocracies across the world.<sup>6</sup> Yet many revolutionary regimes—including erstwhile communist regimes in China, Cuba, and Vietnam—remained intact. Indeed, all the communist regimes that survived into the twenty-first century were born of violent revolution.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in sub-Saharan Africa, the only Soviet client states to survive the end of the Cold War were Angola and Mozambique, both of which emerged out of violent social revolution.

These cases are not anomalies. In a statistical analysis of all authoritarian regimes established since 1900, undertaken with Jean Lachapelle and Adam E. Casey,<sup>8</sup> we find that authoritarian regimes that emerged out of violent social revolution survived, on average, nearly three times as long as their nonrevolutionary counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Revolutionary regimes broke down at an annual rate that was barely a fifth of that of nonrevolutionary regimes.<sup>10</sup> To help visualize these differences, figure 1.1 presents the Kaplan-Meier estimates for the two regime types, along with 95 percent confidence envelopes. It shows that a striking 71 percent of revolutionary regimes survived for thirty years or more, compared to only 19 percent of nonrevolutionary regimes.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, revolutionary origins are

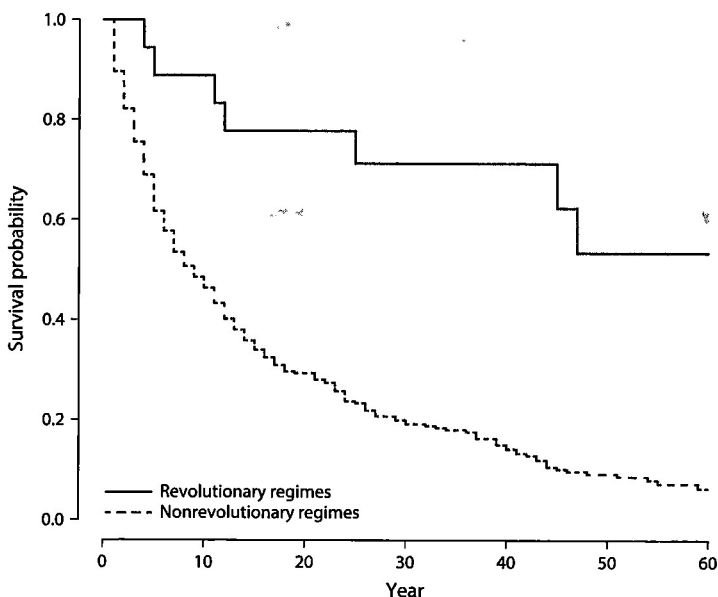


FIGURE 1.1: Kaplan-Meier Survival Curves.

positively associated with regime longevity, even when we control for standard variables such as level of economic development, GDP growth, oil wealth, and type of authoritarian regime (party-based, military, monarchy, or personalist).<sup>12</sup>

The durability of revolutionary regimes is highly consequential. Though rare (we count twenty since 1900), revolutionary autocracies have had an outsized impact on modern world politics. Revolutions expand state power, sometimes dramatically. As Theda Skocpol observed,<sup>13</sup> the destruction of old elites and mobilization of vast human and other societal resources may permit rapid industrial and military advances, enabling states to leapfrog others in the geopolitical pecking order. Thus, the Russian Revolution transformed a predominantly agrarian society into a modern industrial power capable of defeating Germany in World War II and achieving nuclear parity with the United States. The revolution shook the global capitalist system and gave rise to the Cold War rivalry that defined the post-1945 geopolitical order. Likewise, the Chinese Revolution brought the centralization of what had been a weak, fragmented state and fueled the country's emergence as a superpower. Cuba's revolution transformed

a peripheral state into one capable of successful military intervention in Africa.

Revolutions also bring war.<sup>14</sup> Dramatic shifts in national power tend to destabilize the regional and even international order, increasing the likelihood of military conflict.<sup>15</sup> Revolutionary governments generate heightened uncertainty and perceptions of threat among both neighboring states and global powers, which increases the likelihood of interstate conflict.<sup>16</sup> Thus, from revolutionary France to Communist Russia and China, to postcolonial Vietnam, to late twentieth-century Iran and Afghanistan, revolutionary governments have often found themselves engulfed in war. Overall, revolutionary governments are nearly twice as likely as nonrevolutionary governments to be involved in war.<sup>17</sup>

Revolutionary regimes also engender new ideological and political models that spread across national borders. The Bolshevik Revolution gave rise to an economic model (state socialism) and a political model (Leninism) that diffused across the globe during the twentieth century. Similarly, the Cuban Revolution gave rise to a new guerrilla strategy that transformed the Latin American Left, polarizing politics across the region for a generation.<sup>18</sup> The Iranian Revolution created a new model of a modern theocracy.

Revolutionary regimes, moreover, have been responsible for some of the most horrific violence and human tragedy in modern history, including the 1932–1933 Ukrainian famine, Stalin’s Great Terror, the Great Leap Forward in China, and the Khmer Rouge’s genocide in Cambodia.

Finally, revolutionary regimes have posed major foreign policy challenges for Western democracies. Few states were more closely associated with U.S. foreign policy ineffectiveness—if not outright failure—than revolutionary Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, and Afghanistan.

This book seeks to explain the extraordinary durability of modern revolutionary regimes.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on comparative historical analysis, we argue that social revolutions trigger a *reactive sequence* that powerfully shapes long-run regime trajectories.<sup>20</sup> Revolutionary governments’ attempts to radically transform the existing social and geopolitical order generate intense domestic and international resistance, often resulting in civil or external war. This counterrevolutionary reaction is critical to long-run regime durability. Counterrevolutionary wars pose an existential threat to newborn regimes, and, in some cases (e.g., Afghanistan, Cambodia), they destroy them. Among revolutionary regimes that survive, however, early periods of violence and military threat produce three key pillars of regime strength: (1) a cohesive ruling elite, (2) a highly developed and

loyal coercive apparatus, and (3) the destruction of rival organizations and alternative centers of power in society. These three pillars help to inoculate revolutionary regimes against elite defection, military coups, and mass protest—three principal sources of authoritarian breakdown. Such a trajectory almost always yields durable autocracies.

### *Defining Revolutionary Regime*

*A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained, and magnanimous.*

—MAO ZEDONG<sup>21</sup>

Revolutionary autocracies are political regimes that emerge out of social revolutions. We define a social revolution as the violent overthrow of an existing regime from below, accompanied by mass mobilization and state collapse, which triggers a rapid transformation of the state and the existing social order.<sup>22</sup>

Social revolutions possess four characteristics that jointly distinguish them from other types of regime change. First, they occur from below, in that they are led by mass-based movements that emerge outside the state and regime.<sup>23</sup> These may be armed guerrilla movements (China, Cuba, Eritrea, Vietnam), political parties (Russia), or militant social movements (Iran) that seize power amid mass unrest. In all cases, the revolutionary elite is drawn from outside the preexisting state. Military coups are not social revolutions.

Second, social revolutions involve the violent overthrow of the old regime.<sup>24</sup> This may take the form of a civil war (Mexico, Rwanda), a guerrilla struggle (China, Cuba, Eritrea, Mozambique), or a rapid and violent seizure of power (Russia, Bolivia in 1952, Iran).

Third, social revolutions produce a fundamental transformation of the state.<sup>25</sup> State transformation initially involves the collapse or crippling of the preexisting coercive apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Military chains of command are shattered by mutinies or widespread desertion, preventing the security forces from functioning as coherent organizations. In many cases, preexisting coercive structures simply dissolve (e.g., Mexico, Cuba, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Russia) or, in anticolonial revolutions (e.g., Algeria, Mozambique, Vietnam), are withdrawn. Upon seizing power, revolutionary forces usually dismantle remaining coercive agencies and build new armies, police forces, and bureaucracies—often from scratch.<sup>27</sup>

Fourth, social revolutions involve the initiation of radical socioeconomic or cultural change.<sup>28</sup> Revolutionary governments attempt to impose, by force, measures that attack the core interests of powerful domestic and international actors or large groups in society. Such measures include the systematic seizure and redistribution of property; attempts to eliminate entire social classes (e.g., China, Russia); campaigns to destroy preexisting cultures, religions, or ethnic orders (e.g., Iran, Rwanda); efforts to impose new rules governing social behavior (e.g., Afghanistan, Iran); and foreign policy initiatives aimed at spreading revolution and transforming the regional or international order (e.g., Hungary in 1919, Cuba, Iran, Russia). Because such efforts at radical social transformation trigger substantial resistance, often from powerful places, they are invariably accompanied by a heavy dose of coercion. For this reason, social revolutions are antithetical to the development of liberal democracy.

Our definition of social revolution is demanding.<sup>29</sup> It excludes at least three types of regime change that scholars sometimes describe as revolutionary. First, it excludes cases of mass-based regime change in which states and social structures remain intact, such as the so-called color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; the Arab Spring transitions in Egypt and Tunisia; or Third Wave democratizations in the Philippines (1986) and South Africa (1994).

Second, our definition excludes cases of radical change initiated by actors within the state. So-called revolutions from above,<sup>30</sup> such as those in Turkey under Kemal Ataturk, Egypt under Gamal Nasser, or Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam, do not meet our definition of revolution because they were led by state officials rather than mass-based regime outsiders. Far from involving the collapse or transformation of the state, revolutions from above are *led* by the state.

Third, we exclude cases that emerge out of violent regime change but do not initiate radical social transformations. These cases—which include China under the Kuomintang (1927–1949), postcolonial Indonesia and contemporary Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda—might be characterized as *political revolutions*, as opposed to *social revolutions*.<sup>31</sup> Regimes that emerge out of political revolutions sometimes share important characteristics with social revolutionary regimes, such as the creation of new armies. As a result, they too are often robust. However, only social revolutions trigger the revolutionary reactive sequence that generates the extraordinary durability observed in countries like Mexico, the Soviet Union, Communist China, and Vietnam. When we use the term “revolutionary regime,” then, we refer to regimes born of *social* revolution.

Our definition does not encompass some prominent cases that have been described as revolutionary, such as the postcommunist “refolutions” of 1989–1991.<sup>32</sup> Because the fall of communism in Eastern Europe involved mass uprisings and produced far-reaching socioeconomic transformations, these transitions have been described as revolutionary.<sup>33</sup> They do not meet our criteria, however. With the exception of Romania,<sup>34</sup> postcommunist transitions were peaceful, in that they were driven by either peaceful demonstrations (Eastern Europe) or, in the Soviet case, elections (in 1990) and peaceful protest (after the 1991 putsch).<sup>35</sup> In addition, most postcommunist transitions left important state structures, including pre-existing armies, intact.<sup>36</sup>

Our definition also excludes fascist regimes. Although Nazi Germany and Italy under Benito Mussolini have been described as revolutionary,<sup>37</sup> the Nazis and the Italian fascists came to power through institutional means, and with the backing of state officials.<sup>38</sup> States never collapsed.

Our definition of revolution is thus more demanding than those used in much of the contemporary literature. Minimalist definitions, such as those of Mark R. Beissinger, Jack Goldstone, Jeff Goodwin, and others, categorize as revolutions all cases “of irregular, extraconstitutional, and sometimes violent changes of political regime and control of state power brought about by popular movements.”<sup>39</sup> By excluding criteria such as state and societal transformation, these definitions broaden the concept of revolution to encompass a wide array of cases, ranging from violent social revolutions in China and Russia to the protest-driven removal of autocrats such as the fall of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. Our definition yields a narrower—but more uniform—set of cases.

To identify revolutionary regimes, we compiled a list of all 355 autocracies since 1900 by drawing on data from Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz’s “Autocratic Breakdown and Regimes Transitions” data set (GWF).<sup>40</sup> We then narrowed the set of cases to governments that came to power in an irregular fashion (i.e., not via succession or election) and from outside the state (i.e., *not* via a military coup).<sup>41</sup> Finally, we excluded cases in which new governments did not initiate an effort to radically transform the state and the social order. (Our coding criteria and reason for excluding each nonrevolutionary case may be found in appendixes II and III).<sup>42</sup>

To ensure that we did not miss any revolutionary governments that collapsed before the end of the first calendar year, thereby failing to meet GWF’s inclusion criteria for being a regime,<sup>43</sup> we also examined all 219 autocratic leaders who were in power for at least a day but less than a

**Table 1.1** Revolutionary Regimes since 1900

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Afghanistan, 1996–2001
Albania, 1944–1991
Algeria, 1962–
Angola, 1975–
Bolivia, 1952–1964
Cambodia, 1975–1979
China, 1949–
Cuba, 1959–
Eritrea, 1993–
Finland, January 28–April 13, 1918
Guinea-Bissau, 1974–1999
Hungary, March 21–July 29, 1919
Iran, 1979–
Mexico, 1915–2000
Mozambique, 1975–
Nicaragua, 1979–1990
Russia, 1917–1991
Rwanda, 1994–
Vietnam, 1954–
Yugoslavia, 1945–1990

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year.<sup>44</sup> We identified two revolutionary governments that died in their infancy: Finland in 1918 and Hungary in 1919.<sup>45</sup> The fact that we could identify only two such cases increases our confidence that we have not inadvertently failed to identify short-lived revolutionary governments.<sup>46</sup>

Overall, then, we find twenty revolutionary autocracies since 1900; these are listed in table 1.1. In terms of regime longevity, our cases range from those that survived less than a year (Finland, Hungary) to those lasting more than seventy years (China, Mexico, Russia). They include both regimes that emerge out of classic social revolutions, such as those in China, Cuba, Mexico, and Russia, and those founded in radical national liberation struggles, as in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, and Vietnam. The list also includes some post-Cold War cases that are not always treated as social revolutions, such as Rwanda, where the Rwandan Patriotic Front government took steps to overturn the preexisting ethnic order,<sup>47</sup> and Eritrea, where the Eritrean People's Liberation Front sought to radically overhaul the country's rural social structure.<sup>48</sup>

Seventeen of the twenty regimes listed in table 1.1 are left-leaning. This pattern may be attributed to the fact that radical challenges to the existing social order, a defining characteristic of social revolution, were more likely to be undertaken by leftist (and, more recently, Islamist) forces in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Conservative or right-wing forces usually seek to preserve the existing social order.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, all the regimes encompassed by our definition are authoritarian. This should not be surprising. Because efforts to carry out radical social transformation attack the vital interests or way of life of powerful domestic actors and large societal groups, they require a level of violence and coercion that is incompatible with liberal democracy.<sup>50</sup> Social revolutions may contribute to long-run democratization, for example, by destroying institutions or social classes that inhibit democratic change, as Barrington Moore argued in the case of France.<sup>51</sup> In all revolutionary cases, however, the initial regime was authoritarian.

### *A Theory of Revolutionary Regime Durability*

This book seeks to explain the durability of authoritarian regimes. Durable authoritarian regimes are those in which a single party, coalition, or clique remains continuously in power, usually beyond the lifetime of founding leaders, and often despite adverse conditions.<sup>52</sup> Durable autocracies are less likely to suffer serious contestation, either from within (e.g., coups) or from society (e.g., large-scale protest), even in circumstances—such as economic crisis, major policy failure, or leadership succession—that often give rise to such contestation. Moreover, when regime challenges *do* emerge, durable autocracies are better equipped to thwart them.

The early twenty-first century witnessed a proliferation of research on the sources of authoritarian durability. Some scholars pointed to economic sources of regime stability. One of these is growth. Studies have shown that economic growth helps sustain autocracy by limiting public discontent and providing governments with the resources to both maintain pro-regime coalitions and co-opt potential rivals.<sup>53</sup> Other research highlighted the role of natural resource wealth, particularly oil, in sustaining autocracies.<sup>54</sup> However, few revolutionary regimes have achieved sustained economic growth (at least initially) or possess vast natural resource endowments. In fact, most of them have experienced the kind of severe economic crisis that is widely associated with authoritarian breakdown.

Much of the contemporary literature on authoritarian durability highlights the role of political institutions.<sup>55</sup> Scholars argue that pseudo-democratic institutions such as elections, legislatures, and ruling parties help autocrats gain access to information,<sup>56</sup> co-opt opponents,<sup>57</sup> and provide mechanisms of coordination and cohesion among the ruling elite.<sup>58</sup>

The most prominent institutionalist arguments center on the role of political parties.<sup>59</sup> Ruling parties are said to enhance authoritarian stability by creating incentives for elite cooperation over defection. By providing institutional mechanisms to regulate access to the spoils of public office and by lengthening actors' time horizons through the provision of future opportunities for career advancement, ruling parties encourage long-term loyalty.<sup>60</sup> Those who lose out in short-term power struggles remain loyal in the expectation of gaining access to power in future rounds. Ruling parties thus reduce the incentives for elite defection, which is widely viewed as a major cause of authoritarian breakdown.<sup>61</sup>

Given that most revolutionary regimes are governed by strong ruling parties, revolutionary cases may appear to conform to such theories. Nevertheless, there are limits to the explanatory power of institutionalist approaches. As Benjamin Smith has shown, party-based authoritarian regimes vary widely in their durability.<sup>62</sup> Whereas some party-based regimes survive for decades, even in the face of intense opposition and severe economic crises (e.g., Malaysia, Zimbabwe), others (e.g., Pakistan in 1958, Ghana in 1966) quickly collapse, often at the first sign of duress. Indeed, as we show in this book, the formal existence of a ruling party tells us virtually nothing about its strength.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, ruling parties may not exert the independent causal force that is often assigned to them in the literature.<sup>64</sup> Looking back at the origins of many party-based autocracies, we see that ruling parties were often initially weak or nonexistent. Mexico's ruling party was not created until fifteen years after the revolutionary elite took power; Cuba's Communist Party was not established until six years after the revolution, and the party remained inoperative for a decade after its founding. Even the Bolshevik Party, which became the model for Leninist party regimes, was initially weak and riven by internal conflict. In these and other cases, ruling parties strengthened over time, together with processes of state-building and regime consolidation. This sequencing suggests that other, more exogenous, factors may be at work. In other words, strong ruling parties may contribute to durable authoritarianism, but we still need to understand where strong ruling parties come from.

Our statistical analysis offers further evidence that revolutionary origins are associated with more durable party-based authoritarianism.<sup>65</sup> We

found that among the party-based authoritarian regimes that emerged since 1900, those with revolutionary origins are considerably more robust than those without such origins. The likelihood that a revolutionary regime will collapse in any given year is less than half that of nonrevolutionary party-based regimes.<sup>66</sup>

Recent scholarly efforts to explain variation in authoritarian durability have taken a historical turn, examining the role of regime origins.<sup>67</sup> This approach may be traced back to Samuel Huntington, who argued more than half a century ago that strong ruling parties were rooted in “struggle and violence.”<sup>68</sup> For Huntington, the strength of single-party regimes was grounded in the “duration and intensity of the struggle to acquire power or to consolidate power after taking over the government.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, ruling parties that emerged out of violent revolution or prolonged nationalist struggle were most durable, whereas parties that seized and consolidated control of the state “easily, without a major struggle,” usually “withered in power.”<sup>70</sup> Katharine Chorley,<sup>71</sup> writing a full generation before Huntington, pointed to the critical role of social revolutions in facilitating the construction of strong and loyal coercive agencies. This book expands upon and tests these insights.

There exists a rich tradition of research on social revolutions.<sup>72</sup> Much of this research focuses on the *causes* of revolution. Scholars have long debated the causal role of modernization, class structure, culture, ideology, and leadership.<sup>73</sup> Since publication of Theda Skocpol’s pathbreaking book *States and Social Revolutions*,<sup>74</sup> however, there has been a near consensus—to which this book adheres—that state weakness is a necessary condition for revolution.<sup>75</sup> Revolutions occur only where states are disabled by war, decolonization, or the breakdown of a sultanistic regime.<sup>76</sup>

We know less, however, about the *consequences* of revolution, especially for political regimes. Scholars have examined the impact of revolution on culture,<sup>77</sup> redistribution and social equality,<sup>78</sup> and state-building.<sup>79</sup> They have linked revolutions to the development of powerful coercive structures,<sup>80</sup> heightened repression and terror,<sup>81</sup> and war.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, there have been fewer efforts to theorize how social revolutions shape political regimes.<sup>83</sup>

#### THE REVOLUTIONARY REACTIVE SEQUENCE

Building on Huntington,<sup>84</sup> as well as more recent work by scholars such as James Mahoney,<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Smith,<sup>86</sup> and Dan Slater,<sup>87</sup> we argue that developments during a revolutionary regime’s foundational period have a profound impact on its long-term trajectory. Revolutionary origins trigger

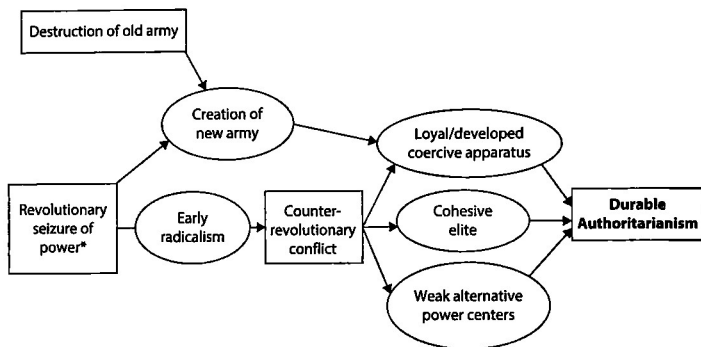


FIGURE 1.2: The Ideal-Typical Revolutionary Reactive Sequence.

\* In some cases (e.g., China), the reactive sequence occurs before seizure of power.

what Mahoney calls a “reactive sequence,”<sup>88</sup> or a series of violent conflicts that, if they do not destroy the regime early on, dramatically strengthen state institutions and weaken societal ones, laying a foundation for durable authoritarianism.

In the ideal-typical revolutionary reactive sequence, which is summarized in figure 1.2, early radicalism triggers a violent counterrevolutionary reaction, often supported by foreign powers. This counterrevolutionary reaction is critical to long-run regime durability because it creates an existential threat that reinforces elite cohesion, encourages the development of a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus, and facilitates the destruction of rival organizations and independent centers of societal power. This process of state-building and societal weakening lays a foundation for durable authoritarian rule. In classical cases (e.g., Russia, Cuba, Iran), or what Huntington called the “Western” type of revolution,<sup>89</sup> the reactive sequence begins after the seizure of national power. In some cases (e.g., China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia), however, much of the conflict and transformation occurs *prior* to the seizure of national power (Huntington called this the “Eastern” type of revolution). Notwithstanding this difference in timing, this book shows that the “Western” and “Eastern” revolutionary paths unfold in comparable ways and give rise to similarly durable regimes.

Two alternative revolutionary paths yield less durable regimes. One is a radical path to *early death*, in which revolutionary attacks on powerful domestic and international interests trigger a military conflict that

destroys the regime. Hungary (1919), Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and Afghanistan under the Taliban (1996–2001) followed this path. The other alternative path is one of *accommodation*, in which revolutionaries initiate far-reaching social change but then temper or abandon most of these measures to avert a counterrevolutionary reaction. This more pragmatic approach often succeeds at limiting violent conflict, but in the absence of such conflict, revolutionary governments are less likely to forge a cohesive elite, build a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus, or destroy independent power centers. Such regimes tend to survive in the short run, but without a durable foundation, they are prone to instability. Opposition challenges—both from within and from society—are more frequent, more potent, and thus more likely to undermine the regime. This was the path followed by regimes in Algeria, Bolivia, and Guinea-Bissau.

#### THE SEIZURE OF POWER: EARLY RADICALISM AND THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY

*You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness.*

—THOMAS SANKARA<sup>90</sup>

In observing the strength of regimes in Mexico and the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s, or in contemporary China and Vietnam, it is easy to forget that most revolutionary autocracies are born weak. Revolutionaries seize power in a context of state collapse, in which preexisting armies, police forces, and bureaucracies have been partially or fully destroyed. Inevitably, then, new revolutionary elites inherit weak states. Rebel armies are often too small, ill equipped, and inexperienced to maintain order across the national territory.<sup>91</sup> In Russia, for example, Bolshevik forces had virtually no presence outside the major cities in October 1917. Likewise, Albanian revolutionaries barely possessed any state structures when Enver Hoxha declared victory in late 1944,<sup>92</sup> and Iranian revolutionaries controlled only a “hastily gathered, disorganized and ill-trained militia” upon seizing power in 1979.<sup>93</sup>

Ruling parties also tend to be weak in the immediate aftermath of revolution. In Cuba, for example, Fidel Castro ruled without a party between 1959 and 1965. Even after being formally established in 1965, the Cuban Communist Party barely functioned.<sup>94</sup> It never even held a congress before 1975, allowing Castro to rule in an “institutional void.”<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Mexican revolutionaries lacked a ruling party during their first twelve

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## WHY THE WORLD'S MOST RESILIENT DICTATORSHIPS ARE PRODUCTS OF VIOLENT REVOLUTION

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