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Authoritarianism, Populism, and the Global Retreat of Democracy: A Curated Discussion

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Abstract

To the surprise of many in the West, the fall of the USSR in 1991 did not lead to the adoption of liberal democratic government around the world and the much anticipated "end of history." In fact, authoritarianism has made a comeback, and liberal democracy has been on the retreat for at least the last 15 years culminating in the unthinkable: the invasion of a democratic European country by an authoritarian regime. But why does authoritarianism continue to spread, not only as an alternative to liberal democracy, but also within many liberal democracies where authoritarian leaders continue to gain strength and popularity? In this curated piece, contributors discuss some of the potential contributions of management scholarship to understanding authoritarianism, as well as highlight a number of directions for management research in this area.

Keywords

institutional theory, business & society, ethics

Introduction

Michael Lounsbury and Nelson Phillips

Over the past decade, there have been increased calls for management scholars to do more research that is societally relevant and important—to, for example, address grand challenges (e.g., George et al., 2016) and to examine the role of organizations and institutions in the production and maintenance of economic inequality and systemic power imbalances (e.g., Amis et al., 2020). While historically "such topics have been difficult to publish in our leading journals," more recently "business schools are becoming more oriented to making research and education more relevant to their broader societies, which will in turn encourage scholars to pursue under researched topics of critical importance" (Tihanyi et al., 2022, p. 712). We believe that recent events in Ukraine demand that management scholars once again look beyond more traditional management themes and focus their attention on a topic that is highly societally relevant and globally important: the rise of authoritarianism and the threat this poses to democratic governments and the international rule of law.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February of this year, the Western world reacted with shock and disbelief, and as days, weeks, and now months have passed, this shock has evolved into a mixture of anger and fear as it has become apparent that there is seemingly little the West can (or at least will) do to stop Russian aggression and the growing humanitarian crisis that has followed the invasion. While

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sanctions and an ever increasing supply of arms are helping Ukraine defend itself, the war continues and Ukrainians continue to die. What the people of Ukraine currently face—the invasion of their country and a direct threat to their democratically elected government—is something that was thought to be a thing of the past in Europe, but nonetheless highlights the growing challenges facing the rule based international order that developed after World War 2 (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020).

These challenges have become manifest in a multiplicity of ways. In Russia, citizens are facing repression and an unprecedented disinformation campaign as the Russian government seeks to prevent dissent over the invasion of Ukraine. Perhaps surprisingly for many international observers, it seems that the Russian government's control of the press and the Internet has proven sufficient to keep the majority of Russians convinced of the justice of an invasion to reverse the "Nazification" of Ukraine and protect the Russian speaking minority.

In China, there is a very different kind of authoritarian government and a different kind of challenge to liberal democracy; but one that is spreading around the world via their Belt and Road initiative[1] and their increasingly sophisticated use of soft power. At the same time, tension around the status of Taiwan continues to grow as China attempts to assert its sovereignty over an independent and democratic country despite the warnings from the West that Taiwan has the right to govern itself. China's authoritarian regime has publicly set the return of Taiwan as a key goal and, at least in public discourse, refuses to accept the idea that Taiwanese citizens have the right to self-governance.

Further evidence of the erosion of the liberal democratic model can be found in the Middle East. The many governments affected by the Arab Spring democracy movement have mostly reverted back to authoritarian systems. The hope of the Arab Spring has fizzled as democracy has receded in country after country. Even more worryingly, surveys indicate that support for democracy is waning and more and more citizens believe that a strong leader is needed to take control of the situation in their countries. Liberal democracy is no longer seen as the solution to the challenges facing their countries and countries like the UAE and Singapore are commonly cited as attractive models where strong authoritarian leaders have succeeded in creating economic growth and stability.

In a number of newer democracies, like Brazil and India, populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies are winning elections over more liberal contenders and eroding the institutional underpinnings of democracy. For example, in a frightening turn of events for democracy in the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son of the former dictator of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos Sr., has managed to rehabilitate the image of his family and has been sworn in as the new President to the horror of citizens who lived through the rule of his father. Even in the United States, the election of Donald Trump, and his subsequent refusal to accept his election loss, rang alarm bells for many observers concerned about the direction of American democracy.

All of these new authoritarian governments are led by what Rachman (2022) calls "strong man"[2] leaders. These leaders, including Putin, Xi, Bolsanaro, Duterte, and Trump, share defining characteristics: "the creation of a cult of personality; contempt for the rule of law; the claim to represent the real people against the elites (otherwise known as populism); and a politics driven by fear and nationalism" (Rachman, 2022, p. 10). Importantly, these leaders are able to thrive in both more traditional dictatorships and systems that are, at least at the beginning of their leadership, democratic: a frightening prospect for many existing democracies.

We believe that these profound challenges growing out of the twinned rise of populism and authoritarianism, and the concomitant decline of institutional trust in liberal democracy in the early twenty-first century, provide an important focal point for new management scholarship. To encourage discussion and new research in this area, we have assembled a collection of short essays that highlight a variety of important issues and questions that are worthy of more systematic inquiry.

Authoritarianism at the Organizational Level

In the first piece, Davis emphasizes how authoritarianism has profoundly worked its way into corporations, highlighting "founder friendly" authoritarian structures inhabited by leaders such as Mark Zuckerberg who embrace an autocratic ideology that resists any form of democratic oversight. His arguments provide a useful corrective to considering the renaissance of authoritarianism as something that we should examine only at the level of the nation state. Instead, the same ideology and leadership style is happening in some of the world's most important companies.

Next, Gartenberg and McGahan argue that we have more tools in our toolkit than we perhaps recognize and suggest that we find inspiration from foundational organizational thinkers such as Coase, Barnard, and Selznick who worked at a time when authoritarianism was even more visible and dangerous. They argue that our field has evolved in a way that makes it difficult for us to deal with the realities of authoritarianism and therefore propose adding in a humanistic concern for values, stories, and the experiences of individuals. The resulting combination will, they suggest, help us to explore critical questions such as when does authority become authoritarianism and how do people within authority-based organizations experience freedom and tyranny?

Adler and Bodrožić suggest a research agenda that explores the interaction of regimes of public policy (contrasting more laissez-faire or more transformative regimes) and

models of organizational management (contrasting more hierarchical or more collaborative models). Combining the two dimensions, they identify four alternative responses to the current period of crisis: authoritarianism, oligarchy, localism, and democratization. A disturbing number of liberal democracies have evolved into oligarchies (see Davis's contribution in this forum), and the resulting aggravation of various crises has encouraged the reemergence of authoritarianism. In the face of this twin danger, many put their faith in localist alternatives. Adler and Bodrožić argue for the fourth option—democratization, based on a democratic-transformative state and an organizational model privileging bottom-up problem-solving.

Battilana and Sheppard-Jones begin by arguing that though past generations of organization scholars greatly advanced our understanding of power, today, dominant management research largely focuses on the performance of shareholder-value maximizing and largely hierarchical corporations, without systematically accounting for power and inequality. They then offer a solution: to counter the authoritarian turn in organizations and society, the field must revive research on power sharing and accountability in organizations. This entails studying organizations beyond the firm, such as social movements, bureaucracies, and social enterprises, and collaborating with political scientists to test innovations in democracy that can strengthen democracy at work and in government.

Authoritarian Systems

Meyer begins her contribution by making the important point that authoritarianism is actually a perversion of authority as authority requires the consent of those who are governed. She then draws on the ideas of Arendt to begin to unpack the increasing inability of democratic societies to uphold the capacity to act in the face of authoritarian crises. She emphasizes the need to more deeply understand the changing nature of institutional trust in core liberal, democratic institutions that sows the seeds for authoritarianism.

Armanios and Adly argue for a systematic research agenda on authoritarian systems themselves, unpacking their variegated nature to understand why some forms of authoritarianism are more resilient than others. They introduce a "varieties of authoritarianism" typology based on two characteristics of an authoritarian regime that leads to four categories of regime with varying degrees of resilience. The two dimensions—degree of professionalization of the bureaucracy and whether or not the territorial boundaries are aligned with the authoritarian logic of the regime—highlight important aspects of regimes that have been so far largely ignored.

Haveman highlights how institutional and relational theories can be leveraged to enhance our understanding of the rise and fall of authoritarian governments. She focuses on related sets of cultural elements in authoritarianism and democracy and then highlights how the logic of democracy can be eroded in small steps and authoritarian tendencies can develop in even the most established democracy. She ends with a strong call to action for management researchers to focus more on the perils of authoritarianism.

Highlighting examples such as Trump's recent activities promoting "The Big Lie," Glynn argues that the cultural analysis of symbolic and linguistic frames can shed light on the growing success of modern authoritarian governments. She begins with an analysis of the two contrasting world orders on display during the riots at the U.S. Capitol—the "illiberal" versus the "liberal." She uses frame analysis to examine the way that Trump was able to convince his followers of the illegitimacy of his election loss. Interestingly, she also shows how the frames created by Trump have become disconnected from him and discusses the frightening ramifications of this development.

Clegg points to the need for further research that compares varieties of state-led versus market-led systems, but maintains that neo-economically liberal and democratic states weather crisis much more effectively than do states in which system integration is subordinate to authoritarian social integration. He draws on the concept of circuits of power to unpack the key differences between authoritarian regimes today and Western democracies.

The Role of Digital Technologies in Modern Authoritarianism

The final two contributions focus on the connection between new forms of authoritarianism and digital technology. First, Gümüsay begins by highlighting the various crises and conflicts that pervade contemporary society and economy. He goes on to argue that they can be usefully understood as forms of institutional contestation and argues that our theories need to better account for how digital technologies play a key role in shaping institutional processes—especially as related to civic and political engagement such as in Russia's disinformation efforts as well as Ukrainian resistance. He closes with a call for rethinking what we study, why we are studying what we study, and how we study the topics we choose to study.

In the final contribution, Leonardi focuses on social media and their use both in spreading democracy and, more recently, in efforts to undermine democracy and further the goals of the authoritarian leaders. He goes on to argue that the power of social media lies in how they let people see how other people respond to their messages. He further argues that the algorithmic nature of social media platforms plays a key role in their impact on political processes. He closes with a discussion of the importance of social media and their effects on organizations as an area of further investigation for management scholars.

Wrapping Up

While we realize that the question of authoritarianism lies some distance from the traditional topics that management researchers have focused on, management scholarship has amassed a considerable toolkit of theories that we believe have the potential to provide real insight into this important phenomenon. Furthermore, the research capacity of our field is tremendous: the array or methods, resources, and expertise that has been developed to understand the social world is truly impressive. We have the opportunity to contribute significantly to our understanding of authoritarianism and the ability of our institutions and citizens to respond to authoritarian leaders in our midst and authoritarian countries running amok in the world. Our discussion here will hopefully pique the interest of management scholars and inspire more of our community to think, write, and research aspects of authoritarianism that will help to reduce the threat to liberal democracy at organizational and societal levels.

Authoritarianism with Silicon Valley Characteristics

Gerald F. Davis

The spread of authoritarianism in the political realm is paralleled by trends in the American technology sector, where CEOs increasingly exercise authority without meaningful structural oversight or accountability. The mythology of the visionary founder, exemplified by Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk, has existed for generations. Today, however, this mythology is increasingly buttressed by formal structural devices that centralize power in the hands of one or two top executives and provide few formal channels to serve as checks and balances. As ever more of our economy and society are mediated by online platforms originating in Silicon Valley, corporate authoritarianism becomes a greater threat to everyday democracy (Davis, 2017; Davis, 2021a).

Google and Facebook pioneered this trend, giving their founders (Larry Page and Sergei Brin at Google and Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook) super-voting shares that essentially guarantee them corporate control in perpetuity. When Facebook went public in 2012, Zuckerberg controlled 60% of the votes via his Class B shares and lockup agreements. As the IPO prospectus noted, "Mr. Zuckerberg has the ability to control the outcome of matters submitted to our stockholders for approval, including the election of directors and any merger, consolidation, or sale of all or substantially all of our assets. In addition, Mr. Zuckerberg has the ability to control the management and affairs of our company as a result of his position as our CEO and his ability to control the election of our directors" (https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1326801/000119312512034517/d287954ds1.htm). This structure still holds to this day.

The idea of giving a 28-year-old college dropout uncontestable control of a major global corporation might seem like a surprising choice. Yet in recent years nearly half the tech startups listing shares on the stock market have included similar structures, driven by an Ayn Rand-inflected theory of corporate governance (Davis, 2021b). According to this theory, widely shared in Silicon Valley, founders are *makers* pursuing their unique vision and should not be held back by moochers and takers and regulators—including their own shareholders. Thanks to enablers in the world of venture capital, particularly Peter Thiel of Founders Fund and Marc Andreessen of Andreessen Horowitz, Silicon Valley today is awash in corporate dictatorships. In 2021, an astonishing 46% of tech IPO firms had dual-class voting shares, according to data compiled by Jay Ritter (https://site.warrington.ufl.edu/ritter/files/IPOs-Tech.pdf).

The same venture capitalists and entrepreneurs who promulgate these "founder friendly" authoritarian structures have recently taken a strident stance against ESG, that is, the movement to measure corporations on their environmental, social, and governance impacts and to reward those who orient toward sustainability, equity, and accountability. In April 2022 Elon Musk tweeted "I am increasingly convinced that corporate ESG is the Devil Incarnate" (https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1510485792296210434), while venture capitalist Marc Andreessen quotes Peter Thiel approvingly: "ESG is just a hate factory. It's a factory for naming enemies, and we should not be allowing them to do that. When you think ESG, you should be thinking Chinese Communist Party" (https://twitter.com/pmarca/status/1512213405511286784). Former Vice President Mike Pence joined the fray, claiming that ESG is a movement of corporate wokeism that "allows the left to accomplish what it could never hope to achieve at the ballot box or through competition in the free market. ESG empowers an unelected cabal of bureaucrats, regulators and activist investors to rate companies based on their adherence to left-wing values" (Pence, 2022). Once again, corporate leaders need to be protected from accountability to their own "unelected" shareholders.

At the same time tech firms are protecting their leaders from outside accountability, some of them are creating or deploying workplace surveillance tools best suited to a corporate Stasi, in which employee actions are monitored in extravagant detail from the moment they log in to work. In 2009 Peter Thiel's Palantir implemented a surveillance program for JP Morgan where their engineers "vacuumed up emails and browser histories, GPS locations from company-issued smartphones, printer and download activity, and transcripts of digitally recorded phone conversations. Palantir's software aggregated, searched, sorted, and analyzed these records, surfacing keywords and patterns of behavior" that merited scrutiny (Waldman et al., 2018). Electronic employee surveillance has greatly accelerated since then,

particularly after Covid induced a vast increase in remote work. AI-enabled "bossware" has turned virtual workplaces around the world into corporate Panopticons, enabling those at the top to monitor and control laborers in exacting detail through tentacles reaching directly into workers' homes and cars (Corbyn, 2022). Perhaps unsurprisingly, some tech firms are using the ability to monitor employee communications to root out discussions of politics under the rubric of "mission protocol" (Savodnik, 2021). Coinbase CEO (and Ayn Rand admirer) Brian Armstrong offered severance packages to any employees who wanted to talk about politics at work—social activism was distracting from the company's core mission of enabling the crypto economy (Barber, 2020). (Skeptics might wonder why discussions of Black Lives Matter count as political, while pursuing a crypto-libertarian vision informed by "Atlas Shrugged" does not—see Popper, 2020.)

Authoritarianism—centralized power without democratic accountability—has long characterized corporate America, as philosopher Elizabeth Anderson has documented so well. Recent trends in technology and tech firms have taken this tendency to radical new levels. Call it *authoritarianism with Silicon Valley characteristics*.

Organizations, Authority, and the Humanities

Claudine Gartenberg and Anita M. McGahan

In the early 1930s, the young economist Ronald Coase spent a year in America observing capitalism in action. As a socialist caught between the allure of Russian authoritarian planning and American exuberant liberalism, he saw a paradox in the vast operations of Ford and General Motors. "Lenin had said that the economic system in Russia would be run as one big factory… Economists in the West [maintained] that to run the economy as one big factory was an impossibility. And yet there were factories in England and America. How did one reconcile the impossibility of running Russia as one big factory with the existence of factories in the West?" (Coase, 1988, p. 8) In other words, even within the most liberal systems in the world, much of human cooperation occurred with hierarchical organizations in which employees willingly ceded control to a centralized authority. How could authoritarianism be an engine of liberalism, and how could liberalism be an engine of authoritarianism?

In the near century since Coase's trip, the field of management and organizations has offered extensive insights on this paradox. Rich streams of research emerged during the late 20th and early 21st centuries on a wide range of organizations, and especially on corporations. This research has contributed to our understanding of the conditions, activities, decision-making processes, and effects of organizations on the quality of the lives of those involved. From these insights, we learned about the myriad ways in which authority is exercised, and the relative advantages and shortcomings of authority over alternative mechanisms of cooperation. In doing so, the field has advanced significantly over the past decades, not only in expanding our body of knowledge, but also moving from a focus on productive efficiency and rational, self-interested agents to a broader set of recognized outcomes and behavioral assumptions.

Despite these advances, the field is not yet equipped to explain the challenges of our times. In general, the social scientific orientation of the field has moved us toward methods that are evidence-based, statistically valid, replicable, and that yield cumulative findings. This evolution is welcome in almost every respect and resolves many of the deficiencies of earlier eras. However, one consequence of the credibility revolution is that it has crowded out humanistic analysis: the view that each individual is, *sui generis*, in possession of unique traits, dignity, and agency. In contrast to methods common in our field, humanistic analysis is not concerned with average treatment effects or explaining variance across large populations of people engaged in comparable activities. Instead, it is focused on considerations such as narratives, experiences, meanings, and understandings of the moral dimensions of situations. In the humanities, scholars seek insights on, for example, how people within organizations grapple with right versus wrong, and good versus bad, to use Sigdwick's categorizations of moral reasoning. This approach involves asking questions such as: When does authority become authoritarianism? How do people within authority-based organizations experience freedom and tyranny? How should competing claims among individuals be adjudicated in organizations or in society at large? These are some of the core questions of our time, and ones that our current approaches to research are not designed to address.

This has not always been true. Foundational organizational thinkers such as Coase, Barnard, and Selznick developed their ideas during the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century. Each witnessed authority manifest both in capitalist enterprises that served as unprecedented engines of growth and in authoritarian regimes that attracted millions to their cause while simultaneously slaughtering millions of others. The two faces of authority likely informed their complex views of the relative benefits and dangers of centralized power in ordering human cooperation.

Echoes from those times are reverberating today. Once again, we are witnessing the allure of authoritarianism, not only in Russia and its invasion of Ukraine, but also in populist responses to liberalism across the globe, in the fracturing of realities and rise of conspiratorial narratives within online communities, in the need for belonging in an increasingly technology-mediated world, in the generalized disaffection with institutions across liberal societies. These portentous

trends highlight the two faces of authority and the urgent need to study the organization as places through which people actualize meaning in their lives, and in which moral questions are raised, discussed, and sometimes argued, buried, abandoned, or elevated.

The structure of our field today—evolving through the last half of the life and career of Coase—has rendered us ill-prepared to address authoritarian challenges at a geo-political level. For the field to engage fully in these and other globally significant issues, we must combine our social scientific methods with a humanistic approach to making sense of the world. Just as the field of management has benefitted immensely from integrating ideas from economics, sociology, and psychology over the past few decades, we must similarly incorporate perspectives from history, anthropology, philosophy, and other humanistic fields to grapple fully with the social changes that define our times.

We know a lot—and have the potential to know a lot more—about how the same practices designed to promote financial prosperity can also make people vulnerable in a wide range of ways, contributing to the pathologies of our times. Our field has much to add to public understanding of how this vulnerability may accumulate in communities. Whether these potential contributions come to fruition depends on the openness of our field to embracing approaches that have historically been the domain of other fields, placing human dignity, agency, and the moral dimensions of organization at the center of our work. As Philip Selznick wrote in 1994:

> We cannot do without authority, nor can we forgo rationality in the management of resources. But authority and rationality are highly problematic ideas, and no particular way of doing things can be considered inevitable or beyond question. Therefore we should ask: What *kinds* of purposive organizations are justified by the nature of the institution? What *kinds* of authority? What *kinds* of subordination? (Selznick, 1994, p. 262–263.)

Authoritarianism, Oligarchy, Localism, or Democratization? Alternative Futures for Resolving the Climate Crisis

Paul S. Adler and Zlatko Bodrožić

The governance weaknesses of the advanced economies of the global North are becoming ever more apparent—and dangerous. While the Covid epidemic might pass notwithstanding the ham-fisted government responses, the climate crisis seems only to accelerate in the absence of stronger government action. The currently dominant public-policy responses to climate change—relying on modest industry regulation—aim to nudge us toward sustainability while ensuring the continued profitability and growth of the private sector and thereby maintaining the country's prosperity. But the climate emergency makes it imperative that we discontinue heavily polluting activities and invest in sustainable alternatives—even though the former represents great losses to investors and the latter may not be profitable for many years to come. We cannot hope to meet the climate challenge if we rely only on the limited "win-win" solutions that are within the reach of private enterprise. Government action seems essential. But what form of government action would be adequate to this challenge?

Looking for parallel situations, we have reviewed previous periods of crisis as they emerged in the course of each of the five major technological revolutions to date in the most advanced capitalist countries (Bodrožić & Adler, 2018; Bodrožić & Adler, 2022). This review suggests that we can map the possible trajectories of development of advanced capitalist economies in the face of such crises along two axes. The first axis is defined by whether the dominant public policy regime orients us toward greater laissez-faire, relying on the primacy of private value creation and the market as the primary coordinating mechanism, or toward a regime in which the state would play a transformative, system-building role by advancing missions aimed at creating public value. The second axis is defined by whether the dominant model of organization in public and private sectors is more coercive, relying on hierarchical authority as the primary organizing principle, or more enabling, relying on community collaboration rather than hierarchy. Combining in a 2×2 matrix the two main alternative choices, we identify four alternative futures for resolving the current period of crisis: authoritarianism, oligarchy, localism, and democratization—see Figure 1.

Authoritarianism pulls public policy toward system-building and pulls organization toward coercion and hierarchy. An authoritarian-transformative state might indeed attempt to address the climate crisis. We see one form of this type of state in China; but it might well also emerge in the wealthy countries of the global North, where authoritarianism is already mounting (Alizada et al., 2022) and shoots of eco-fascism are growing (Kamel et al., 2020). Given the limitations of this model—the costs in civil rights and the opportunity costs in lost bottom-up engagement if we take a top-down approach to climate adaptation and mitigation—the authoritarian response to the climate crisis points us down a costly and risky path (Shahar, 2015).

Widespread distrust of central government encourages one alternative path: perhaps government should step back, and we should entrust our future to the market process and wisdom of CEOs whose ideas can be implemented through corporate hierarchies. Under a laissez-faire policy regime, however, market competition tends toward concentration, through both economies of scale and scope and the accumulation of extra-economic influence (as witnessed, for example, in the success of big oil firms in shaping public opinion and policy on climate change—see Washington

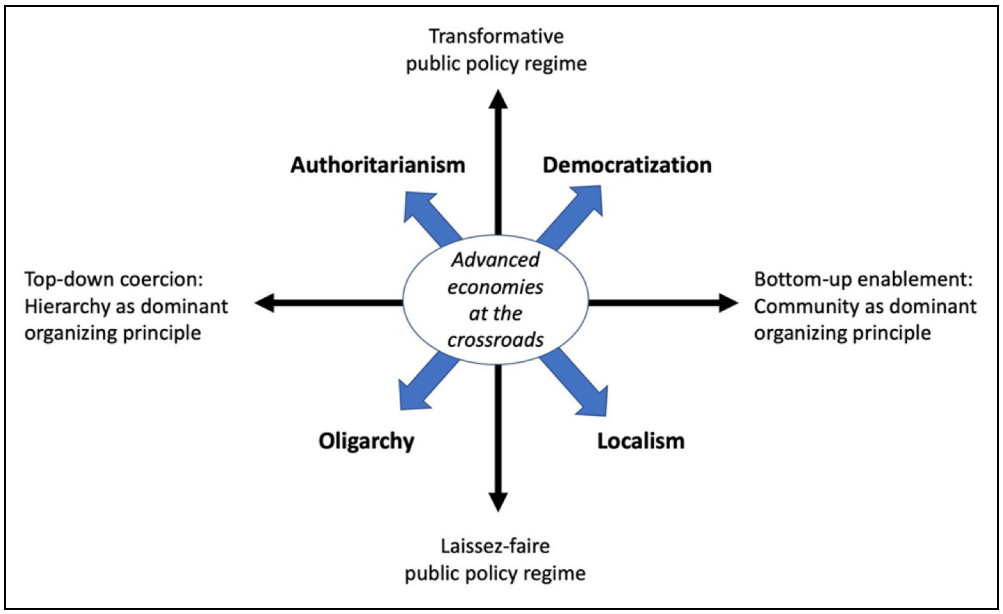

Figure 1. Four responses to the climate crisis.

(2013)). The result is a self-reinforcing path toward **oligarchy**. If the authoritarian response to the climate crisis seems risky, the oligarchy response seems suicidal, albeit all too possible. Over the last four decades, the United States has largely ceded leadership in responding to the climate crisis to the corporate sector, and it has brought us to the brink of disaster, notwithstanding the positive gestures of the more forward-looking faction of the business community. Oligarchy portends a world where the very affluent will be able to protect themselves from the worst consequences of the climate crisis, while the rest flounder on their own in an ever-more inhospitable world.

Advocates of **localism** accept (sometimes reluctantly) the overarching laissez-faire policy regime and argue that the best path forward is through innovations at the local level. Some jurisdictions will allow oligarchies to dominate, but in other places, we might see local movements push for more democratic and environmentally sustainable forms of community wealth-building (Dubb, 2016). Local businesses, community organizations, and government can work together to address local effects of climate change. The "transition towns" movement is one example (Barry & Quilley, 2009). However, forced by the overarching laissez-faire regime to compete with jurisdictions taking the low road, local community-based efforts face impediments to diffusion. Moreover, it is difficult to see how these bottom-up initiatives cohere into the national and international transformation that is so urgently needed. In the face of the climate crisis, we will need major investments programs that only national governments can orchestrate. The localism scenario foregoes the necessary benefits of nation-level scale and interconnectivity.

Advocates for what we call **democratization** embrace a system-building role of the state, but in contrast to Authoritarianism, they call for the state to play an enabling rather than coercive role. Such a democratic-transformative state is embedded within society, rather than standing apart from and hierarchically above it. This would take the form of an expanded public sector and of government policies aimed at strengthening and activating bottom-up problem-solving within that sector as well as within independent enterprises and civil society. In contrast to localism, all levels of government and society are activated and coordinated to advance the sustainability agenda, harnessing network effects and other positive externalities on national as well as local levels, for example through a series of missions that could drive the green transition (Mazzucato, 2021). This path might take the form of much-strengthened Nordic social-democracy or a reimagined democratic socialism. The proponents of either are, however, as yet politically very weak.

At present, we see China and Russia exemplifying the authoritarian response—China with some notable successes with respect to climate action, but also serious limitations (Li et al., 2019; Smith, 2017). The US seems to be leaning toward oligarchy (Winters & Page, 2009), with a still largely passive response to the climate crisis. Localist approaches such as those in transition towns are remarkable but seem limited to incremental changes (Heikkinen et al., 2019). Looking toward the future, given the inevitability of serious climate-induced crises, and given the weakness of the oligarchy and localism options, the risk of authoritarianism is growing even in the advanced economies of the global North. The only effective alternative to authoritarianism, we

argue, is democratization. But we do not see any major country moving in that direction.

While we as scholars cannot choose the future of our countries, we can choose the topics of our research. Given the stakes and the prospects, we hope we will see more research on the system-building role of governments and on opportunities for widening and deepening democratic participation.

Centering Power to Resist Its Concentration: On the Need to Account for Power in Organization Studies

Julie Battilana and Kara Sheppard-Jones

The year 2021 marked the 16th consecutive year of democratic decline globally (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). With the rise of authoritarian strong-men, and instances of democratic backsliding around the globe (Waldner & Lust, 2018), the distribution of power and its implications in organizations and in society has re-emerged as a central question. Previous generations of organization scholars would have had much to say about these worrisome trends, but do we, the new generation?

The field of organization studies has played a critical role in advancing our understanding of power dynamics in interpersonal relationships, in organizations, and in society (for reviews see Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Ocasio et al., 2020). In the 1950s and 1960s, early thinkers of organization theory, including Richard Emerson, Richard Cyert, James March, Michel Crozier, and Erhard Friedberg were seminal contributors to theorizing power. Then, in the 1970s, organization scholars like Jeffrey Pfeffer, Gerald Salancik, and Stewart Clegg advanced this genealogy, further refining the study of power relationships within and between organizations. These contributions from the field of organization studies even cross-pollinated with other disciplines, feeding broader theorizing on power. But interestingly, even though these organization theorists continued their foray, in the following decades, power drifted to the margins of organization studies and management, leaving the subject mostly to critical theorists (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006).

Increasingly, research published in dominant publications in the field turned toward the study of shareholder-value maximizing and largely hierarchical corporations, focusing mostly on the factors affecting their performance, without systematically accounting for the role of power and inequality in these analyses (Amis et al., 2020). Organization scholars did recognize the inherently political nature of organizations—that they are embedded in broader societal power hierarchies. They did so in their discourse about organizations in general, but, where they came short is in centering on these political dynamics in their empirical studies. As a result, they stopped problematizing and theorizing them. Though as organization scholars, we know too well that the process of institutionalization of dominant organizational archetypes is a political one, we fell into our own trap by taking for granted the archetype of large profit-maximizing companies (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993). This evolution has had serious implications for the field of organization studies as a whole: We came to consider politics as usual as business-as-usual. This shift has left us with a dangerous and partial perspective on organizations, one that over the past decades has too often failed to account for the role of organizations in the reproduction of power inequalities. It has also opened the way to legitimate critiques from philosophers like Elizabeth Anderson. In her book, *Private Government* (2017), she provocatively states that modern corporations are akin to authoritarian regimes: They concentrate power in the hands of shareholders and management while providing little, if any, power to workers over the organization's strategic decisions.

At present, the field of organization studies must urgently renew its commitment to studying power and its distribution in organizations and in society. We must join the vibrant and vital discussion on building organizations and societies that are fairer and more democratic at a time when power concentration and authoritarianism are on the rise. The actions of citizens and organizers on the ground reinforce the importance of such a renewed commitment. Indeed the #metoo and Black Lives Matter movements have transfused into the academy, spurring a new wave of engagement, attention, and resources dedicated to the study of gender and racial justice in organizations, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Building on the momentum of this important field of research, organization studies must revive research on power sharing and accountability in organizations more broadly (Casciaro & Battilana, 2021). While in the past decades we have taken for granted that decisions in organizations ought to be made by those at the top, such organizing models are far from the only ones that exist. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to the democratization of firms (Ferreras et al., 2022). More democratic forms of organizing, such as cooperatives or codetermination models, which are prominent in some European countries, have existed for over a century and point to alternative forms of power sharing between workers, top executives, and shareholders that require more attention and are worthy of study (Battilana et al., 2022). Additionally, a field of research at the intersection of political science and organization studies could empirically test propositions put forth, for instance, by deliberative scholars in organizations. Innovations in open democracy (Landemore, 2020), direct democracy, and participatory democracy (Dryzek et al., 2019) applied and studied in organizations could provide workers with a

say in the decisions that affect them directly, while deepening our understanding of these innovations and their potential to invigorate democracy in society and, in doing so, resist authoritarianism.

This ambitious agenda must be pursued across various organizational settings. This entails moving beyond the study of the single dominant archetype of the corporation. Instead, we must study various types of corporations, from traditional profit-maximizing ones to benefit corporations and their equivalents across the world. We must also invest once again in studying other forms of organizations whose functioning is critical to a healthy and resilient democracy, including social movements, public bureaucracies, not-for-profits, cooperatives, and social enterprises among others. It is critical these studies account for the evolution of both offline and virtual forms of organizing, as the emergence of new online platforms raises important questions regarding power and inequality that also merit further inquiry (Bernholz et al., 2021; Tufekci, 2017; Vallas & Schor, 2020).

As organizations and societies across the world grapple with growing power concentration up the corporate ladder and in the halls of government, it is urgent that organization scholars rise to the occasion and recenter power at the core of their research endeavors. The stakes could not be higher.

Organizing Against Authoritarianism

Renate Meyer

Ultimately, authoritarianism—for the sake of space I subsume under this term various forms of autocratic regimes—is a perversion of authority. Authority, as defined, e.g., by Max Weber (1978), is the ability to rule over people based on their consent, that is, authority is grounded in their believe in the legitimacy of the rule and trust in its representations—institutions, actors, and organizations alike. Authoritarianism elevates the ruling center above the people, swaps belief in the legitimacy of the rule with the fear of sanctions and renders the potency of the ruler absolute. In order to give authoritarian regimes a coating of authority, higher powers, such as God or Patria—the authoritarian leader rules in their direct lineage and tradition—or the super-natural charisma of "born" leaders are evoked, often in an unholy assemblage. The sacralization and symbolic overloading of politics—the staging of secular leaders together with the highest religious dignitaries, or the adornment of those who only recently attained power with the insignia of eternal rule—is accompanied by a conspicuous distain for constitutional law and courts as the prime custodians of the people-authorized rule of law. The aspiration of showcasing authority makes control over and totalization of history a collateral *conditio sine qua non*—there can be nothing outside of the authoritarian rule, no alternative, not in the present, not in the past, not in eternity.

Ann Swidler (1986) observed that in unsettled times people turn to explicitly articulated, highly organized meaning systems that claim to offer unified answers to problems—ideologies—while taken-for-granted traditions lose their capacity to guide action. At any point in time, she argues, the structural opportunities for ideologies to thrive differ. Times of crises are a fertile breeding ground for authoritarian ideologies. Whether all crises of the last decades deserve the denotation or have been rendered crises as outcome of political and rhetorical rent seeking notwithstanding, there has been an accumulation of crises and the general sense of societal fragility is high. Although we know that distributed decision-making, collective action, and collaborations are the way forward (Frey-Heger et al., 2021; Kornberger et al., 2019), with their sense of urgency and high stakes for a large number of people, crises facilitate a direct display of state muscle, and justify order-obedience relationships.

However, the growing authoritarianism is not rooted in the necessities of crisis response, nor in the strength or persuasiveness of the underlying regimes and their ideologies or the charisma of their leaders, but in the weakness of the institutions that embody democratic values and the organizations that support them. It is the mistrust toward traditional authorities and core cultural institutions that clears the way for autocratic phantasies. The institutions and organizations that should guide us through uncertain times are in crisis themselves. Sources of the weakness are the polarization and fracturing of society that produce, amidst virtual mass connectivity and an explosion of social media communities, the loneliness that, according to Hannah Arendt (1986), is the soil for totalitarianism and its results. Totalitarian regimes, she notes, are built on movement and acceleration—stable institutions of any sort are their enemies. They are characterized by a loss of a shared reality and truth gaps ("everything is possible and nothing is true"), the isolation of people from each other, and the complete absence of authority.

Consequently, the contributions of organization scholars are essential in three areas. First, we need to study how authoritarianism is organized, its characteristic features, relationships, its distinct institutions and organizations during emergence and upholding, the (re)sources of its shapeshifting capacities. On a societal level, we need to better understand the growing amalgamation of previously differentiated institutional orders, such as, for instance, state and religion, and its consequences. While it may seem that such developments promise a de-fragmentation of society, they may actually prepare the ground for comprehensive ideologies to grow.

Second, authoritarianism has a high degree of active organization and an equally high degree of active disorganization: Disconnection, splintering, prevention of networking, mistrust is as organized as are their counterparts (Meyer & Quattrone, 2021; Pawlak, 2022). We need to know more

about how disorganization is accomplished, how the manufacturing of isolation and fracturing is achieved amidst the technologically possible hyper-connectivity.

Third, authoritarian regimes thrive on the inability of people to act collectively and to collaborate across divisions. We need to advance our knowledge on how the capacity to act in concert among equals can be maintained, how a pluralist public space can be kept open across all cleavages, how horizontally organized societal institutions can regain power and trust in the face of crises and unsettled times.

Varieties of Authoritarianism

Daniel Erian Armanios and Amr Adly

On February 24, 2022, as Russia launched airstrikes across Ukraine, we were taking stock of another region some 2,000 km south. Just before the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the Arab Spring was concluding its first wave that started in Tunisia and swept through Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Morocco, and Bahrain. In 2019, a second wave swept through Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Sudan. The result has been varied to say the least. Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain have all remained or reverted back to authoritarianism. Tunisia and Morocco initially incorporated revolutionary representation toward a democratic transition before reverting to more authoritarian tactics. Libya, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Sudan all had their systems transition or collapse; their outcomes remain unresolved. In the short span of just over a decade, we observe everything from authoritarian resurgence to transformation. This begs the question: how are some authoritarian regimes so resilient, while others are not?

To better account for this variation, we seek to introduce the possibility of developing a more multifaceted "varieties of authoritarianism" approach. Scholars recognize authoritarian systems have varied capacity to withstand uprisings (Skocpol, 1979; Slater & Fenner, 2011; Tilly, 1978). However, these exercises still tend to treat authoritarian regimes along a single conceptual spectrum, being all lumped as non-democratic. To attempt here to commence this process, we leverage organizational theory, namely from the institutional perspective, to add conceptual variation to the scholarship around authoritarianism that has largely been the preoccupation of political science. More specifically, we see the notion of institutional logics as allowing us to add heterogeneity to despotic power, and the notion of institutional carriers as allowing us to add further heterogeneity to infrastructural power.

Prior work argues that state institutional logics aim to redistribute resources in the public interest and their legitimacy is based on democratic participation (Thornton et al., 2012, Table 3.2). We must expand that notion of state logic to one that includes despotic power, or how authoritarian systems subjugate their civil societies to the will of a small cadre of political elites (Linz, 1964). In particular, authoritarian state logic seems more predicated on constricting distribution to those in power and their cronies, or on selective redistribution to appease the general public to the will of that cadre (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Ross, 2001). Legitimacy is based on the leader's charismatic authority (Weber, 1968), and/or wielding tools of extreme violence that can forcibly suppress anti-regime activities (Linz, 1964; Slater & Fenner, 2011).

One way perhaps to incorporate greater variation is to consider the alignment or misalignment between authoritarian logics (and despotic power) and their perceived territorial claims and/or territorial integrity. This is not to say that such misalignments do not impact other political systems; we simply observe here that such misalignments seem salient in characterizing different authoritarian actions. For instance, Putin's ambitions reflect the wider territorial reaches of the former Tsarist empire from the 1700s. We can also see similarities to other countries such as Turkey, whose ambitions reflect those of their former Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, Egypt's territorial claims have largely remained similar to their present-day boundaries, with the exception of a brief loss of the Sinai from 1967 – 1973. The same for Iran whose territorial boundaries still reflect the historic core of ancient Persia.

Prior work shows how institutional carriers underpin the shared understandings and standards of a system (Armanios & Eesley, 2021). To bring this concept into our inquiry around authoritarianism, we link it to notions of infrastructural power, or the degree to which civil society depends on state institutions for the delivery of goods and services (Mann, 1984). To do this, we focus on carriers that operate within the state's civil society such as state banks, hospitals, and bureaucratic agencies—those state entities for which citizenry rely for goods and services and hence the means by which authoritarian subjugation is sustained.

One way to incorporate greater variation is to perhaps consider the degree to which the institutional carrier is professionalized to global standards. The degree to which state civil sector is professionalized will likely decide how efficiently state bureaucracy can enact the needs of the authoritarian system. However, this comes at a potential cost to the regime. If revolution successfully detaches state bureaucracy from its authoritarian logic, even temporarily, these carriers have the ability to operate autonomously along global standards rather than regime interests, thereby becoming an enabler of further disruption (Armanios & Adly, 2022). As such, different authoritarian systems may be more or less willing to professionalize their civil society. For instance, Egypt and Iran increasingly professionalized their state sectors to global standards, such as banking (Adly, 2020; Mihret et al., 2020). However, Libya under Gaddafi largely suppressed such professionalization (Basir et al., 2021).

While not having the territorial integrity issues of Libya, Gabon and Trujillo's Dominican Republic are arguably examples of a lack of professionalization due to a desire to heavily concentrate power around a single family and its cronies. So much so, that the Trujillo regime even refused to professionalize occupations needed for even the most basic of healthcare, such as nursing (Zeller, 2018).

From these two possible sources of variation, we could then begin to envision a 2×2 typology that begins to characterize different kinds of authoritarian regimes and potentially their differential resilience (or fragility) to disruption. One axis would be the degree to which existing territorial boundaries are aligned or misaligned with authoritarian logics (and despotic power). The other axis would be the degree to which institutional carriers (infrastructure power) are professionalized to global standards.

Table 1 presents examples of authoritarian systems for each cell in our typology. Greater professionalization arguably increases the efficiency of state institutions to deliver goods and services. This may potentially better prevent *internal* disruptions as such efficiency arguably enhances citizen dependency on the authoritarian state. Those whose logics operate within current territorial boundaries can prevent *external* disruptions to their systems. Authoritarian logics that are misaligned with territorial claims perhaps are more likely to experience credibility crises that will drive them to reconfigure territorial boundaries in greater alignment with their logic. This will only induce perennial conflicts with neighbors.

As we reflect on the current Russia incursion into the Ukraine, let's not make the same mistakes we did amidst the Arab Spring and assume all authoritarian regimes are the same. Nor should we continue to observe from afar. Almost 11.6% of the world's economic activity comes out of areas of civil unrest just like these (Institutes for Economics & Peace, 2021). As organizational scholars, we have critical contributions to provide and the need for doing so is only increasing. We hope initiating such a typology as the one we present here will help us get off the sidelines of these increasingly critical issues and begin to enhance our impact in these domains for which we have largely neglected in our scholarship.

Table 1. Potential Typology for Classifying Variety in Authoritarian Regimes.

		Authoritarian Logic (Despotic Power)	
		Aligned Territorial Boundaries	*Misaligned Territorial Boundaries*
Institutional carriers (infrastructural power)	*More professionalization*	Examples: Egypt and Iran	Examples: Russia and Turkey
	Less professionalization	Examples: Dominican Republic (under Trujillo) and Gabon	Examples: Libya and Sudan

Organizing the Authoritarian State

Heather A. Haveman

Governments, like many other elements of modern societies, consist of organizations: elected or appointed assemblies that write and pass laws, staff departments that interpret laws and develop rules to enforce them, law-enforcement agencies that are authorized to use force to uphold laws, and judicial bodies that evaluate both laws themselves and compliance with laws. This holds true across the spectrum from the most authoritarian government to the most democratic. Authoritarian governments are headed by individuals or organizations that wield (almost) absolute control over their jurisdictions. In practice, authoritarianism is a continuum ranging from complete leader control (as in North Korea) through partial leader control (as in Singapore) to democratic control (by the people themselves, as in Norway). To understand the rise of authoritarian governments, then, we need to understand the *degree of authoritarianism*, the extent of rulers' power.[3]

Here, I will focus on the logics of governments. *Logics*, related sets of cultural elements (norms, values, beliefs, and symbols) that help individuals and organizations make sense of their everyday activities and order those activities in time and space, define the rules of the political game. Logics determine both what should be done in order to achieve desired outcomes and what is good to do. In other words, they encompass both instrumental (means-end) rationality and value rationality. Logics are most powerful when they are institutionalized—accepted as normal, natural, proper, even taken for granted.

The logic of democracy is egalitarian, as exemplified by the slogan "one person, one vote." This focus on equality of access to politics is central to democracy, even though in practice the definition of "person" is sometimes highly restrictive, limited by gender, race or ethnicity, religion, or economic status. The democratic logic became institutionalized in many parts of the world in the 150 years following the French and American Revolutions. Its institutionalization was reinforced by three sets of events: (i) the 1945 victories of the Allies over the Axis in World War II; (ii) the hatching of fledgling democracies in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia as European empires slowly crumbled; and (iii) the breakup of the Soviet Union from 1988 to 1991.

The democratic logic celebrates equality, social solidarity, and mutual respect ("we the people" in the U.S.; "liberté, égalité, fraternité" in France), and denigrates self-seeking behavior (corruption) and favoritism. Embodying this logic,

democratic governments strive to be "of the people, by the people, for the people," as Abraham Lincoln famously put it. This means that democratic governmental organizations are expected to serve voters and their families, and democratic governmental officials, elected or appointed, are expected put voters and their families first.

Although long institutionalized, the democratic logic has been under siege for several decades. In many countries, it has been gradually, through many small steps, replaced by *the logic of authoritarianism*, which celebrates centralized power. To justify centralized power, often in the guise of democracy, the authoritarian logic relies on sharp, Manichean distinctions between "us" and "them," usually based on religion or morality, geography, or race or ethnicity. "Us," however it is defined, is good; "them" is viewed with suspicion—sometimes utterly maligned. Pitting "us" against "them" puts governments on a war setting and justifies centralizing power: political elites are assumed to know best how to safeguard "us" from the clear and present dangers posed by "them."

How do would-be authoritarians undermine the logic of democracy and replace it with the logic of authoritarianism? They leverage existing organizations, both inside and outside government. Inside government, they create cults of personality around strong, charismatic men (rarely women). They then institutionalize those cults by taking over established political parties or launching new ones and appealing to voters though emotion-laden polemics that surface latent fears or invent new ones. They use the electoral power they've gained to control legislative assemblies, passing laws and devising rules to limit voting by "them," ostensibly to clean up the electoral system. They also co-opt the courts under the guise of improving judicial efficiency. And they classify opponents as traitors, using laws, police and armies, and the courts to detain and punish (sometimes kill) them.

Outside government, would-be authoritarians co-opt news media, persuading (or forcing, using police and armies as levers) media outlets to parrot authoritarians' ideas and opinions, and to report "alternative facts" as true. Co-opting news media is easiest when media ownership is highly concentrated—when a small number of sites or companies dominate the delivery of information and opinion to the public. Would-be autocrats often co-opt another trusted source of information and opinion: religious authorities. This is easiest when religious tenets are instantiated in a hierarchical organization with centralized power, such as the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church. Would-be autocrats also co-opt business organizations in exchange for favors. This is easiest when industry, and thus economic power, is highly concentrated.

My challenge for organizational theorists is to take this bare-bones argument, flesh it out, and test it empirically. Two of our tools—institutionalist and resource-dependence theories—should be especially useful. We possess the expertise to understand organizations, inside and outside government, in all their variety and complexity. If we don't take on the charge of analyzing and (I hope) helping resist the rise of authoritarianism, who will? Who else could do it as well as we can?

The Authoritarian Legacy of Trumpism

Mary Ann Glynn

> [There is] an ongoing struggle between two sets of habits … One… is represented by the Capitol -- that competing interests can be resolved through reason, and that when the people decide to transfer power, we affirm the system that allows it by gathering on the Capitol steps for the handover. The rioters brought other habits. … "The mob was fed lies … They were provoked by the president and other powerful people, and they tried to use fear and violence to stop a specific proceeding of the first branch of the federal government which they did not like. Never before had the president, the most powerful person in American government, taken aim at a core feature of that government. … for the first time in American History." (Dickerson, 2022)

The deadly January 6th 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol, which the FBI viewed as "domestic terrorism," was a shocking and vicious "war scene" (Amiri, 2022) where two contrasting world orders—the "illiberal" versus the "liberal" (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020)—were in literal and figurative battle. The war was predicated on Trump's delusion that the election was stolen from him and his intention to thwart the peaceful transition of power. Even more startling, perhaps, was the reveal of his increasingly authoritarian leadership.

Although authoritarianism is often thought as rule being inflicted on others, it is, ironically, actively fueled by "anticipatory obedience": "Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. … individuals think ahead to what a repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked" (Snyder, 2017, p. 17). Initially, this involves an unreflective adaptation to new leadership, a process that redounds to Milgram's experiments on obedience where he found that people were remarkably willing to follow an authoritarian's directives, even to the point of harming or killing others (Snyder, 2017, p. 21).

Nowhere was this as evident as in the responsiveness of Trump's followers to his signature slogan: Make America Great Again (MAGA). It was a siren call to a new way of thinking, with new rules, "depicting a nation in crisis, while positioning himself [Trump] as the nation's hero – the only one who can conquer our foes, secure our borders." Urging his followers to "trust him," claiming he is "really smart" and "I alone can fix it," paired with erroneous claims that he won the election, the anger of the MAGA movement was key in the storming of the Capitol.

Trump's authoritarianism influence was predicated on his "rhetorical brilliance" in framing situations or events to his

advantage. Framing involves "the packaging and organization of information … for shaping others' understandings and behaviours … [which] brings attention to a few stylized dimensions of reality, while hiding others" (Giorgi, 2017, p. 712). In his classic work, *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974, p. 24) argues that framing results in "social frameworks" used by collectives; Trump's frames explicitly aggrandized himself and demonized his perceived enemies. The Mueller Report (2019) made this point: "Trump has marketed himself as the apotheosis of American exceptionalism —as the nation's hero—by using rhetorical tactics more often associated with unheroic authoritarian leaders" to attack the investigation and Mueller himself as politically illegitimate.

The effect of repeated falsehoods is to numb the audience to a preferred framing, normalizing aberrations. Reinforcing this rhetoric was Trump's admonition "not to trust our own eyes and ears—that what we see is not what is real" and instead, to simply trust him. It was chillingly Orwellian in its framing. In his dystopian novel on the dangers of totalitarianism, Orwell warns: "The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command" (1984, p. 69). Ignore what your eyes might tell you; only trust in the authoritarian leader.

Much of Trump's rhetoric creates a new or different reality in which "alternate facts" are common and critiques are routinely castigated as hoaxes or witch hunts. Trump profusely promoted false and misleading information; by the end of his presidency, he had lied 30,573 times, about 21 times per day (Higgins, 2021). The Big Lie—Trump's claim that a corrupt conspiracy robbed him of a second term as President—diffused widely within his base who embraced it fully; it took on a life of its own, apart from Trump. Many now embrace his demagoguery, ideology, and authoritarian style, but not necessarily his personality.

The decoupling of the man from the movement suggests that authoritarianism can continue well beyond the authoritarian's rule. The most enduring vestige—apart from the democratic institutions attacked—is Trumpism. It has metastasized from Trump's delusional framing on his inauguration day in 2017—with the biggest crowds *ever*—to a widespread and ambient movement, amplified by disinformation and distortion, broadcast in social and right-wing media, aggressively militant, and framed with falsehoods. "Authoritarianism is surging" (Lozada, 2022) and liberalism needs to meet the moment.

Circuits of Power and the Crisis of Russian Authoritarianism

Stewart Clegg

Updating Durkheim (1893), contemporary Russia is based, ideologically, on modern mechanical solidarity. It is not a liquidly modern society (Bauman, 2000). The contrast with the West is striking; the circuits of power quite different (Clegg, 1989). Societies of Western Europe and the United States are based on a post-modern organically liquid solidarity in which electoral competition is central. System integration also differs markedly. In contemporary Russia it flows through pipelines of oil and gas that are the major network resource forming the basis for a network of system integration that is state controlled. While the EU imports about 45% of its gas and 25% of its oil from Russia, the combination of sanctions and voluntary withdrawals from the market will have destabilizing effects not only on them but more so on Russia. If Russian integration of its pipeline network to Europe is ruptured, the consequences will be extreme for Russia, starved of foreign capital from export sales. Western reduction of gas and oil demand is a major shock to Russian system integration.

In the west, the USA and Europe's primary means of system integration is through complex global market networks that are far less material, more digital and much more pervasive, with the sanctions regime these afford having the potential to shut Russia's oligarchy out of global capital markets. These western counties have every motive to divest from the carbon economy; Russia has not. Some counties in Europe, especially Norway, are showing how it can be done. Others, such as Germany, are slowly following.

Social integration works through different solidarities, ideal typically represented as modern and postmodern, or one could say Russian and western. Of course, social integration can always construct an Other on whom the unleashing of episodic power can be justified: for Russia, at the present, the Ukrainian state is the Other. It is the irruption of episodic power spilling into this state that strengthens social integration at home, through opposition, antagonism, and violence to the western European oriented political projects of the majority fraction of the Ukrainian political elites. The minority fraction maps its support closely onto social identity claims premised on language, religion, and ethnicity sprung from Mother Russia, claims that have little external legitimacy in the face of Russian barbarism.

Power does not normally work through coercion except when the order ordinarily secured breaks down. An implication of this is that social systems that intervene forcibly to reform "deviance" are not, in fact, powerful. The claims of Russian and Ukrainian social integration are fused in language and its sense of national identity—yet these are clearly not resonating. The paradox is that the war becomes a civil war in its own terms: if Russian social integration is pan-national, then the invasion of Ukraine is a declaration of war on a shared social identity. It is important to note, as did Parsons (1963), that creation of power within a system normally presupposes consensus on goals, providing a framework within which facilitative power operates. The Ukrainian state has not shared goals with Russia since at least 2014 and the Maidan Revolution. Social and system integration clash on Ukrainian soil.

To summarize: in the east, where there is centrality of circuits of social integration, social ordering is marked by too much state and too little market, while in the west's most neoliberally economic expressions, there is centrality of circuits of system integration and social ordering is marked by less state and more market. As circuits of social and system integration traverse these relations each is liable to circuit breaking from events. Where social integration is central, power over deviant subjects defined in terms of dominant conceptions of normal power/knowledge will be forcibly exercised, even against resistance. Where system integration is central and achieved not just through material but also digital infrastructure with its abstract coding, the system may be confounded when confronted with events but not face rupture.

Crisis in either market-led system integration or in state-led social integration can destabilize existing knowledge, resource dependencies, and pattern of interaction. In such conjunctures, while system disintegration can be fixed by states learning new routines, such as quantitative easing, social disintegration is far more problematic where no higher order organization (other than potentially religious institutions such as the Orthodox Church in Russia) exists to fix internal problems of integration. However, these can be displaced externally through a projection of episodic power, in the name of social integration, into other systems, disintegrating them in the process, as in Ukraine.

Neo-economically liberal and democratic states weather crisis much more resiliently than do states in which system integration is subordinate to authoritarian social integration. The former situations are far less ideological while the latter are for more ideological, contrary to the lessons of Western Marxism. Contradictions in system integration have not destroyed capitalism because of its relative autonomy as a circuit of power/knowledge, especially in the most central global states; in addition, the plurality and diversity of social integration within such nations make them far more resilient, even when all the preconditions of fiscal and legitimation crisis are present, matters attended to at more length, elsewhere (Clegg, forthcoming).

Organizations, Institutions, and War

Ali Aslan Gümüsay

Nowadays, few would deny that we have reached the end of the "end of history." Change, not stability, is constant. Crisis mode is the new normal, whether it is due to COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine—or the ever-looming climate crisis. And, of course, these crises are interrelated: Fossil fuel dilemmas show us how deeply interlinked global sustainability and national sovereignty are.

As nation states and authoritarian leaders seem to be celebrating a comeback, it is apt to ask: What is the role of organization studies in general and institutional theory in particular? Perhaps unsurprisingly, I believe that, now more than ever, they have an important one. As crises unfold, organizations and institutions come to the fore. They are maintained and disrupted, built and destroyed (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Institutions and conflict relate intimately to each other: Institutions shape conflict and conflict shapes institutions. As a result, institutional tensions, turmoil, and upheaval emerge. Conflict and war uproot lives, organizations, and institutions. For Friedland and Alford (1991, p. 256): "Institutional contradictions are the bases of the most important political conflicts in our society." These conflicts may be between nation states and their values, beliefs, convictions, and interests, or across different types of institutions, such as the state, market, profession, family, religion, and community.

If we see conflicts as being about institutions, we can see how the Ukrainian government has tried to uphold state institutions. The digital war over what happens in Ukraine and how it is interpreted also becomes a war about diverse and contradictory narratives and understandings—and questions of authority. All this is central to upholding both the functioning of institutions and their legitimacy.

It is important to see and analyze these institutions and the struggles over them. Some may argue that zones of conflict are devoid of institutions. Institutions break down, and one day, they seem to be simply gone. However, in most cases, they do not disappear entirely but merely change and shift —possibly into other forms. Take the market as the institution underpinning transactions for goods and services. In wars, such transactions are inhibited but not stopped. Informal markets pop up, where people purchase necessary goods and services. Likewise, nonmarket mechanisms—such as the sharing of food, water, and shelter—may replace market mechanisms. The institutions of the family, community, and state substitute for the market in such cases. Institutions hence remain present and central.

A period of war and conflict is high time for radical institutional work—to reproduce, alter, and destroy institutions. It entails a struggle over symbols, identities, physical and digital infrastructures, and social relations. It is also high time for new forms of organizing such as hackathons. Hackathons can be used to swiftly coordinate and collaborate. The term hackathon is a portmanteau of hacking and marathon. Hacking indicates a focus on technological solutions. Marathon is really a misnomer, as hackathons are rather design sprints. So, hack-sprint would be more fitting. At these events, whether analog or virtual, software and hardware are co-developed to "hack the crisis." In the Ukraine war, the solutions thus developed attempt to stop or inhibit violent attacks or alleviate their consequences. Examples include software that allows residents who remained in Ukraine to report damage to public buildings and apartment blocks, and software that acts as a propaganda filter by flagging social media posts that are likely fake news.

The role of the digital should not be underestimated. Digital technologies, and the affordances they provide, can significantly shape institutional processes. In the last decade, social media and other digital platforms have redefined civic and political

engagement by enabling new ways of connecting, collaborating, and mobilizing. For instance, in the Ukrainian war, politicians have leveraged the technological features of social media platforms. The president of Ukraine uses Twitter to report on the current situation, offer praise and criticism, and enter into dialogue with other politicians—effectively opening up discussions to a world-wide audience. As popular opinions globally are largely on his side, this form of diplomatic conversation puts additional pressure on world leaders to act in line with Ukrainian interests and requests. The digital arena thus becomes a space in which institutional work is performed. We see how debates in traditional and social media frame the war in certain ways. These debates are part of processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. They can be seen as attempts to legitimize and delegitimize actions.

To conclude, we need to update what we study, how we do so, and why. Regarding what we study, we see how globally interconnected societal grand challenges are (Gümüsay et al., 2020) and the need to study them on a very macro level (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020). United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 16 on "peace, justice and strong institutions" and 17 on "partnerships for the goals" attest to the significance of effective, inclusive, and sustainable worldwide institutions. Regarding how we study, the risk is that our findings may be outdated before they are codified due to the pace of change. We thus need to engage with the future before the future catches up with us. This requires us to rethink and transform theory, empirics, and our scholarly community. Timeliness is an ingredient of relevance. For instance, we may need to move from studying what is (not) to what if (not). And our peer review process may need updating to ensure rigor while making it more applicable to this new normal. I could envisage fast track models—like at airports—but not just for academic passengers who pay business-class rates but for those who serve a more immediate public interest. Lastly, as to the why, we cannot leave the future to authoritarian leaders, as we sweep up their messes and then do our theorizing. Instead, I think we need to co-create the future (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2022)—with modesty, deep humility, and continuous reflection on the role of academia. As the future is unfolding in front of us, we need to play our part—or in this post-truth world, we will be taken apart.

Social Media

Paul Leonardi

Starting in December 2010 and continuing into the Spring of 2011, people across Northern Africa and the Middle East began to engage in massive social protests demanding political reform. Using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter on their mobile devices, protesters spread word, recruited, and mobilized in public squares and at State capitals from Cairo to Damascus. Observers of this Arab Spring that toppled dictators such as Mubarak and Qadhafi argued that social media was the tool that allowed for this rapid spread of organizing that fueled democracy in areas known not only for its absence, but also for social movements demanding it.

Flash forward just one decade. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are once again at the nexus of massive social change. Yet the use of such tools for the spread of democracy has been replaced by their deployment for the enactment of authoritarianism. It turns out that those social media affordances that make it possible for (dis)information to spread quickly, for people to easily organize into self-referential communities, and for online sentiment to spill-over into offline action have been the primary tools that have enabled leaders like Putin, Bolsonaro, and Trump to wield such strong influence over so many.

In my view, the core engine driving action in both directions—democratization on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other—is the same. Sure, social media are phenomenally efficient at allowing the person on the street (or the authoritarian leader in the country's capital) to create and disseminate messages nearly instantaneously without any vetting or filtering. But were that the only thing that social media did, it would not be enough. The primary affordance that makes social media unique among other forms of media and communication technology is that *they make visible how other people respond to those messages*.

Nearly half a century of study in the fields of social and I/O psychology have shown how our own thoughts and actions are fundamentally shaped by the perceptions, attributions, and inferences we make about other people's behaviors. And, the evidence is compelling that when we are acting in public (or believe that we are), our thoughts and actions tend to converge toward our beliefs about what is normative or popular. Social media enables us to see how people who we believe are like us and those who we believe are very different from us, react to various stimuli. For example, do they post incendiary comments about political figures I revere, or do they "like" a news story that affirms my beliefs? Although one can never know for sure why other people act the way they do, that certainly does not stop us from making inference about their motives and rationalizing their actions.

Because social media make visible what people do, we believe we can know what they think. And because we know our own behaviors are visible to others who are also making inferences about us, any action we make on a social media platform is the equivalent of doubling down on "this is who I am." The bottom line is that the visibility of actions enabled by social media platforms plays an incredibly powerful role in our interpretation of the world and our place in it.

It is precisely this strong sense of "I know what other people think and I know who I am in relation to such thinking" that can accelerate democratization as it did in the Arab Spring, while also fueling authoritarianism as it now appears to be doing in the COVID era.

If social media is the spark that ignites behavioral visibility, algorithms are the accelerant that allow visibility to do its work. We don't just happen to be exposed to, or arbitrarily stumble across, random people reacting to information and disinformation on our social media platforms; a sophisticated set of algorithms are making decisions about whose actions will be made visible to us (and to whom our own actions will be made visible) based on their predictions about what we are most likely to click on or share. In other words, algorithms determine, in large part, what is made visible to us and what remains invisible. When viewed in this way, it is easy to see why such strong polarization of thought and such massive mobilization of action are common hallmarks of a world dominated by use of social media.

The primary challenge for organizational theory in the age of behavioral visibility is twofold. First, we must be able to explain how, why, and under what conditions information and disinformation become visible to us. Second, we must develop theory that helps us figure out what to do when what we see is biased and how to make sure that such bias is dismantled, to the extent that it can be. If organization theory is to move in these directions, it will clearly need to focus at both the micro and macro levels of analysis. We need to help people figure out how to attend, interpret, and act in an environment in which everyone's behaviors (including one's own) are highly visible, and we need to help our organizations and institutions give those people the structures, symbols, and logics to deal make sense of their own place in the world so that others do not do it for them.

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Notes

1. The Belt and Road initiative is one of the centerpieces of Chinese foreign policy. It involves extensive investments in infrastructure projects in more than 70 countries across Asia and Europe.
2. Rachman uses "man" purposefully here as they are all men so far.
3. Note that governments can be strongly authoritarian even if they have the trappings of democracy, such as elections and elected legislative bodies. Opposition candidates can be harassed, convicted on trumped-up charges, even killed; opposition parties can be outlawed; and electoral results can be manipulated or faked.

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