Survival Through Strength: How Strong Party Organizations Help Authoritarian Regimes Survive

February 5, 2020

Abstract

Why do some authoritarian regimes with parties outlive those with similar institutions? The institutional turn in comparative authoritarianism has provided various explanations on how institutions help authoritarian regimes endure. Previous models show that party regimes survive longer than military or personalized regimes, but institutional strength has been asserted rather than tested. This paper argues that strong parties are endowed with tools which induce elite cohesion, link mass and civil society to the party, and maintain local political control. To test this theory, I develop a new measure of authoritarian party strength which uses data on the permanency of the national and local party organization, control over candidate selection, local control of political office, and strength of societal linkages. With this index I show that authoritarian regimes with stronger parties are more likely to stave off regime failure than regimes with weaker parties independent of regime type.

Why do some authoritarian regimes survive longer than others, even when they share similar institutions? Twenty years ago Geddes (1999) spurred the institutional turn of comparative authoritarianism (Pepinsky 2014) by showing that party-based regimes survive longer, on average, than military or personalistic regimes. Since her pioneering work, several scholars have advanced our understanding of authoritarianism by theorizing various ways in which parties facilitate longer survival for these regimes.

While regimes with parties tend to survive longer, not all authoritarian regimes with parties are equally effective at staving off dissent and surviving. For example, Kwame Nkrumah's CPP in Ghana only held power for a few years before being ousted from power. Yet in other cases, such as UMNO's long rule in Malaysia, party regimes have remained in power for decades. Although both these cases have been coded as party regimes,[1] why do parties such as Nkrumah's party in Ghana fail to solve ruling dilemmas as effectively as others, such as Malaysia's UMNO?

The literature on comparative authoritarian institutionalism has offered several models which explain how parties extend the life of authoritarian regimes. In these models, parties extend the life of the regime by co-opting other elites (Gandhi 2008), producing a stronger coalition by increasing the costs of defection (Brownlee 2007), providing credible commitments and reducing monitoring problems between the executive and other elites (Magaloni 2008), managing elite promotion and candidate selection (Svolik 2011), or by providing a robust party organization (Smith 2005), which can be linked to mass society to manage elections (Magaloni 2006), de-personalize the regime (Meng 2019), promote collective party interests over the individual (Levitsky and Way 2012, 2013), and distribute rents (Geddes 2008). Alternatively, a recent literature argues the opposite – that stronger authoritarian parties allow autocrats to democratize when they are confident they can perform well in a democratic setting (Slater and Wong 2013; Ziblatt 2017; Riedl et al. 2021).

When incumbents prefer authoritarian rule to democracy, what explains variation in their

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[1]See Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014)

ability to maintain authoritarian rule? I argue that variation in regime survival, even when parties are present, is due to the *strength* of the ruling party. By party strength, I refer to the robustness of the party organization which is employed by the regime to uphold authoritarian rule. Some have conceptualized party strength as the breadth of the organization across territory, membership size, cohesion, and professionalization of staff (Levitsky and Way 2010; Tavits 2012). While these are useful ways of thinking of party strength, especially in the context of democratic or competitive authoritarian electoral competition, they are less well-suited for understanding party strength in authoritarian regimes where the primary goal is obtaining and maintaining a political monopoly. To understand the strength of an authoritarian party, we must key in on its ability to induce elite cohesion, reach society throughout the territory, out-manoeuvre the opposition at the national and local level, and control the local bureaucracy.

I focus on several factors which increase the party's strength beyond its capacity in contesting elections. These include the permanence of national and local offices, control of career advancement, the strength and type of ties to society, and the party's ability to control local political office. These factors allow parties to induce elite cohesion, conduct and coordinate party business at the national and local level, mobilize society in support of the regime, and prevent the development of opposition parties or movements.

Unlike previous works, where party strength is asserted or assessed qualitatively, I measure the strength of ruling parties along these dimensions using data provided by the Varieties of Democracy Project. Using survival analysis, I show that regime failure decreases as party strength increases. I also show that this outcome exists for party, personalist, and military regimes; showing that the benefits of party strength are independent of a regime's nominal type. This demonstrates that regimes are not necessarily one coherent entity, and that the survival enhancing benefits of a party are active even if the party is not the dominate actor.

This article contributes to this now established literature on comparative authoritarianism by offering a theoretical model of how the strength of authoritarian parties influences

regime survival, and new empirical evidence for this proposition. In doing so, it identifies previously unexplained heterogeneity in regime survival, and also provides a way forward for scholars of authoritarianism that does not rely as heavily on assumptions of authoritarian party capacity. This article also identifies a critical role of authoritarian rule *at the local level* in increasing the survival of regimes – a factor which is often overlooked in a field of research which frequently focuses on elites or mass society. Lastly, this article adjudicates the competing claims which argue that either more party strength leads to greater regime durability or that this strength increases the odds of democratization.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I review the literature on authoritarian institutions and highlight how previous work often overlooks the role institutional strength plays in regime survival. Following this review, I outline a theory of how party strength influences the odds of a regime's survival. I then introduce my research strategy, operationalize key variables, and present my main statistical results. I then discuss the results and conclude.

Comparative Authoritarian Institutionalism

Since the pioneering work by Geddes (1999), several scholars of authoritarianism have offered theories explaining why party-based regimes survive longer than alternative forms of authoritarianism. For some, legislatures and parties are mechanisms created by autocrats in order to generate credible commitments (Svolik 2012). Others point to how parties help co-opt elites into the ruling coalition. In these models, the party's control over rents ensures that elites toe the line of the regime (Frantz and Ezrow 2011). Additionally, some have posited that parties increase the longevity of these regimes by inducing elite cohesion through managing promotion and selection into the regime (Blaydes 2008; Svolik 2012).

For all of the work on explaining the longevity of authoritarian regimes as a function of political parties, work on the characteristics of the parties themselves is more limited. A careful reading of this literature reveals that party strength has largely been assumed, rather than tested, as a key mechanisms with regards to regime survival. While helping understand *why* parties facilitate regime survival, many, including key works such as Gandhi (2008)

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and Brownlee (2007), *assume* that parties are sufficiently strong to perform the mechanisms central to regime survival – yet party strength clearly varies. Thus, these models are not as well suited to explain differences found in regime survival where parties are present (e.g. CPP in Ghana versus UMNO in Malaysia).

That party strength is asserted, rather than explicitly theorized and measured, may be the case because work in comparative authoritarianism has focused on explaining variation in regime survival as a function of differences in institutional *structures*, leading researchers to largely overlook how variation in institutional *strength* affects regime survival. While these models do not dismiss institutional strength as a potential explanation outright, they fail to account for variation in the strength of institutions.

This article is not the first to explicitly address party strength. Most recently, Meng (2019) has shown that strong parties are less prominent than previously assumed, and uses a quantitative approach to show that most ruling parties do not survive the departure of the founding leader. Others have used comparative historical analysis to identify the sources of strong authoritarian parties. Smith (2005) was one of the first to focus on the role *strength* has in influencing the survival of a regime. For Smith, a robust party organization, with a high degree of party loyalty, helps hold authoritarian coalitions together. In addition to Smith, Levitsky and Way (2013) argue that strong parties emerge following revolutionary conflict. Together, Smith (2005) and Levitsky and Way (2013) help explain the origins of some of the more durable party-based regimes. While linking regime survival to party strength is not new, generalized testing of this argument is limited.

Altogether this literature has argued that parties enable greater regime survival – assuming that strong parties undergird this durability. It may be, however, that stronger parties facilitate authoritarian regime *failure*. Recent work has argued that parties actually view their organizational strength as a reason to support democratization. For example, Slater and Wong (2013) argue that strong parties have seen their organizational superiority as reason to concede to pressures for democratization without fearing political extinction.

Likewise, Ziblatt (2017) found that conservative parties were more likely to extend the franchise because they were confident they could perform well in elections. Most recently, Riedl et al. (2021) argue that when autocrats have strong parties, they are likely to view democratization optimistically. Thus, there are two competing veins in comparative authoritarian institutionalism. One argues that party strength should generate more durable authoritarian regimes, while the other argues the opposite – that greater party strength should increase the likelihood of democratization.

Conceptualizing Party Strength

To explain how party strength influences regime survival, I begin by conceptualizing party strength and also show how my conceptualization differs from others who have used party strength to explain the durability of regimes. Conceptualizing authoritarian party strength is difficult because, at times, there is little space between the regime and its ruling party. A concept developed to argue that party strength is associated with greater regime durability may be tautological in context of single party regimes, if the concept fails to distinguish the party as a separate actor from the regime. Indeed, Sartori (1976) takes great care to avoid conceptualizing party systems in the context of authoritarian regimes, because single-party regimes were a common form of regime analyzed during the Cold War in Eastern Europe/Central Asia and East Asia.

However, many non-single party regimes also use parties where there is greater variation in the degree to which the party is fused with the regime. Regimes with weak parties may survive for quite some time in some cases when paired with other actors (see Egypt or Indonesia), while in other regimes, the strength of the party is what drives survival (see Malaysia or Paraguay). If we define a regime in terms of the party itself, the theory borders on tautological and we fail to identify how a strong party factored into regime survival. We should take greater care associating the party with the regime itself, however, considering several non-single party regimes feature either a hegemonic party or party within a personalist or military coalition. Below, I develop the concept of party strength that operates in all forms

of authoritarian rule where any party is present – whether that party is fused with the regime or not, and whether it is the dominant actor.

I define a strong party as an organization with a robust apparatus that allows it to induce elite cohesion, mobilize society on its behalf, and control the national and local state. A strong party must be able to do more than manage a complex portfolio of tasks (Huntington 2006). Indeed, a strong party will be able to induce elite cohesion, as well as mobilize the state and masses in order to dominate its rivals.

There are several factors which produce a strong authoritarian party. First, the party must have a permanent central organization. This allows the party to manage its complex portfolio of objectives, but is also absolutely necessary to endure beyond the life of the founder of the party. It also means the party cannot simply be a vehicle for passing out patronage in the form of seats or other rents. Parties without a permanent national organization, that are simply personalistic or patronage vehicles, are too easily transformed or die when there is a transition in leadership. Second, parties must have a permanent presence at the local level. This allows the regime to function, not only in the capital, but throughout the territory. Third, a strong party maintains control over candidate selection and career promotions. Weak parties are those in which control of nominations and advancement within the party is in the hands of an actor outside the party's leadership. Fourth, a strong party must also have programmatic links to society. This form of linkage is far more durable than transactional clientelistic relationships. Lastly, a strong party must be able to control the bureaucracy, including at the national and local level.

I am not the first to invoke the concept of a strong party. Most recently, Meng (2019) has applied the concept of party strength to authoritarian rule. Meng argues that a key characteristic of a strong party is the ability to survive the departure of the party's founder. Meng focuses on this aspect of party strength because it identifies routinization and adaptability. This allows the party to perpetuate, which is a key factor cited by Levitsky (1998) and Levitsky and Murillo (2009) as a necessary characteristic of an institutionalized party.

Meng also argues that this autonomy increases the party's ability to constrain the executive.

Organizational autonomy may endow the party with a greater ability to constrain the executive, but parties still employ infrastructural power which boosts the odds of survival, even if the party is subordinated to other actors (Slater 2003). Thus, organizational autonomy may be a contributing, but not necessary condition of party strength.

In addition to Meng, Ziblatt (2017) and Riedl et al. (2021) have invoked the idea of a strong authoritarian party as a possible explanation for authoritarian led democratization. They conceptualize a strong party with five components: capacity for nationwide mobilization, capacity to stimulate but subordinate outside groups, loyal party professionals, a brand that can cross-cut social cleavages, and firewalls to maintain cohesion. There is some overlap between Riedl et al. (2021)'s conceptualization of party strength and mine. The key difference, however, is that each component of their definition lends itself to a theory to explain how incumbent parties can perform well in democratic elections. Mine, on the other hand, is more focused on how ruling parties can garner and maintain a political monopoly.

Lastly, Levitsky and Way (2010) use party strength to explain the ability of incumbents to tilt the electoral playing field in their favor. For Levitsky and Way, party strength is conceptualized around the scope and cohesion of the mass-organization, which is necessary to overwhelm the opposition in elections. Scope refers to the size and breadth of the party throughout the territory, and is related to two components of my concept of party strength: presence of local party offices and control of sub-national political office. They also refer to cohesion, which is the extent to which individuals are tied to the party through non-material means. I do not directly account for the strength of non-material ties to the party. Instead, I focus on the links to society in general, and whether they are clientelistic or programmatic.

Durability Through Strength

How do stronger parties enable greater durability for authoritarian regimes? The theory developed herein does not solely focus on party regimes. Rather, I focus on the party as a distinct actor in a regime - whether or not the party is the dominant member of the ruling

coalition. Because regimes boast political parties even if the party is subordinated to other actors, we need not limit the concept of party strength solely on the basis of independence from the executive or other actors. Party mechanisms which extend the life of a regime may operate whenever there is a party present, regardless of its position within the regime.

Previous work by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) has sought to measure institutions by categorizing authoritarian regimes into types. By coding these regimes in categories, including hybrid types, Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) laid the foundation for scholars to begin identifying the role institutions played in the behavior of these regimes. However, because typologies require coders to strictly delineate categories, heterogeneity in certain characteristics of the cases, such as their strength, may not be measured with this approach.

Parties, however, are found in all types of regimes – not solely within those that Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) code as party dominant regimes. This can be seen in Figure 1[2] where, in addition to party regimes, roughly 50% of personalist regimes, military regimes, and monarchies feature authoritarian parties.

It may seem unintuitive that parties exist in non-party regimes, especially monarchies, as these types of regimes aren't typically endowed with a support or ruling party. Parties, however may also strengthen monarchies, military-led regimes, and personalist regimes. For example, from the early 1920s to the revolution in 1952, the Egyptian Wafd party incorporated land-owners into the regime. Thus, the Wafd may have facilitated the regime's survival prior to the 1952 coup - yet is unaccounted for in an approach with strictly defined

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[2]To create this figure I select data from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) where the variable *Regime* is either Party, Personal, Military, or Monarchy. I combine this dataset with that from the Varieties of Democracy Project and then code for whether the regime has a party on a few conditions. First, if v2psbars_ord or v2lgbicam from the Varieties of Democracy data equals zero, then the regime is coded as not having a party. Also if the regime is coded as Party by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) then the regime is coded as having a party.
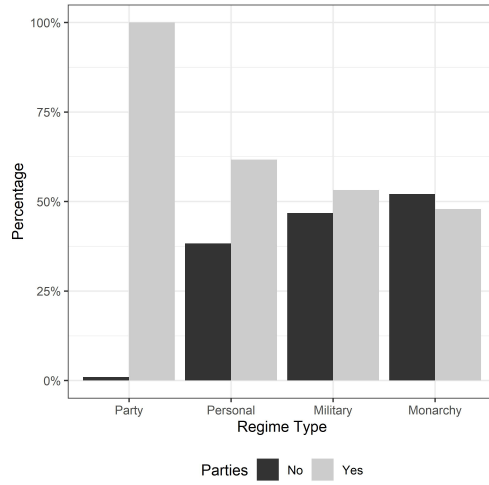
Figure 1: Breakdown of Regimes and Presence of Parties

typologies.

Given that parties exist across the spectrum of regime types, how can the strength of parties increase regime duration? Parties are political bodies which function to order society (Huntington 2006). Parties can do so by using their organization to coordinate behavior amongst, and between, elites and mass society. While parties *can* function in this way, they are not automatically endowed with the capacity to do so simply through their existence. Indeed, the breadth and complexity of partisan organizations varies across cases, with some parties boasting well-developed organizations that penetrate deep into society, while others merely function as window dressing.[3] To illustrate how stronger parties facilitate regime

[3]Throughout this section, I refer to Malaysia's UMNO and Indonesia's Golkar to provided qualitative evidence for the mechanisms outlined. I select UMNO because it functions as a most likely case, and serves as a strong illustrative case for the mechanisms proposed. UMNO was in power from the time of independence in 1957 to when it lost power in 2018. Unlike some authoritarian parties, UMNO was not simply created by an autocrat. Instead, UMNO was created by pro-independence activists and established deep organizational roots in Malaysian society. Indonesia's Golkar began as a weak confederation of corporatist interest groups, but developed into an institutionalized party which helped the regime survive for over 30 years.

survival I will structure my theory by the five components of party strength outlined in the conceptualization section. By doing so, I demonstrate how each component functions as a mechanism to boost regime survival.

Permanent National Organization

The first component of a strong party is the presence of a permanent national organization. Permanent headquarters facilitate regime survival in several ways. First, it helps the party perform basic administrative functions that are critical for a well-functioning organization, while also providing a base for professional party cadres. These party cadres perform day-to-day operations which help manage and coordinate complex tasks. This may range from directing elite behavior at the national level, to coordinating the behavior of local offices across the territory. Should the party have an extensive network of party offices, the central office steers this network to benefit the regime. In short, permanent headquarters provide the party with a basic bureaucratic structure which facilitates routinization.

Another way a national organization facilitates regime survival is the ability to better manage elections. A permanent national organization can work and prepare for elections year-round. This includes recruiting and training candidates, while producing party material for the elections. Weaker parties, without a permanent organization, will need to stand up and develop a national organization in preparation for elections. This may lead to significant oversights and missteps due to the lack of experienced and professional cadres.

A permanent national organization can also facilitate regime survival by navigating leadership transitions. In order to manage a national organization, parties need to institutionalize leadership. This leads to the development of committees within the party which oversee party business. As parties institutionalize their leadership, they create procedures for selecting and replacing elites into these positions. This can be seen in the history of Indonesia's Golkar. After the military reformed the organization into a party at the national level, Golkar institutionalized its leadership structure in order to manage party business. This allowed the party to create a system to select new leadership, and not be completely subordinated to

a single party leader. When Indonesia's long-time president Suharto resigned in 1998, the party was well situated to navigate life without him and transition to new leadership.

Permanent Local Organization

Authoritarian rule requires that a regime manage its territory. A territorially expansive party provides a regime with an organization that can extend its reach into society that is spread throughout its territory. This helps the party establish roots in society, increasing its ability to organize and mobilize society at the local level. Should the regime lack a territorially robust party, the ruling party can only penetrate a more narrow portion of society, such as the capital or party enclaves. This weakens the base of mass support for the regime, and/or limits its ability to monitor and rule society in the periphery. Furthermore, parties with limited geographical reach will struggle to monopolize political control throughout the territory, which opens space for opposition parties.

The benefits of a territorially expansive party can be seen in the case of UMNO in Malaysia. UMNO has boasted an expansive party organization with approximately 3,500 local branches scattered throughout Malaysia's territory, with most branches having several hundred members (Case 1996). These local branches allowed UMNO to have an active presence at a grass-roots level throughout the Malay peninsula where UMNO dominated elections for decades. This presence provided UMNO with a broad coalition - meaning UMNO did not have to rely on a narrow societal sector to shore up its rule.

These local offices support the national party when linked to the permanent national organization. UMNO was able to make good use of its territorial presence with a strong hierarchical organization which coordinated activities across the territory. UMNO's branches were organized into 165 divisions which selected a cadre into leadership, and a committee which organized and managed the party within the division (Case 1996). The divisional leaders worked with those in the permanent central party to coordinate party goals and behavior. Thus, UMNO's central party apparatus was able to wield its deep presence throughout Malaysia and perform critical tasks for its long survival.

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Permanent local organizations are also crucial for the party as it contests elections and develops cadres for the national party. Having local offices throughout the territory boosts the party's ability to drive turnout in favor of the regime. Golkar used its presence throughout the Indonesian archipelago to meet specific electoral quotas (Crouch 2007, pg. 265) for the regime, and helped the regime extend its electoral advantage far better than the opposition parties, which had a limited geographic reach.

With permanent local offices, the party can be active at the local level year-round to prepare for elections. As professional and active cadres staff the local offices, the party can interact with local notables or organizations, who can then advocate for the party and boost their success in elections. These local offices can also allow the national office to delegate critical tasks to local cadres. Local cadres can act on behalf of the national organization and recruit and train new cadres and candidates. This structure also provides meaningful experience for cadres, as well as allows the party to identify and promote more talented cadres, ultimately boosting the efficacy of the national party.

Another task these offices can perform is local monitoring. Local offices deeply embedded in society can monitor neighborhoods, and allow the party to respond to shifts in popular sentiment before it broadens. The presence of the party at the local level also allows the party to act and co-opt potential rivals before they have a chance to network and build broader organizations which can challenge the party. Lastly, local offices provide the party with a mechanisms to deliver patronage or clientelistic goods more directly and efficiently to the population.

Social Linkages

Key to a regimes survival is its linkages to society, as clientelistic or programmatic linkages allow the party to mobilize society on its behalf. Clientelism may facilitate greater regime survival by buying support for the regime. If endowed with a robust territorial structure, these parties can more directly and efficiently distribute cash, or other goods, in exchange for support for the regime (Magaloni 2006). On the other hand, deep roots in society

may also provide party leadership with local information that helps them craft economic programs which boost popular support. This was the case in Malaysia where delegates tied national economic programs and patronage to local needs. For example, elites often crafted broad developmental programs but also gave local party loyalists direct control over local developmental programs (Crouch 1996).

While clientelistic networks may tie voters to the party and regime, a party boasting programmatic linkages exhibits greater strength. This is the case because clientelistic relations are transactional and weak. Programmatic parties demonstrate a higher degree of strength in two ways. First, a stronger party is required to develop, maintain, and execute a policy program rather than solely relying on buying support from voters. Second, programmatic parties are more likely to exhibit what Levitsky (1998) terms "value infusion", where members of the party place greater value in the interests of the party than their own. These parties forge an identity with elites and mass-society via values rather than weaker material transactions. When paired with an extensive network of local offices, the party can more effectively organize and mobilize those with strong ideational ties on the regime's behalf.

Strong, non-material links to society leads to greater elite cohesion through they party's ability to whip cadres into line with its activist and mass base. When parties have more robust links with society, activists within the party operate through party bodies to whip elites and punish those that deviate from the party line (Panebianco 1988). Strong ties also make it harder for defectors to peel away voters who are tied to the party by values rather than through patronage. Ambitious politicians are less likely to challenge a ruling party if they cannot pull support away from the party and are punished at the ballot box. An example of this can be seen with those that sought to challenge Mahathir and UMNO. Challengers faced serious consequences after they failed to drum up sufficient popular support and lost at the ballot box - from being locked out of the government to imprisonment.

Control of Local Office

Another way that a strong party leads to greater regime duration is by capturing local polit-

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ical offices. The presence of a strong party throughout a polity's territory which dominates local elections raises the bar for opposition parties in their bid to oust the incumbent party. To compete on the same level as a strong ruling party, opposition parties must invest and develop a party that rivals the incumbent party in strength. The costs of doing so are high and requires sustained coordinated effort by those in the opposition (Dettman 2018). This then helps the ruling party out-organize its opposition and continue holding onto power.

This can be seen in the case of the electoral dominance of UMNO in Malaysia from independence until 2018. With their thousands of local branches and broad control of local office, UMNO's territorial advantage required the opposition to expand its geographic presence just to come into reach of competing on the same playing field. This took decades of work and difficult coordination amongst the opposition parties. These opposition parties repeatedly failed to build a broad enough electoral coalition across the country until 2018, and were only able to oust UMNO after decades of party building.

Another way that control of local political office enables regime survival is the control it gives the party over the local bureaucracy. By controlling local political offices, the party can capture the local state apparatus and tilt the playing field in their favor. This means that the party can use the police, or local legal officials, to harass political opponents. Lastly, control over local office and bureaucracy could also enable the party to engage in more discrete electoral fraud. Instead of having to rig elections from the center or at the national level, the party can use local officials to conduct more precise electoral fraud.

Control of Career Advancement

A strong party can also serve the regime by increasing elite cohesion by managing the career paths of political entrepreneurs (Svolik 2011). This requires that the party must have centralized control over career advancement and candidate selection. When the party controls promotions or nominations, elites are more likely to toe the party line and subordinate their personal interests for those of the party's.

Parties with more decentralized or weak hierarchies, or where there is a lower degree

of autonomy from other actors, will find it more difficult to induce cadres to toe the line. Should the party lack autonomy, those within the party will seek to curry favor with the dominant actor outside of the party to advance their career interests. This creates discord within the regime, as elites jockey and compete for access to promotions or nominations. It also means that if elites can find a different patron, they will break away from the party and pursue power via alternative avenues. This can result in capable elites challenging the status of the party and weaken its hold on power.

I have outlined various ways components of a strong party facilitate regime survival. These mechanism may increase in effectiveness when paired with another. For example, local branches can be more effective when directed by a permanent and well-institutionalized national organization. Clientelism, on the other hand, will be more effective if it can be distributed through local party branches. While each component may boost the effectiveness of another, I am agnostic about which factors of a strong party are more important. Each may be more or less essential as it motivates actors to support the regime.

Lastly, a strong party does not necessarily mean that a party will survive indefinitely. Stronger parties should be better at mobilizing mass-society on their behalf and constraining elites than regimes with weaker parties. The regime, however, may still become unpopular over time (see the PRI in Mexico) and lose elections as opposition parties develop (see UMNO in Malaysia). It may also be that elite-pacts break down within the party despite its strength (see Paraguay's Colorado Party). Thus, simply stated, the argument is that a regime with a strong ruling party has more tools at its disposal that help solve political problems, than those with weaker parties - all else equal.

Prior to testing this theory, I identify a key alternative explanation. Specifically, I highlight Geddes (1999) which argued that the *type* of regime explains variation in its survival. Central to this theory is how the characteristics of the *dominant* actor within the regime structures incentives for cooperation with elites within the regime. Parties, then, lead to more durable regimes because alternative forms of authoritarian rule create stronger incen-

tives for defection. This means we should observe that when the party is autonomous and the dominant actor, regimes survive longer. If how the dominant actor structures incentives matters more than the strength of the party, we should see little association between party strength and regime survival when accounting for the institutional structure of the regime.

This may be the case, but it is unlikely that how the dominant actor structures incentives solely matters. As I stated previously, personalistic and military regimes also have parties. The presence of these parties may produce beneficial effects, whether they are subordinated or not. Thus, the strength of the party should matter independent of the regime type. It may be, however, that the scope of the effect of party strength matters, but is dependent on its position within the regime. If completely subordinated to the military or a personalistic ruler, the benefits of a strong party organization may become muted. It may be that party regimes are more effective at wielding their party organization than alternative forms of authoritarian rule.

Expectations

The theory outlined above leads to some testable implications for the impact of party strength on the survival of authoritarian regimes. In general, this theory implies that authoritarian regimes, *independent of other factors, including their regime type*, should survive longer if they are endowed with stronger parties.

- **Hypothesis 1:** The likelihood of any regime's survival will increase as party strength increases.

As mentioned, however, the existing literature suggests several mechanisms which enable regime survival if parties are the dominant actor in the regime. Yet this effect may be strengthened by the presence of a strong party. If a party is subordinated (as it would be in a personlist or military regime), the benefits of having a strong party may diminish as more powerful members of the ruling coalition ignore or constrain the party. Thus, I test whether the effect of regime strength on survival is conditional on the autonomy of the party in the regime.

- **Hypothesis 2:** The effect of party strength will be greater as the party becomes more autonomous.

Data

To test how party strength influences survival rates of authoritarian regimes, I use data coded by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) to model the survival rates of authoritarian regimes. I select this data for several reasons. First, this dataset provides one of the largest panels on the lifespan of regimes available. THis allows me to model the failure of authoritarian regimes from the post-WWII era to 2010. One strength of this dataset is that it captures *all* regime deaths, not just those which result in democratization, but also those which result in transitions to alternative forms of authoritarianism. Second, this dataset is widely used in comparative authoritarianism, making the results from this exercise more easily comparable to other works in the literature. Third, this dataset is also preferable to other datasets [4] because its focus is on the relative balance of power between regime actors (e.g. party vs military) and whether parties are subordinated to other actors, rather than solely focusing on restrictions on the party system (e.g. multi vs single party). This approach also allows me to use this dataset to model the composition of institutions (i.e. regime type) which is directly correlated in the dataset with the emergence and failure of the regime.

From this data I primarily use the variable *Regime*, with the failure of these regimes as the outcome of interest. The data codes regimes into one of several categories, *Military*, *Monarchy*, *Party*, or *Personal*, which are used to control for the autonomy of the party within the regime. [5] Additionally, I use the variable *Regime Type* which allows for hybrid regimes. As previously mentioned, regimes often do not fit cleanly into one single category. To address this, Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) measures the complex nature of author-

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[4]Such as Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius (2013).

[5]In the main models I exclude regimes which have duration lengths of over 100 years because they are outliers. This excludes the monarchies of Nepal and Oman, but models with this data can be found in the supplementary Appendix B.

itarian regimes by coding hybrid forms of autocratic rule, where parties may rule alongside the military or a personalist authority.

The complex nominal category of *Regime Type* is an improvement upon other coding schemes, as it captures greater complexity of these institutions. While an improvement, however, this data falls short in capturing the range of party strength across all these regimes. I highlight the structure of this data because Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) has been used frequently in the literature on regime survival and, when paired with a measure of party strength, helps illustrate variation in party strength across various forms of authoritarianism.

To measure authoritarian party strength I generate a new continuous measure using data from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-dem) (Coppedge et al. 2018). While both GWF and V-dem use expert coders, there a some key differences which provide V-dem with some distinct advantages. First, using V-dem data allows the researcher to account for several possible dimensions of authoritarian party strength. This is not possible with GWF as the data provides a single (or hybrid) typological coding based on a few criteria laid out by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). This prevents the researcher from measuring components which factor into party strength. Second, to generate their data, V-dem first identifies several experts in each country. These in-country experts are surveyed on several topics concerning democracy for any given year. V-dem uses the responses from each expert and aggregates them using a measurement model to reduce coder error and disagreement. This measurement model is then used to produce a continuous index for any given concept (Pemstein et al. 2018). Using this method, V-dem produces a panel for their indicators which vary from year to year from 1900 to 2016, with wide coverage of countries.

Using data from the V-dem parties section, I select five indicators to create a measurement of autocratic party strength. These indicators are selected because they are theoretically relevant, and also because they are appropriate for measuring party characteristics in authoritarian regimes. From this data I generate an index I call Authoritarian Party Strength (APS). The five components correspond to the five mechanisms discussed in the

theory section; permanency of the national organization, local party branches, characteristics of social linkages, party control of candidacies, and control of sub-national political offices.

To create APS, I sum the five indicators to form a party strength index, reflecting the expectation that each element of the index is partially substitutable for the entire concept of party strength. Each index is normalized on a 0 to 1 scale, with higher values associated with higher levels of party strength. If no parties exist in the system I set APS to zero.[6] The index varies over time by country, but is relatively stable as substantive shifts in party strength take time.[7]

As previously mentioned, parties can be found in all types of regimes and we should assume that the strength of these parties varies. Indeed, using APS we see in Figure 2 that the strength of parties varies across the different types of regimes. Figure 2 also shows that, for the most part, the coding by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) largely identifies that party regimes have stronger parties, but the typological approach fails to capture the *distribution* of the strength of these parties *within* and *between* these types.

In related research, Meng (2019) has addressed the strength of authoritarian parties. Meng's index focuses on the party vis-à-vis the executive of the regime. She does so by accounting for whether a party survives the initial transition of leadership within the party. By doing so, Meng shows that parties often lack the strength to survive an initial change in leadership. APS differs from Meng, however, by measuring variation in the robustness of the

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[6]For all models I run a more conservative test by replacing values where the system has no parties to NA instead of zero so they are dropped from the analysis. Results are robust to this more conservative approach and can be found in Appendix E.

[7]A validation of APS is presented in Appendix A where I show the heterogeneity of APS across time and space, the distribution of the sub-components of APS, the correlation of each sub-component of APS as well with the new personalism measure developed by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018), and the distribution of the various constructions of APS.
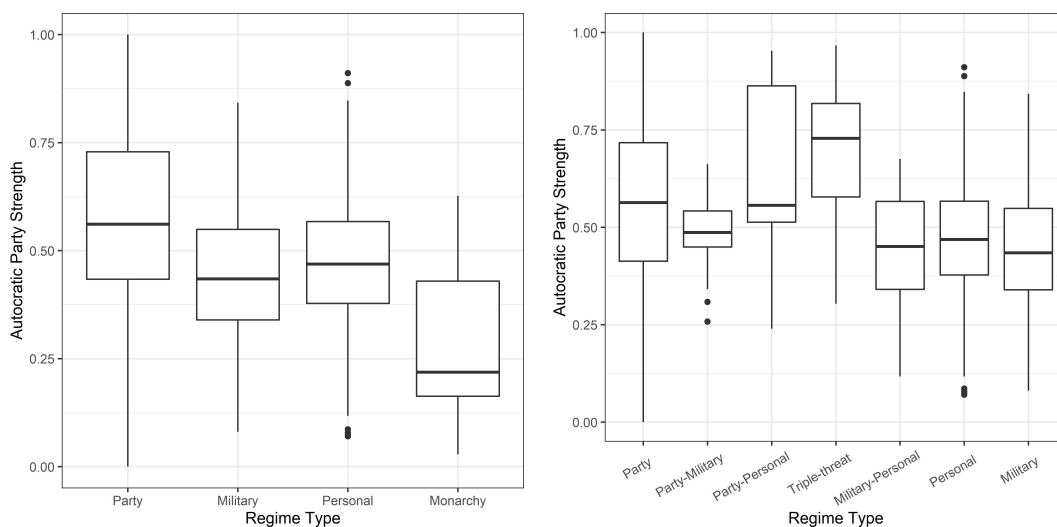
Figure 2: Distribution of Authoritarian Party Strength by Regime Type

party apparatus and its links to society, rather than focusing on the ability to survive leadership transitions.[8] Furthermore, the index developed by Meng (2019) is not fully independent of other factors which may influence the survival of a party. While an institutionalized party is certainly more likely to survive leadership transitions, the survival of a party beyond its first leader is not solely a function of its strength. Other factors contributing to the failure of a regime or the transition in leadership may also affect the party's survival.[9] Thus, APS improves upon this approach by not relying so heavily on a narrow factor of party strength. Instead, I use local expert coding to measure the strength of the party at a given time prior to regime failure.

Another strength of APS is that it measures party strength multi-dimensionally. Where Meng (2019) measures party strength as a function of leadership transitions, and Geddes,

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[8]Indices such as Meng's rely on proxies of strength identified *ex-post* – meaning we can only know of a party's strength *after* a leadership transition is attempted. *APS*, on the other hand, solves this issue by coding the actual characteristics of these parties on a year-by-year basis.

[9]Meng (2019) tries to control this by accounting for whether a leader is ousted violently, but there are other potential factors which may undermine an authoritarian party's ability to survive.

Wright, and Frantz (2014) measures the strength of the party by its relative position to other actors, APS accounts for several different dimensions which contribute to party strength. This measure is easily generalizable across all regions of the world, and is comparable across a wide scope of time. APS allows a researcher to directly measure the characteristics of a party which enable its strength and capabilities without capturing other factors which may be correlated with the dependent variable. By measuring the components of party strength, APS does not accidentally smuggle in the effects of the charismatic power of the leader, the strength of the armed forces, foreign benefactors, or natural resource wealth.

Recent work by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018) adds greater detail to the character of the ruling or support party. For example, Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018) codes for whether the party has a local presence in society. The strength of this most recent work lies in the relationship of the party and the regime leader, such as whether the party controls succession. I maintain that APS is preferable to this alternative measure of autocratic parties for a few reasons. First, APS is continuous and provides a distribution of strength of parties across time and space. This means APS accounts for the *degree* of social penetration by capturing the breadth of the party's local offices, robustness of its control of local office, and the type of social linkages. Second, APS centers on the strength of the party organization rather than its relationship with the regime leader. This makes APS more appropriate for this study, as it is the party apparatus which enables survival, whether it is subordinated to some other actor. Lastly, these other measures may appropriately capture when large shifts in the relative power of actors within the regime change, but this requires discrete changes to the party or military in order for changes to be measured. APS improves upon this by capturing more nuanced changes to the composition of the party.

While an improvement upon other measures, APS does has a few weaknesses. APS does not directly measure some mechanisms which have been proposed as reasons for how parties improve the odds of regime survival. But this is also true of all existing measures of party strength under authoritarianism. Other data uses binary or categorical approaches which is

coded using easily observable characteristics of regimes. Instead, by using data on several factors of party strength, I am better able to measure the strength of the party, and in turn, capture any party's potential capacity to use these mechanisms.

Another weakness is that APS measures the average strength of parties in the entire party system. Thus, if only one ruling party is present, this index directly measures the strength of the *ruling party*. However, if other parties are present in the system, whether pro-regime or opposition, this index will account for their strength as well. This may mean that APS picks up on the mechanisms proposed by Gandhi (2008), wherein co-opted opposition parties produce regime stability. This may happen, but co-opted parties tend to be weaker because the regime prevents their development which, in turn, would produce a lower APS. Thus, if capturing this mechanism, we should expect that lower APS is correlated with higher rates of regime survival.

To help address this issue, I create an index of restraints placed on opposition parties. I do so to control for the openness of the party system and presence of opposition parties. Like APS, the opposition party constraints (OPC) index is an additive index using V-dem data. This index uses components which capture (1) the extent to which parties are banned, (2) the strength of barriers to entry for opposition parties, and (3) the extent to which opposition parties are autonomous. Like APS, OPC is aggregated and then normalized from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate a *less* restrictive, or more free, party system.

This addresses the issue stated above by controlling for the effect of opposition parties on regime survival. As OPC increases it measures more openness in the system, which captures the presence of opposition parties. Thus, it measures whether the presence of opposition parties, rather than the strength of the ruling party as measured by APS, drives regime survival. If it is true that opposition parties are captured by APS, even when controlling for OPC, we should expect APS to be correlated with a *decrease* in regimes survival, as stronger opposition parties can more effectively challenge the regime. If, however, APS is capturing the role of the ruling party, while OPC captures that of the of opposition, we should expect

to observe higher levels of *OPC* to be associated with *regime failure*, while higher levels of *APS* to be associated with *regime survival.*

Because I cannot randomly assign party strength to regimes, I rely on various indicators to control for other factors which may affect the life of a regime. First, using the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities data (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972, (v5.0)), I construct a measure of military capacity with data on military expenditures. This data is taken from the CoW NMC dataset and then standardized to the 2000 U.S. dollar, divided by the total population, and then logged. I use the lag of this variable to measure the previous year's military spending, so the measure of military spending is not a function of that year's *APS*. I use this data to proxy for the strength of the regime's repressive apparatus, which may directly affect the durability of a regime.

Using this same dataset, I account for the level of urbanization which may induce regime failure, as others have linked the likelihood of transitioning to democracy with increases in urbanization (Wallace 2013). I take their measure of the percentage of the total population which lives in urban areas, and log it to control for any urbanization effect.

I also account for the level of economic development using the logged GDP per capita measure from V-dem (e_migdppcln). In addition to economic wealth, I account for the size of the territory, as this should effect that party's ability to wield its apparatus effectively. To do so, I use the measure of land area in the V-dem dataset (e_area) and log it. I also measure the natural resource wealth with V-dem's e_Total_Resources_Income_PC indicator.

In addition to these controls, I account for the level of personalization of power within the regime using the index produced by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018). This variable uses eight components regarding personalized authoritarian rule to construct a continuous latent measure of personalism. Using Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018), I also generate a control variable for whether the regime emerged from violent revolution or rebellion which may affect its durability (Levitsky and Way 2013). To construct this measure, I take the variable *seizure* and, if coded as *rebel*, set it to 1 with all other seizure types set to 0.

I select these control variables to improve the estimation of a causal effect of party strength on regime failure. While I cannot randomly assign party strength to ensure a precise estimate of its effect, including these prominent factors reduces the likelihood that models suffer from omitted variable bias. Should the estimated coefficients behave consistently, even when controlling for these factors, we can have greater confidence that autocratic party strength plays a causal role in staving off regime failure.

Regime Survival

To model regime survival, I start with a non-parametric Kaplan-Meier estimator where the estimate of regime survival is modeled by the type of *Regime*. This model is presented in Figure 3. With this model, I substantiate the results found by Geddes (1999) that *Party* regimes survive longer than *Military* or *Personal* regimes. With this specification there is only a slight difference in the survival rates of *Party* and *Monarchy* regimes, where the probability of *Monarchy* regimes is higher well into the life of these regimes.
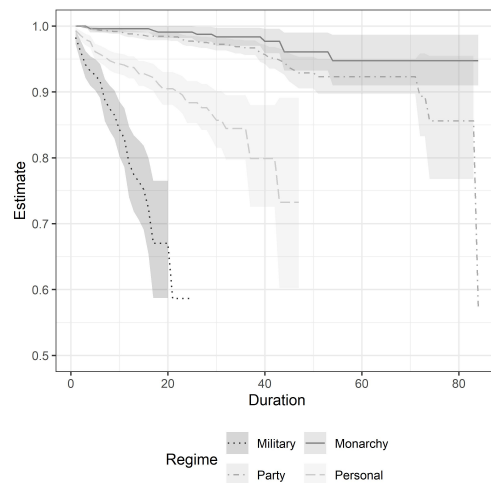

Figure 3: Survival Odds of Authoritarian Regimes by Regime Type

I then model how survival rates of *Regime* vary as a function of *APS*. Again, I use a Kaplan-Meier estimator, and break *APS* into terciles - High, Medium, and Low.[10] The results of this estimator are presented in Figure 4 and show that the probability of a regime

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[10]It is common to break variables into specific strata when graphing a Kaplan-Meier function.

surviving, across all regime types, is higher for regimes with parties located in the highest tercile, while there is no difference for regimes with APS in the middle or lower terciles. This non-parametric estimation supports the theory presented earlier that regime survival is not simply due to the presence of a party in a system, but also that the strength of the party matters.
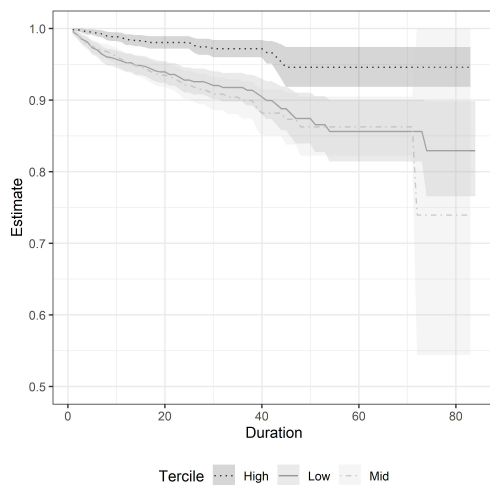

Figure 4: Survival Odds of Authoritarian Regimes by Party Strength

To estimate the effect of APS on the survival for *Regime*, I use a Cox Proportional Hazards model. I select this approach because it does not assume a specific probability distribution for the time until a regime's death (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). The flexibility of this approach allows me to model the effect of APS without needing to directly parameterize the effect of time on a regime's survival, while allowing me to control for factors which may influence *Regime* survival. One potential weakness of the Cox Proportional Hazards model is that it does not handle fixed effects parameters, which potentially undermines the ability to estimate a causal effect. To address this, I estimate the same models using a Weibull survival model with time and country fixed effects. I find that the results are robust and consistent under this specification which allows for greater confidence that they have a causal interpretation.[11]

Results of this exercise are found in Table 1 in which I present the exponentiated hazard

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[11]Results for the Weibull specifications are found in Appendix C.

odds for *APS* across several specifications, and between two sampling strategies. I sample with observations from the four major regime types from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) – Party, Personal, Military, and Monarchy but also produce a sample where monarchies are dropped. This exercise includes models without any controls (Models 1 and 5), models with all controls laid out previously (Models 2 and 6), models with additional controls for the regime type (Models 3 and 7). Lastly I include controls for hybrid regime type (Models 4 and 8).

Table 1: Regime Failure

	Dependent variable:							
	Regime Failure							
	With Monarchies				Without Monarchies			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
APS	0.21***	0.16***	0.35***	0.33***	0.08***	0.09***	0.29***	0.27***
	(0.36)	(0.52)	(0.54)	(0.53)	(0.38)	(0.54)	(0.55)	(0.55)
Non-regime Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regime Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Hybrid Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	4,519	3,345	3,345	3,255	3,995	3,053	3,053	2,963
R²	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.11	0.02	0.06	0.10	0.11
Max. Possible R²	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.52	0.55	0.53	0.53	0.53

Reported coefficients are exponentiated hazard odds with exponentiated standard errors in parentheses. All models use *Personal* regime as the baseline. P-values are reported as: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

The most important finding from this exercise is that, for all specifications, the results support Hypothesis 1. In each model the expected rate of failure of a regime decreases as *APS* increases. The reported coefficients should be interpreted as the odds of failure if taking the product of the baseline hazard rate. Thus, using the coefficient in Model 3, this model reports that the odds of failure, with the average of *APS*, is 0.35 of the baseline rate – meaning that the odds of failure are much lower as parties become stronger.

In addition to support for the first hypothesis, I find that the results are fairly consistent across specifications. There is only a slight difference across models when including monar-

chies than not; approximately .06 difference in the hazard odds when excluding monarchies and including all other controls. This demonstrates that altering the sample does not significantly change the estimated odds of regime failure. The biggest shift in the coefficients comes when controls for the regime type is included in addition to other controls. This means that the categorical coding of regime type is capturing some variation that was previously correlated with APS. Although the coefficients increase when controlling for regime type, APS is still associated with a substantial decrease in the odds of regime.

As previously mentioned, APS was constructed with an additive approach, meaning I assume that each component of APS is partially substitutable. This may not be the case. To test the robustness of APS I also construct a multiplicative index,[12] as well as an index using Factor Analysis,[13] and present the results in Table 2. In addition to these alternative indices, I also replicate these same indices while excluding the indicator of social linkages. I acknowledged that some will disagree about whether a party uses programmatic or clientelistic linkages is indicative of its strength. Thus, I construct the indices in two ways, and then compare them with and without social linkages as a component of APS.

With this approach I find that APS is a robust measure of party strength. I find that the estimated odds of survival are equal for the multiplicative and additive indicators when including social linkages. When social linkages are excluded, there is only a minor (0.02) change in the hazard odds.

The results for the Factor Analysis index are mixed. When including a component for social linkages there is no statistically significant correlation between APS and regime survival. When the component for social linkages is excluded, however, the index is correlated with a estimated odds of failure similar to the additive index. Overall I find that the

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[12]The multiplicative index uses the same components as the additive index. However, the index was transformed using the cubed-root to create a normal distribution.

[13]The Factor Analysis index excluded the measure of local branches because this factor failed to load.

correlation between *APS* and regime failure is robust to various forms of the index.

Table 2: Regime Failure

	Dependent variable:					
	Regime Failure					
	With Social Linkages			Without Social Linkages		
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
APS	0.29***	0.29***	1.14	0.26***	0.27***	0.18***
	(0.55)	(0.53)	(0.59)	(0.64)	(0.61)	(0.40)
Index	Additive	Multiplicative	FA	Additive	Multiplicative	FA
Non-regime Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regime Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,053
R^2	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.11
Max. Possible R^2	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53

Reported coefficients are exponentiated hazard odds with exponentiated standard errors in parentheses. All models use *Personal* regime as the baseline with *Monarchy* excluded from the sample. P-values are reported as: *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$

Having demonstrated that the survival of regimes is partially dependent upon the strength of parties, I now disaggregate the *APS* index into its component parts to observe how these variables are correlated with the variation regime survival.[14] The results of this exercise are presented in Table 3. First, I model the survival function with each individual component (Models 15-19). Then, I model the survival of *Regime* as a function of all components, with and without controls (Models 20 and 21). I then repeat these two models, but remove sub-national control of governments (Models 22 and 23) to observe how the other components respond to dropping this factor.

Using this approach I find that sub-national control of policy making organs is doing the heavy lifting in the aggregated variable. In Model 21, sub-national control is the only variable that is statistically significant when including all other components and controls. This model suggests that a regime's ability to exert partisan control over sub-national governmental organs reduces the hazard of regime failure to 0.45 of the baseline hazard. While this finding

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[14]Here, I again remove monarchies from the sample.

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Table 3: Component Factors of Autocratic Party Strength

	Dependent variable:								
	Regime Failure								
	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)
Nat Org	0.86					0.93	0.82	1.15	0.89
	(0.12)					(0.15)	(0.20)	(0.13)	(0.18)
Branches		0.88				0.83	0.91	0.68***	0.94
		(0.12)				(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.14)	(0.19)
Selection			0.87			1.15**	0.96	0.83***	0.89
			(0.09)			(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.10)
Linkages				1.05		0.81***	1.04	0.90	1.05
				(0.10)		(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.11)
Sub-Nat					0.46***	0.39***	0.45***		
					(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.10)		
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,053	3,995	3,053	3,995	3,053
R^2	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.01	0.10
Max. Possible R^2	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.53	0.55	0.53	0.55	0.53

Reported coefficients are exponentiated hazard odds with exponentiated standard errors in parentheses. P-values are reported as: $^*p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

is robust, I do find evidence that other components matter for the odds of regime failure. For example, in Model 22 I find that centralized control of candidate selection is correlated with a reduction in the odds of regime failure by a factor of about 0.83 to that of the baseline. I also find in Model 22 that more local branches are associated with a reduction in the odds of failure by a factor of 0.68. In Model 20 I find that more programmatic parties are associated with better odds of survival, but that this only holds when excluding controls.

From this approach, however, the effect of local branches, centralized candidate selection, and the form of societal linkages are not robust or strong when conditioned on other factors. These variables are found to be weakly correlated with decreases in the odds of regime failure in other specifications. Additionally, I also find little evidence that permanent

national organizations are associated with changes in the odds of regime survival. Even though sub-national control is the only component robustly correlated with regime survival, these components, when aggregated, provide a useful measurement of party strength in authoritarian regimes.

The final step in this empirical exercise is to test Hypothesis 2 which expects the effect of APS to be dependent upon party autonomy. To test this hypothesis, I estimated two models. First, I estimated a semi-parametric Cox Proportional Hazards model where each type of regime, as coded by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014), is interacted with APS. I then fit a linear prediction of survival for each regime type by APS to estimate how survival changes as authoritarian parties become stronger and more autonomous. I also estimated another model where the quartile of the level of personalism, as measured by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018), was interacted with APS. This estimates how survival changes as APS increases, but shows whether this is conditional on the level of personalism. Like the first model, I also fit a linear prediction of survival for each quartile of personalism. The results are provided in Figure 5.

On the left in Figure 5, we see that party regimes have higher expected rates of survival than personal or military regimes. This exercise confirms that the effect of APS is partially dependent upon its autonomy. Where the party is less autonomous (e.g. military or personalist regimes), the effects of APS are attenuated. [15]

This exercise also shows that APS's effect on regime survival is fairly independent of the degree of personalism. As can be seen in Figure 5 on the right, as APS increases, there is little difference in the probability of surviving across the various quartiles of personalism. Personalism appears to only matter when APS is low, and only then is there a difference between the lowest quartile of personalism, and the 50th and 75th percentiles.

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[15]As a robustness check I removed all cases where no parties exist in the party system. When doing so, the relative probability of surviving for Military regimes also increases as APS increases. The results for this test can be found in Appendix E.
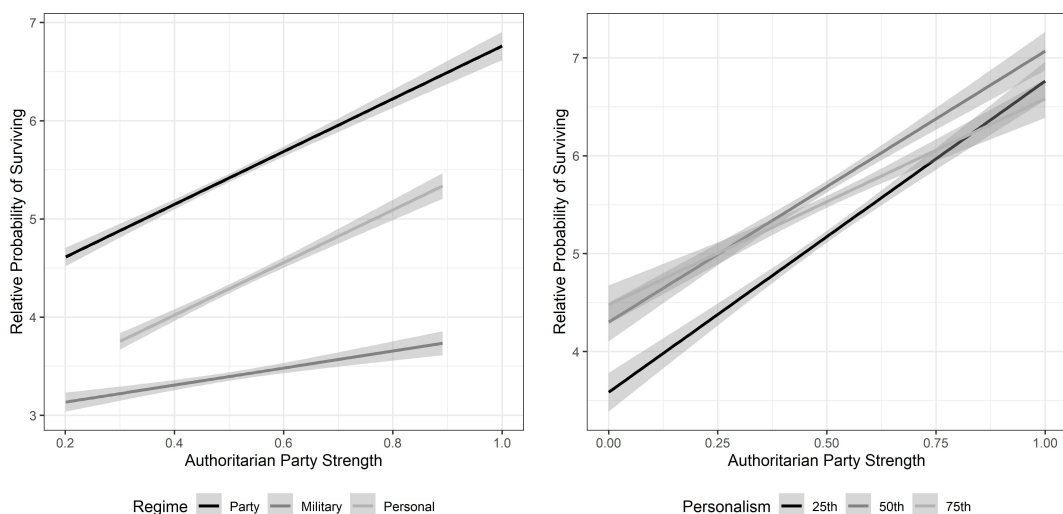
Figure 5: Linear Prediction of Survival of Regimes

The findings from this last exercise confirm the second hypothesis. *APS* plays a role in reducing regime failure, but this depends on the degree to which the party is subjugated to the military or a strong ruler.

Conclusion

Nearly 20 years ago, Geddes (1999) spurred a large literature which sought to explain why party regimes survived longer than most of their counterparts. This literature has offered various explanations for why parties may lead to longer regime survival but the ability to carry out certain tasks cannot be inferred by the mere presence of a party.

Diverging from this approach, I propose that parties are not necessarily strong enough to perform these functions. In order to tilt the playing field, incumbent autocrats need a strong organization that wields tools of authoritarian rule, while weak parties are less capable at inducing elites and mass society to provide support to the regime.

By developing a new indicator of authoritarian party strength, I have shown that authoritarian party strength matters for regime survival. These results may seem to simply replicate Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) and others, but it shows a more nuanced picture. Across several specifications, I find strong evidence that the odds of regime failure are reduced dramatically as authoritarian parties become stronger, and that this result exists

independent of regime type. Indeed, I find that odds of survival for *Party*, *Military* and *Personal* regimes increase as the authoritarian party strength index increases. This demonstrates that nominal measurements of parties are insufficient at capturing variation in party strength. Using this data, I also show that much of the variation in longer regime survival due to political parties is attributable to the ability of these parties to maintain sub-national control.

This argument pushes against more recent works which have argued that stronger authoritarian parties improve the likelihood of democratization (Slater and Wong 2013; Ziblatt 2017; Riedl et al. 2021). If it is true that greater party strength generally leads to greater authoritarian regime survival, we should think more about the factors that lead to the exceptions pointed out by this literature, and how to better identify these exceptions to the general rule.

The results drawn from this study also have implications for how we should think of authoritarian parties and regime durability. First, categorical indices of regimes are problematic for understanding how parties influence regime survival. Party-based regimes are not the only ones to have parties – as military and personalist regimes have parties as well, but categorical variables are limited in their ability to measure multiple dimensions of party strength. The evidence provided here suggests that parties provide survival enhancing benefits to authoritarian regimes as they become stronger – whether they are the dominant member of the authoritarian coalition or not. Thus, we should exercise greater care with inferences drawn when conceptualizing authoritarian regimes in categorical terms.

A central implication of these findings is that we should place greater emphasis on the local politics of authoritarian rule. Much of the focus of the comparative authoritarian and democratization literature focuses on elites or social structures, while leaving local politics to be largely ignored. How is it that some regimes are able to develop and maintain authoritarian rule deeper into societies than others? Also, why does this local control wane for some but not for others?

The cracks of Malaysia's UMNO's demise was first seen as they ceded local control to alternative parties. It did not come out of the blue with the ruling party losing power dramatically at the national level. Well before their electoral loss in 2018, alternative parties began carving out sub-national enclaves. The growth of these parties at the sub-national level weakened UMNO's grip on power. From there, these opposition parties began stitching together a coalition that eroded UMNO's dominance in the Malaysian parliament. This set the stage for UMNO's downfall when the leader of UMNO, Najib Razak, was caught in a massive scandal and the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, significantly weakened UMNO with his breakaway party BERSATU. Thus, democratization from below may not solely be characterized by mass-movements against authoritarian rule, but also by the loss of power on the part of the incumbents below the national level.

Future work should provide more insight into sub-national factors of authoritarian rule. For example, future work may theorize and establish the origins of strong sub-national parties. Where do these parties come from and why do some establish strong parties sub-nationally while others do not. What factors play a role in the rise of these parties and their ability to hold onto power beyond the national level? Also, how does control of sub-national governments facilitate the survival of the national regime? Does control at the sub-national level improve the regime's ability to tilt the playing field than would otherwise be possible with strong national control but weak sub-national control? These are just a few questions that can build off of the implications from these findings and contribute to our understanding of how parties help authoritarian regimes endure.

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