Dilemmas of Dictatorial Rule: The Inherent Trade-offs of Autocratic Survival Strategies

Alexander Taaning Grundholm

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Acknowledgements

Writing a PhD thesis has been a paradoxical experience. One the one hand, it has been a very lonely process. On the other hand, it has been an extremely socially stimulating process. This apparent contradiction probably requires some clarification.

When you are writing your thesis, you are the one making every decision about your project, and thus you are the one who is ultimately responsible for any mistakes and wrong choices you may make along the way—and the hard truth is that this will most likely happen rather frequently. However, while you are both manager and subordinate in your little one-man PhD firm, this, fortunately, does not mean that you are all alone in the process. On the contrary, as a PhD student—and especially so as a PhD student at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University—you are in the privileged position to find yourself surrounded by a host of people who have your back, and who are ready to both celebrate with you when you succeed and support you when you do not. Hence, while my PhD thesis is written by me alone (except, of course, for the parts that I had the pleasure to co-author with talented colleagues), I would not have been able to accomplish this without the many great people around me, and to whom I am extremely grateful. In the following, I try to thank these wonderful people who have helped me along the way.

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During my time as a PhD student, I have had the good fortune to co-author two research articles with great colleagues. I am thankful to Matilde Thorsen (yet again) and Lasse Aaskoven. Writing research articles can be a tough and frustrating process, so what a privilege is has been to share some of these ex-

periences with two so talented people, who have both challenged and stimulated me academically and provided me with many enjoyable discussions over beers after workshops, conferences, and the like.

While writing a PhD thesis has been very time consuming (all-consuming it has felt like at times), this has, fortunately, not been the only thing I have found time to do during the last four years. I therefore also want to thank those who have helped me emerge from the academic swamp at the end of working days and helped me take my mind off work for a time—this social recharging of my batteries has been an essential part of my thesis-writing process. The first round of thanks in this regard goes out to my whisky club (although, strictly speaking, we have branched out quite a bit from whisky since the founding of the club—but 'alcohol club' just does not have a very nice ring to it). A big thank you goes out to my good friend, Frederik Milling, who co-founded the club with me, and who will be my best man at my wedding. Thank you also to Lasse Schmidt, who has been a very nice addition to the club and a driving force behind the diversification of the whisky club's portfolio. Lastly, thank you to Anne Kirstine Rønn (another person who deserves to be mentioned more than once) for also being a great addition to the club, especially in terms of her company, but also by dramatically improving our gender balance and thereby immunizing us from accusations of being a club for privileged white men.

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that you are never that far away from home, for instance by reminding you that no matter where you are in life, or how many academic degrees you get, you are never too old to fight in the backseat of your parents' car.

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Aarhus, October 2020
Alexander Taaning Grundholm

Preface

This is a summary of my PhD dissertation entitled 'Dilemmas of Dictatorial Rule'. The dissertation consists of this summary and four self-contained research articles:

Article A: "Taking it personal? Investigating regime personalization as an autocratic survival strategy", *Democratization*, 27(5), 797-815.

Article B: "Keeping Your Enemies Close: Co-optation and Coup Risk in Autocracies", Invitation to revise and resubmit at *Government and Opposition*.

Article C (with Lasse Aaskoven): "Stability through Constraints: The Impact of Fiscal Rules on Autocratic Survival", Working paper.

Article D (with Matilde Thorsen): "Motivated and Able to Make a Difference? The Reinforcing Effects of Democracy and State Capacity on Human Development", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 54(3), 381-414.

In this summary, I pose the overall research question and the sub-research questions of my PhD project, provide answers to these questions by drawing on the four articles, and discuss the implications of my findings for our knowledge of autocratic politics and future research on the topic.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Never let any government imagine it can always choose perfectly safe courses; rather let it regard all choices as risky, because in everyday affairs, when one tries to avoid one trouble, you always run into another. Wisdom consists of knowing how to distinguish the nature of trouble, and in choosing the lesser evil.
—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Ch. XXI*

While some dictators hold on to power for decades on end, others are overthrown almost immediately after taking office (Svolik, 2012). An example of the former is Fidel Castro. Castro came to power in 1959 following the Cuban Revolution and held on to power for half a century until his declining health eventually prompted him to step down. However, even in this physically weakened state, his personal control over Cuban politics was so entrenched that he was able to orchestrate at familial succession by his younger brother, Raúl, and instead stay on in a 'grey eminence' position in the regime until his death in 2016. An example of the latter, and a stark contrast to the political career of Fidel Castro, is the numerous short-lived Syrian dictators who ruled the country from the dissolution of the United Arab Republic in 1961, until Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970. In this nine-year period, Syrian rulers were overthrown via coups no less than three times, thus yielding an average life span of only three years per dictator. Assad, on the other hand, broke this cycle of frequent leader depositions and remained in power for 30 years, until he died in office in 2000 and passed on power to his son, Bashar.

What explains these vast differences in how long dictators are able to hold on to power? In the literature on comparative authoritarianism we have seen an increasing focus on the various strategies that dictators employ in their attempts to maintain power (e.g., Baturo & Elkink, 2016; Brownlee, 2007; Escribà-Folch, 2012, 2013b; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Frantz, Kendall-Taylor, Wright, & Xu, 2020; Frantz & Stein, 2017; Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2018; Gerschewski, 2013; Knutsen, Nygård, & Wig, 2017; Magaloni, 2008; Roessler, 2011; Sudduth, 2017a, 2017b; Svolik, 2012; Weeks, 2014; Woo & Conrad, 2019). While dictators have a wide palette of power maintenance strategies at their disposal, these strategies can, for the sake of simplification, be divided into two overall analytical categories: 1) strategies

aimed at *fostering support* for the dictator and 2) strategies aimed at *deterring opposition* to the dictator. The first category encompasses a range of 'co-optation' and 'legitimation' strategies, while the second category encompasses various 'repression' strategies (cf. Gerschewski, 2013). In the following section, I describe and discuss the two types of strategies in turn.

Different types of autocratic survival strategies

On the one hand, dictators can attempt to buy, or otherwise induce, support from various groups of societal actors. These groups include elite members of the dictator's ruling coalition, opposition elites, and the masses. The dictator can do this by either sharing political power (i.e., either increasing the power of current regime members or co-opting current members of the opposition), granting policy concessions, and/or distributing material resources (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003; Gandhi, 2008; Svolik, 2012). Furthermore, dictators can hope to foster support for their rule by generating desirable societal outcomes—and thereby induce 'performance legitimacy' among the affected groups—or by making more abstract claims to a legitimate right to rule, for instance by claiming to be the rightful heir to the previous ruler (Chehabi & Linz, 1998; Easton, 1975; Gerschewski, 2013; Schlumberger, 2010).

On the other hand, dictators can try to deter opposition to their rule through different types of coercive strategies. Firstly, dictators can utilize the security apparatus of the state (police, military, etc.) to target either specific individuals or large societal groups with repression in order to pacify targeted actors (Escribà-Folch, 2013b; Levitsky & Way, 2010). Secondly—and relatedly—the dictator can employ purges, demotions, and reshuffles of elite members of their ruling coalition in order to prevent potential challengers from amassing influence and support and to discourage disgruntled coalition members from voicing their dissatisfaction by signaling the dictator's will and capacity to punish dissent (Geddes et al., 2018; Sudduth, 2017b; Svolik, 2012). What these coercive strategies have in common—and what distinguishes them from the first category of strategies—is that rather than providing the actors in question with a 'positive' motive for supporting the dictator in the form of benefits from doing so, this latter category of strategies provides the actors with a 'negative' motive for supporting the dictator in the form of costs from not doing so. In both cases, however, the strategies are aimed at altering the actors' perceptions of their net benefits from supporting versus opposing the dictator in favor of the former.

While all dictators employ a mixture of strategies aimed at fostering support and at deterring opposition, the relative importance of the two types of

strategies varies from dictator to dictator (Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, 1999; Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2014; Svolik, 2012). As I will elaborate upon in the following chapter—which reviews the existing literature on autocratic survival strategies—the choice of strategies is associated with different institutional features of dictatorships. For instance, dictators in more personalized regimes tend to rely more heavily on coercive strategies such as purges of elite members of their ruling coalition—especially during the regime personalization process (Geddes et al., 2018; Svolik, 2012)—whereas dictators in more institutionalized (i.e., less personalized) regimes are more likely to buy support by sharing power and granting policy concessions (Geddes, 1999; Geddes et al., 2014).

Although previous contributions to the literature have greatly increased our knowledge of the potential benefits of these different types of autocratic survival strategies (see, e.g., Geddes et al. (2018) and Svolik (2012) for prominent examples), attempts to investigate the potential drawbacks of these same strategies have been less pronounced. This somewhat one-sided focus on the potential positive effects of the strategies have caused scholars to overlook important research questions and prevented more nuanced conclusions about the effects.

With important exceptions (e.g., Knutsen et al., 2017; Woo & Conrad, 2019), research on autocratic survival strategies have lacked awareness of the fact that the same strategies may have both beneficial and detrimental effects on autocratic survival. Thus, rather than focusing merely on if and how a particular strategy can have beneficial effects on autocratic survival, we need to direct our focus at the conditions under which a strategy can have beneficial effects as well as the conditions under which the strategy may be ineffective—or even outright harmful—for autocratic survival. Only then will we be able to make a comprehensive assessment of the benefits and drawbacks for dictators of different survival strategies, which will increase our understanding of when, where, and by whom specific survival strategies are most likely to be employed. This, in turn, will help us improve our insight into the different strengths and weaknesses of specific dictators and their ruling coalitions, and it will thereby increase our insight into where and when opportunities for political change in autocratic countries are most likely to be present.

Improving our knowledge of these strengths and weaknesses is not only relevant for scholars interested in autocratic politics. It is also of great relevance to both politicians and practitioners around the world. As an example, policymakers with limited resources at their disposal will have great use of this knowledge when making assessments of where different tools intended to promote policy change and/or regime change in autocratic countries are most likely to be effective (Escribà-Folch & Wright, 2010, 2015). This will both help

them target their resources at the countries where their efforts are most likely to have a positive impact, and—perhaps even more importantly—it will help them avoid targeting countries where their efforts may be outright counter-productive (Allen, 2008; Escribà-Folch, 2012; Wright, 2009).

Distinguishing between different kinds of outcomes

In order to be able to investigate the conditions under which the same types of autocratic survival strategies can have differential effects, the researcher needs to distinguish between different kinds of desirable and undesirable outcomes for dictators. This PhD dissertation is structured around three key distinctions that I make, which each illuminate very different aspects of the costs and benefits associated with different autocratic survival strategies.

The first distinction is between the survival of autocratic regimes and the survival of individual dictators. This distinction is crucial to make, as these two types of survival are not only conceptually distinct phenomena, they may even be in contradiction with one another under certain circumstances. As an example of this, the leader-rotation principle of the PRI regime in Mexico—under which the president was not allowed to seek reelection, and the presidency thus changed hands every six years—is credited as being one of the reasons for why the regime was so stable and lasted so long as it did (Magaloni, 2006). Accordingly, here short leader tenures was one of the causes of long regime duration. Conversely, some autocratic leaders' attempts to prolong their own tenures have hastened the demise of the regimes they were heading, as we for instance saw with the fall of the Egyptian regime following Mubarak's refusal to step down during the Arab Spring protests of 2011 (Brownlee, 2012). This distinction is thus theoretically important in and of itself. However, from the point of view of a dictator attempting to survive in office, the distinction is perhaps even more important because it relates to the two main types of threats that a dictator face, namely, threats from inside the regime and threats from outside the regime, respectively. This is so, as challenges from inside the regime usually only threaten the survival of the dictator—and not the regime as a whole—while challenges from outside the regime usually threaten the survival of the whole regime in addition to the dictator (Aksoy, Carter, & Wright, 2015). Accordingly, by distinguishing between the survival of autocratic regimes and the survival of individual dictators, we gain insights into dictators' abilities to balance, on the one hand, threats from outside the regime and, on the other hand, threats from inside the regime.

The second distinction is between short-term and long-term survival of dictators. This is another important distinction to make, as it reflects the fact

that a certain policy, or some other political initiative, may have very different short-term and long-term effects, which is true not only in an autocratic setting but in politics in general. For instance, a dictator's fiscal policies may have different effects on economic growth in the short term and the long term. Fiscal austerity measures, for example, could have a negative effect on economic growth in the short term while having a positive effect on economic growth in the long term. These differential effects, in turn, would be likely to translate into parallel effects on public support for the dictator and his government (Easton, 1975; Gerschewski, 2013), that is, to reduce public support in the short term while increasing public support in the long term.

The third distinction is between dictators' ability to stay in office and their discretionary power (i.e., the extent to which other actors are unable to constrain the dictator's decision-making) and access to spoils while they are in office. This last distinction is important, as dictators' benefits from staying in office depend on the power and spoils they receive from doing so. Accordingly, dictators are likely to want to maximize their discretionary power (Geddes et al., 2018; Svolik, 2012). However, as I also discussed above, sharing power and spoils with other elites is a common way for dictators to stay in office (Gandhi, 2008; Svolik, 2012), which means that dictators' dual goals of staying in office and maximizing their personal power and resources may not always be compatible with each other (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003).

By making these distinctions, this dissertation will contribute to filling the current gap in our knowledge about the trade-offs inherent in different types of autocratic survival strategies. This is of course not to say that the three distinctions made here constitute a comprehensive list of all relevant distinctions that can be made by researchers. It would be impossible to carry out in-depth analyses of all such distinctions within the scope of a single PhD dissertation, and several interesting research questions therefore have to be left for future research. Nevertheless, the three distinctions selected for analysis in the dissertation are central to the study of autocratic politics:

Firstly, they address one of the most fundamental conceptual distinctions in an autocracy, namely that between autocratic chief executives (dictators) and the regimes they rule. Secondly, they incorporate awareness of the fact that political decisions may have very different effects in the short term and the long term. Thirdly, they allow for even more nuanced conclusions about the effects of autocratic survival strategies by looking not only at the effects on the political survival of dictators but also on the effects of their power and influence while in office.

In sum, the three distinctions allows the dissertation to shed light on very different aspects of the effects of autocratic survival strategies, which in turn provides for a more nuanced picture of these effects than one would be able to

obtain from merely asking the question of whether a particular strategy is effective or not.

Research questions and structure of dissertation summary

The dissertation is structured around the following research question:

> *How do different strategies for maintaining power affect the political survival of dictators, and what potential trade-offs do dictators face when pursuing these strategies?*

To help answer this overall research question in a comprehensive and nuanced manner, the dissertation is furthermore divided into three sub-research questions, which each investigates one of the distinctions described above:

> *Sub-RQ 1: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their vulnerability to insider threats and outsider threats, respectively?*
> *Sub-RQ 2: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their political survival in the short term and the long term, respectively?*
> *Sub-RQ 3: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their discretionary power while they are in office?*

These sub-research questions allow the dissertation to disentangle and investigate different aspects of autocratic survival one at a time and on this basis provide different parts of a more general answer to the overall research question. However, the sub-research questions should not be viewed as mutually exclusive research topics to be investigated in separate articles in the dissertation. Rather, the articles each investigate the different effects of a specific survival strategy, and the articles thereby provide insights that are relevant to more than one of the research questions at a time. All of the articles provide insights relevant to at least two of the research questions, and some of the articles provide insights relevant to all three research questions. In this way, the dissertation investigates the sub-research questions in a more holistic manner than what would be possible if the research questions were investigated in isolation in separate articles.

The remainder of the dissertation summary is structured as follows: In *Chapter 2*, I review the existing literature on the effects of autocratic survival strategies, structured around the above distinction between strategies aimed at fostering support, and strategies aimed at deterring opposition, respectively. The chapter ends by highlighting the gaps in the literature that my PhD

project addresses. This sets the stage for *Chapter 3*, in which I present the contributions of the dissertation and summarize the different arguments that I make in the dissertation's four self-contained articles. In *Chapter 4*, I present the research designs that I employ in the articles and discuss the respective strengths and weaknesses of the research designs (and my methodological approach in general) for the purposes of this dissertation. In *Chapter 5*, I discuss the empirical findings of the dissertation and provide answers to the dissertation's three sub-research questions based on these findings. In *Chapter 6*, I conclude by summarizing my answers to the sub-research questions and, based on these, I provide an answer to the overall research question of the dissertation. I end the chapter with a discussion of the different empirical, theoretical, and (to some extent) normative implications of the project's findings for the literature on autocratic politics and by suggesting avenues for future research on the topic.

Chapter 2: What do we know about autocratic survival?

During the last two decades, we have witnessed an increasing scholarly interest in the institutions and political tools that dictators use to maintain their grip on power. This new 'wave' of autocracy research (cf. Gerschewski, 2013) was set in motion by Geddes (1999) seminal article 'What do we know about democratization after twenty years?'. In this article, Geddes introduced a new typology of autocratic regime types as well as an associated cross-national dataset that identified the world's autocratic regimes and assigned each regime a type according to her typology (i.e., as either 'party' (single/dominant), 'military', or 'personalist' regimes). Geddes' dataset quickly emerged as the industry standard in quantitative research on autocracies. In 2014, Geddes and her co-authors published an updated version of the dataset with an expanded version of the typology that now also included 'monarchy' as a type (see Geddes et al., 2014), which reinvigorated the use of the dataset and associated regime classifications. Although the use of Geddes' dataset has declined somewhat over the last couple of years, it remains highly influential today.

Aside from presenting researchers with a comprehensive off-the-self dataset with which to measure institutional variations and regime transitions in autocracies, Geddes also presented a series of game theoretical arguments about how the institutional features of autocratic regimes affect which survival strategies dictators and their ruling coalitions have at their disposal, as well as their perceptions of the costs associated with losing office or allowing democratizing reforms. Geddes' theoretical framework has been instrumental in improving how researchers think about the strategic incentives of dictators and their elite supporters, and it has increased our awareness of the importance of contextual factors for which survival strategies dictators have at their disposal, and when particular strategies are most likely to be effective. Not only are Geddes' own theoretical arguments still utilized by researchers today (e.g., Kroeger, 2020), they have also spurred further theorizing both in line with (e.g., Davenport, 2007b; Fjelde, 2010) and in opposition to (e.g., Cheibub, Gandhi, & Vreeland, 2010; Wahman, Teorell, & Hadenius, 2013) her framework—as well as contributions that can best be described as a mix between agreement and disagreement with Geddes' framework (e.g., Lai & Slater, 2006; Weeks, 2014).

Despite the great influence that Geddes' framework and data has had on the literature, the underlying conceptual logic of dividing autocratic regimes

into distinct categories has been criticized for being unnecessarily rigid and for obscuring both important differences between regimes within the same category as well as notable similarities between regimes from different categories (Svolik, 2012). The coding scheme for Geddes' regime categories has also been criticized for not being fine-grained enough to capture smaller—but significant—changes in the institutional structures of autocracies that take place within the lifetime of a regime (Morgenbesser, 2018). These are limitations that Geddes and her co-authors fully acknowledge in their later work (Geddes et al., 2018), and in this work they have made important contributions toward the goal of refining the way scholars conceptualize and measure autocratic regimes—both in terms of exchanging the distinct regime categories with a more flexible multidimensional approach to conceptualization and in terms of increasing researchers' ability to capture fine-grained changes that take place during the course of a regime's lifetime (see also Wright, 2019).

In the following, I provide a review of some of the main contributions from this modern wave of autocracy research that have moved beyond the distinct regime categories and instead have looked at the effects of individual autocratic survival strategies across different types of autocracies. I focus mainly on contributions that approach autocratic survival from the vantage point of the dictator—rather than autocratic regime as a whole—but other contributions are included as well as long as they help shed light on the strategic incentives of dictators and the tools they have at their disposal. I structure the review around the above distinction between strategies aimed at fostering support for the dictator, and strategies aimed at deterring opposition to the dictator. I end the review by summarizing the gaps in our knowledge of dictatorial survival that have not been addressed by the current literature, and which I will explore in this dissertation. A more in-depth discussion of these gaps is then presented in the following chapter (Chapter 3) along with a discussion of how the four articles of the dissertation addresses one or more of the gaps.

Strategies aimed at fostering support

Beginning with strategies aimed at fostering support for the dictator, this category of strategies comprises what Gerschewski (2013) refers to as 'co-optation' and 'legitimation' strategies, respectively. However, in this review I do not distinguish between the two, as the intended outcome of both types of strategies is the same—that is, inducing the targeted groups of actors to support the dictator. The difference between the types merely lies in the means with which dictators attempt to achieve this outcome, with co-optation strat-

egies being aimed at 'buying' the support of the targeted groups, while legitimation strategies are aimed at instilling a belief among the targeted groups that the dictator's rule is 'rightful'. This perception of the rightfulness of the dictator's rule can be brought about in different ways.[1]

On the one hand, it can materialize in a somewhat abstract sense. For example, the dictator can inherit the office from the previous ruler through a process that is viewed as legitimate by the relevant actors (which is common in autocratic monarchies (Yom & Gause, 2012)), or he can claim that the right to rule has been bestowed on him, for instance by god or a similar omnipotent entity (which occurs in some very personalized dictatorships where the dictator attempts to create a 'cult of personality' around himself (Chehabi & Linz, 1998)). On the other hand, the perception that the dictator's rule is rightful can also materialize in a more concrete sense based on the dictator's performance in office. This type of performance legitimacy comes about when the relevant actors are satisfied with the policies that are implemented by the dictator's government and the material benefits they receive during his time in office (Easton, 1975; Gerschewski, 2013).

Accordingly, while the means that are used to implement legitimation strategies are different from those of co-optation strategies, the aim is exactly the same, that is, to convince a group of actors to support—or at the very least acquiesce to—the dictator's rule. Furthermore, as can be seen from the case of performance legitimacy, there can even be a certain degree of overlap between co-optation strategies and legitimation strategies, as buying a group's support by providing it with material benefits is likely to generate performance legitimacy in the eyes of the group's members. For these reasons, it seems justified to treat the two types of strategies as one overall strategy of attempting to foster support for the dictator and to treat research contributions addressing one or more strategies within this overall type as a common strand in the literature.

Much of this strand of research has focused on the survival of autocratic regimes while neglecting the survival of individual dictators. Accordingly, we have learned a lot about how, for instance, co-opting critical segments of society can help autocratic regimes increase their durability by compensating for structural weaknesses (De Juan & Bank, 2015; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Schmotz, 2015). However, while implementing co-optation measures thus seems to increase the longevity of autocratic regimes, we know less about how doing so affects the expected tenure lengths of individual dictators during the life span of the regime. Hence, the autocratic chief executive

[1] See also Gerschewski (2018) for an exhaustive discussion of the concept of legitimacy in autocratic settings.

may not gain the same benefits from this strategy as the regime as a whole does, which, in turn, may be one of the reasons why we see so much variation in the prevalence of co-optative institutions in autocratic countries (Gandhi, 2008; Svolik, 2012).

Likewise, there has been important contributions to increasing our knowledge of how, for example, traditional sources of legitimacy contribute to stabilizing monarchic regimes (Geddes et al., 2014; Menaldo, 2012; F. S. Møller, 2019a, 2019b; Schlumberger, 2010; Yom & Gause, 2012), as well as how good economic performance (and the accompanying legitimacy) can stabilize autocratic regimes (Andersen, Møller, Rørbæk, & Skaaning, 2014; F. S. Møller, 2020)—and, especially, how poor economic performance (and the accompanying *illegitimacy*) can destabilize autocratic regimes (Brancati, 2014, 2016; Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017; Geddes, 1999; Hess, 2016; Huntington, 1991). However, with regard to both of these types of legitimation strategies, we have learned substantially less about how they affect the survival of individual autocratic leaders during the life span of a regime; although we do know that poor economic performance (as well as war performance) increases the likelihood of experiencing a 'bad' post-exit fate if a dictator loses power for some—potentially unrelated—reason (Escribà-Folch, 2013a), and that a dictator's ruling coalition is able to hold him accountable for his general performance in office (Aksoy et al., 2015), except under very specific circumstances (Svolik, 2012).[2]

Thus, while great advances have been made in terms of our knowledge of the effects of support-fostering strategies on autocratic regime survival, more research is needed that investigates the effects of these same strategies on the survival of individual dictators, and which attempts to disentangle the effects on leader survival from the effects on regime survival. Nonetheless, some important contributions have been made in this regard.

One of the most influential of these contributions is Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003). In this book, the authors present—and corroborate empirically—what has come to be known as the "selectorate theory" of political survival. The theory is applicable to both democratic and autocratic regimes, and it has been used to explain both differences between democracies and autocracies as

[2] Even though Krishnarajan (2019) examines the effect of economic crisis on the likelihood of 'irregular' removals of autocratic leaders (i.e., leader depositions), he does not distinguish between leader exits that coincide with a regime breakdown and leaders who lose power while the regime as a whole endures. Accordingly, it is less clear whether his results capture a destabilizing effect of economic crisis on autocratic leaders specifically, or whether the estimated effect on leader depositions reflect a more general destabilizing effect on autocratic regimes.

well as differences between regimes within these two overall categories of regime types. At its core, the theory states that in order to remain in power, a political leader needs to provide at least 50% of his/her essential supporters (who will vary based on the institutional setup of the regime) with sufficient benefits that they prefer the leader over a potential challenger. Additionally, it states that the easier it is for the leader to exchange one essential supporter for another, the more loyal will the supporters be for fear of being exchanged. While the first point, among other things, is essential for understanding the logic of co-optation in autocracies, the second point is essential for understanding the political logic of, for instance, very personalized autocracies (including the strategies that personalist dictators utilize in order to deter potential challengers, which I will return to in the section below). For these reasons, I draw on various elements of selectorate theory in several of the articles in the dissertation.

Another very influential contribution is Svolik (2012). In this book, Svolik introduces an important distinction in terms of threats to a dictator's survival, namely the distinction between threats stemming from political elites (what he terms 'the problem of authoritarian power-sharing'), and threats stemming from the masses (what he terms 'the problem of authoritarian control'). Based upon this distinction, he discusses the logic—and investigates the effects of—different autocratic survival strategies, including both strategies aimed at fostering support as well as strategies aimed at deterring opposition (which I discuss in the next section). In terms of support-fostering strategies, Svolik investigates both dictators' use of nominally democratic institutions (such as legislatures and political parties) as a means of addressing threats from political elites as well as the specific use of regime parties as a means of addressing threats from the masses. Although targeted at different types of actors, both uses can be viewed as co-optation strategies.

In his analyses, Svolik shows that these strategies can have beneficial effects for autocratic survival,[3] both when measured in terms of the survival of autocratic 'ruling coalitions' (which is roughly equivalent to what I refer to as an autocratic 'regime') as well as in terms of the survival of individual dictators. However, while co-optation strategies are likely to be effective at increasing the survival of autocratic regimes in most instances—as these can help the regime compensate for its potential vulnerabilities toward different groups of actors in society (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Schmotz, 2015)—co-optation also has the effect of bringing potential rivals into the regime who may be able to challenge the dictator's grip on power (Roessler &

[3] Although more recent findings by Woo and Conrad (2019) help nuance Svolik's conclusions.

Ohls, 2018). This, in turn, implies that while co-optation may be beneficial in terms of autocratic regime survival, the same will not always be the case when it comes to the survival of individual dictators, despite Svolik's finding that implementing some sort of institutionalized power-sharing mechanism (an aspect of co-optation) prolongs the survival of autocratic rulers. I will return to this last point about the potential adverse effects of co-optation for dictators in the next chapter where I discuss the arguments that I make in the articles of the dissertation.

Lastly, some effort has been made to investigate the interplay between support-fostering strategies and opposition-deterring strategies in terms of their effects on the same outcome. Bove and Rivera (2015) examine the effects of co-optation and repression, respectively, on the likelihood of coups in autocracies. They find that co-optation decreases the likelihood of coups, while repression increases the likelihood of coups. While this is an important insight, the authors do not distinguish between coups that change the autocratic regime as a whole and coups that only change the dictator while leaving the regime intact (cf. Aksoy et al., 2015). Accordingly, we do not know whether the effects of co-optation and repression are relevant for both the survival of autocratic regimes and autocratic leaders, or whether the effects are relevant only for the survival of autocratic leaders but not for autocratic regimes as a whole. Consequently, this is a question that merits further investigation. In this dissertation, I address the first part of the question by providing a disaggregated examination of the effects of co-optation on coups in autocracies.

Having reviewed the contributions addressing support-fostering strategies, I now turn to a review of the contributions addressing opposition-deterring strategies.

Strategies aimed at deterring opposition

While a large part of the contributions that addresses support-fostering strategies has focused on the survival of autocratic regimes while neglecting the survival of individual dictators, we see a more evenly distributed focus among the contributions addressing opposition-deterring strategies as well as a certain 'division of labor' among these contributions. While one strand of the contributions (e.g., Davenport, 2007b; Josua & Edel, 2015; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Rivera, 2017; Sutton, Butcher, & Svensson, 2014) focuses on repression of the masses by the security apparatus of an autocratic government—which is commonly termed 'state repression' (Davenport, 2007a)—another strand of the contributions focuses on repressive acts against political elites (often members of the dictator's ruling coalition), which usually take the form of 'purges'

and 'reshuffles' (e.g., Geddes et al., 2018; Svolik, 2012).[4] As a general rule, repression targeted at the masses is mostly relevant for the survival of autocratic regimes, since a nondemocratic ruling coalition needs coercive means of control to compensate for the fact that its rule—by definition—is not based on popular consent granted through free and fair elections (Geddes et al., 2014; J. Møller & Skaaning, 2013). Conversely, repressive acts targeted at regime insiders are primarily relevant for the survival of dictators (Svolik, 2012). Hence, as this review is focused on the survival of autocratic leaders, I limit the scope to contributions from the latter strand.

Purges, reshuffles, and similar repressive acts against regime insiders are usually part of a power-concentration strategy by the dictator. For instance, Svolik (2012) describes the process of consolidating personalist power by the dictator (or what he terms moving from 'contested autocracy' to 'established autocracy') as a series of consecutive power-grabs by the dictator, including the elimination or demotion of potential rivals. Similarly, Baturo and Elkink (2016) describe this process as a gradual elimination by the dictator of competing centers of power—and a gradual attraction of influential supporters—which ends with him having consolidated power to such an extent that he can no longer be meaningfully challenged by a rival. Both these descriptions of the process of power concentration in autocracies assert that dictators can employ purges, reshuffles, and similar repressive acts effectively against other political elites in order to eliminate rivals as well as deter other potential dissidents from challenging the dictator.

The literature is generally supportive of this assertion. With regard to purges—the elimination of elites actors from the regime—Sudduth (2017b), for instance, shows that under the right circumstances dictators can get away with purging elite rivals and thereby reduce the capacity of regime elites to remove the dictator via a coup (see also Sudduth, 2017a). And, with regard to reshuffles, Woldense (2018) shows how a dictator can successfully break up potentially threatening cliques within their regimes by frequently shuffling elites between different posts and positions, which often involves (at least temporary) demotions for previously high-ranking officials. Although a 'milder' tool than purging, reshuffling thereby also serves to keep regime elites in line by weakening rivals and deterring potential dissidents from voicing their opposition.

An additional important, and fairly recent, contribution investigating power concentration in autocracies is Geddes et al. (2018). In this book, the authors present a theoretical explanation for why some dictators are able to

[4] There are, of course, also contributions that investigate elements from both strands, for instance Escribà-Folch (2013b) and Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2014).

consolidate personalist power, while others are not, which is rooted in the coherence (or, rather, lack thereof) of the organization that brought the current regime into power. Even more importantly, the authors present an originally coded continuous measure of autocratic power concentration (i.e., 'regime personalization'), which they use to test their argument. While their theoretical explanation in itself constitutes a novel contribution to the literature, the new measure of regime personalization is arguably an even bigger contribution, as it solves several of the issues that plague existing (usually categorical) measures of personalism in autocracies (cf. Morgenbesser, 2018). By solving these problems, Geddes et al.'s new measure has greatly improved researchers' ability to study the causes and consequences of regime personalization in autocracies, and I, too, employ the measure in this dissertation.

However, what is common for the contributions that I have reviewed here is that their focus is on the beneficial effects for the dictator of successfully concentrating power, while the question of power concentration's potential downsides for the dictator is largely overlooked. An important exception to this pattern is Roessler (2011), who shows that although dictators can reduce the risk of a coup by purging rivals from the regime, this instead translates into an increased risk of civil war breaking out in the country (see also Roessler & Ohls, 2018). Thus, while purging rivals may reduce dictators' risk of being challenged by regime insiders, it instead increases their risk of being challenged by regime outsiders.

This is an example of the types of trade-offs associated with power concentration—as well as any other autocratic survival strategy—that have received insufficient attention by researchers, and which I address in this dissertation. In the next section, I summarize the gaps in the literature that I have identified in this review, before proceeding to Chapter 3 that describes the contributions of the dissertation as well as the arguments of the four articles.

Remaining gaps in our knowledge

As the above review illustrates, we have learned a lot about the effects of different types of autocratic survival strategies, especially in terms of the survival of autocratic regimes but also to some extent in terms of the survival of individual dictators. For instance, thanks to important contributions to the literature, we now know that co-optation can increase the durability of autocratic regimes, and that purges and reshuffles of regime elites—in some circumstances—can prolong the tenures of dictators. However, what we have learned substantially less about is the potential trade-offs associated with these types of strategies. In particular, we do not know very much about whether strategies that are effective in terms of prolonging the survival of autocratic regimes

are equally effective at prolonging the survival of dictators, or whether these strategies are ineffective—or even harmful—from the point of view of the dictator. Furthermore, even if a particular strategy can prolong the survival of whole regimes and individual dictators at the same time, there are other trade-offs to be considered as well. For instance, strategies that are effective in the short term may not be effective—or may have downright opposite effects—in the long term, and vice versa. Additionally, even if a strategy is effective at prolonging a dictator's tenure (and is so both in the short term and the long term), it may do this at the cost of a loss in the discretionary power and/or access to material benefits of the dictator while he is in office. Thus, in order to investigate the effectiveness of autocratic survival strategies in a more comprehensive manner, researchers need to employ a multidimensional conception of what 'effective' means and measure their outcomes in ways that are consistent with these dimensions.

I employ such a conception in this dissertation. In the following chapter, I describe three trade-offs (outlined above) that I will address in the dissertation as well as summarize the arguments of the four articles, which each investigate different aspects of the strengths and weaknesses of various autocratic survival strategies.

Chapter 3: The overlooked trade-offs of autocratic survival strategies

Staying in office is of paramount importance to any political leader, dictators included (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). No matter whether a leader's goal is to change his or her country for the better, or to live a life in luxury and abundance on the backs of the country's citizens, the leader needs political power to do so. Hence, leaders want to implement strategies that enable them to survive in power in order to be able to obtain their goals. Moreover, surviving in power is especially important in the case of dictators, as it allows them to avoid the possibility of (potentially severe) post-exit punishment if either the masses or a political rival manages to oust the dictator from office (Escribà-Folch, 2013a; Geddes et al., 2014).

Ideally, the dictator would want to implement a strategy that ensures both the survival of their regimes and themselves, does so both in the short term and the long term, and leaves the dictator with large amounts of discretionary power and control over resources that he can use to pursue his goals (be they societal reform or self-enrichment). However, as is so often the case, it is rarely possible for the dictator to have his cake and eat it too. On the contrary, the survival strategies that dictators implement are usually associated with various trade-offs in terms of different desirable outcomes for dictators. In the following, I describe and discuss three of the most central of these trade-offs that I have selected for investigation in this dissertation, and I describe how the four articles of the dissertation relate to these trade-offs. After this, I turn to a more detailed description of the arguments of each of the articles.

Three trade-offs to be investigated

The first trade-off to be investigated is between the survival of autocratic regimes and the survival of individual dictators. I use the term 'dictator' to refer to the chief executive of an autocratic government, whereas I use the term 'regime' to refer to the group of elite actors ruling the country (which is roughly similar to what Svolik (2012) refers to as a 'ruling coalition'). A regime is not necessarily defined by its leader—nor any other of its members—at any given point in time,[5] and the members of the regime—even the dictator himself—can

[5] This use of the word 'regime' is therefore in contrast to the more colloquial use of the word, where it is used to refer to a particular dictator's government.

therefore be exchanged without the regime itself changing as long as the formal and informal rules for selecting leaders and influencing policy remain substantially unchanged (Djuve, Knutsen, & Wig, 2020; Geddes et al., 2014). As a result, although autocratic regime breakdowns and the removal of dictators are related phenomena, they will not always coincide (Geddes et al., 2014; Svolik, 2012). In fact, while the breakdown of an autocratic regime will usually[6] result in the dictator being removed from power as well, a dictator being removed from power will often not result in the regime breaking down (see also Aksoy et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to distinguish—both theoretically and empirically—between the two types of outcomes when investigating autocratic survival strategies in order to avoid confusing the survival of regimes with the survival of dictators.

I employ this distinction in Articles A and B of the dissertation. In Article A, where I investigate the effects of regime personalization, I show that this autocratic survival strategy has similar effects on dictator survival and regime survival. Accordingly, this is an example of a strategy that is similarly beneficial or harmful (depending on the circumstances) for the survival both of dictators and of the regimes that they rule (which makes sense, as higher levels of regime personalization ties the fate of the regime closer to the fate of the dictator (Geddes, 1999)). In Article B, however, where I investigate the effects of co-optation, I show that this survival strategy has *opposite* effects on dictator survival and regime survival. Hence, this is an example of a survival strategy for which it is crucial to distinguish between the two types of outcomes. On the one hand, focusing on only one of the outcomes would cause us to draw one-sided conclusions about the strategy's positive or negative effects, whereas, on the other hand, lumping the two outcomes together would lead us to conclude—erroneously—that the strategy does not have a measurable effect. Together, the results of the two articles show that while autocratic survival strategies will not always have different effects on dictator survival and regime survival, some strategies have very different effects on the two outcomes. Thus, in order to determine whether this is the case, researchers have to distinguish between the two types of survival.

[6] The exceptions to this rule are the cases where a transition to democracy is negotiated, and the current autocratic government oversees the holding of free and fair elections that result in the government being (re)elected. In these cases, the dictator remains in power even though the autocratic regime breaks down due to the democratic transition, although he will no longer be classified as a dictator after the election (Geddes et al., 2014).

The second trade-off is between autocratic survival strategies' effects in the short term and in the long term. Many studies of autocratic survival strategies investigate their effects on the outcome of interest in the near future—especially in the case of quantitative studies, where the focus is often on the effects within the first year or two after the dictator's/regime's use/nonuse of the strategy in question is observed (e.g., Woo & Conrad, 2019). However, some strategies' effects may take longer than that to materialize, and—even more importantly—some may even have different effects in the short run and the long run. Hence, researchers should be aware of this potential temporal heterogeneity in the effects of autocratic survival strategies and design their research in a way that allows them to investigate whether such heterogeneity is present.

I do this in Article C, where my co-author and I investigate the effects of implementing (and strengthening) national fiscal rules on autocratic regime survival. We show that fiscal rules have very different effects in the short term and the long term, with the rules having no—or perhaps even a slightly destabilizing—effect on autocratic regimes in the short term while having a clear and substantial regime-stabilizing effect in the long term. Furthermore, my Article A also speaks to the question of potentially different short-term and long-term effects of autocratic survival strategies. It does this by showing that while dictators can greatly reduce their vulnerability to coups and similar threats from regime insiders by concentrating power in their own hands, doing so also leaves them more vulnerable to popular uprisings if these are to materialize at some point after this concentration of power has taken place. By highlighting different types of temporal heterogeneities, the two articles underline the importance of distinguishing between short-term and long-term effects of autocratic survival strategies.

The third trade-off is between dictators' survival and their discretionary power while they are in office. While dictators have to stay in office if they are to have any chance of obtaining their goals, this is only a first step. The ability of dictators to control policy as well as access to material benefits varies widely, with some dictators having virtually unrestricted power while others are severely constrained by their elite supporters (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Geddes et al., 2018; Svolik, 2012). In addition to strategies that further their objective of staying in office, dictators will therefore also want to implement strategies that increase their discretionary power while they are in office. However, this will not always be possible, as the two objectives at times are in conflict with one another (Frantz & Stein, 2017; Magaloni, 2008). This, in turn, may face the dictator with the dilemma of having to choose between either attempting to prolong his survival in office by accepting constraints on his power or instead attempting to increase his power at the risk of being

thrown out of office (Svolik, 2012). When assessing the effectiveness of autocratic survival strategies, researches therefore need to take into account not only how a particular strategy affects the expected length of a dictator's tenure, but also how it affects the discretionary power of the dictator while he is in office. Although discretionary power lends itself less easily to objective measurement than tenure length does, it is an important parameter to take into consideration—even if this requires a certain amount of subjective judgement on the part of the researcher—if we want to increase our knowledge of why dictators chose specific survival strategies.

I address this potential dilemma in Articles A, C, and D. As described above, in Article A, I look at the effects of regime personalization on autocratic survival. If a dictator is successful in personalizing the regime, this entails a considerable increase in his discretionary power. Furthermore, I also show that regime personalization reduces the dictator's vulnerability to threats from regime insiders, which demonstrates that an increase in the dictator's power can be compatible with an increase in the dictator's survival prospects under certain circumstances. However, I also show that this increase in the dictator's power entails an increased vulnerability to popular uprisings for the dictator, which exemplifies the circumstances under which the dictator's objectives of increasing his discretionary power and surviving in office are in conflict with one another. Another example of such circumstances is provided in Article C, which investigates the effects of national fiscal rules on autocratic regime survival. Here, my co-author and I show that dictators can increase the durability of the regimes they rule by implementing and/or strengthening national fiscal rules. However, doing so limits the discretionary control over the country's fiscal policy of the dictator's government, which, in turn, entails a reduction in the dictator's discretionary power. Lastly, in Article D, my co-author and I show that (provided reasonably capable administrative institutions are in place) dictators can bring about desirable societal outcomes, such as increased access to healthcare and education, by making their regimes more inclusive—that is, by expanding the group of actors with whom they share power. Generating these types of desirable societal outcomes is likely to increase a regime's support among the population (Easton, 1975), which, in turn, can be expected to increase the stability of the regime (Gerschewski, 2013). However, expanding the group of actors with whom the dictator shares power also dilutes the power and access to material benefits of the current members of the regime—including the dictator himself (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Hence, this strategy also entails a loss of discretionary power for the dictator, and it thus serves as an additional example of a scenario in which the dictator's objectives of increasing his power and staying in office come into conflict.

Having described the three trade-offs that I investigate in this dissertation, I now briefly present the arguments of each of the four self-contained articles before moving on to the next chapter in which I present and discuss the methodological approaches that I have employed in the articles in order to test these arguments.

Summary of arguments of dissertation articles

The four articles are self-contained in the sense that they each lay out and investigate their own theoretical propositions. However, aside from all contributing to examining different aspects of the three trade-offs that I investigate in this dissertation, the four articles also rest on a common conception of the structure and dynamics of autocratic politics. Thus, while the arguments of the articles are self-contained, they are all based on the same understanding of the composition of autocratic regimes and the groups of actors that are relevant to understanding autocratic politics. Aside from providing the basis for a common theoretical framework for the dissertation, this conception—and its accompanying distinctions—helps identify the potential trade-offs of autocratic survival strategies by highlighting different sources of threats to the dictator's political survival. Before presenting the arguments of the four articles, I therefore briefly present my underlying conception of autocratic politics, which is outlined in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Analytical categories of actors in autocratic politics

	Inside regime	**Outside regime**
Comparatively higher power position	The dictator	Outsider elites
Comparatively lower power position	Insider elites	The masses

Note: Summary of distinctions and groups of actors employed in the theoretical framework of the dissertation.

The dissertation's conception of autocratic politics is based on two fundamental distinctions, resulting in four categories of analytically relevant actors. The first distinction is between 'regime insiders' and 'regime outsiders', whereas the second distinction is between actors with comparatively higher and comparatively lower power positions within these two overall groups. In terms of the first distinction, I distinguish between actors who are part of the regime (the dictator and his elite supporters) and actors who are not part of the regime (other political elites who are not members of the regime as well as non-

elite citizens). Within these two overall groups of actors, I make a second distinction based on the relative power positions of the different actors in the group. With regard to the group of regime insiders, I distinguish between 'the dictator' (who is in a comparatively higher power position) and the remaining 'insider elites' (who are in a comparatively lower power position). With regard to the group of regime outsiders, I distinguish between the 'outsider elites' (who are in a comparatively higher power position) and 'the masses' (who are in a comparatively lower power position).

In sum, these are the four categories of actors that may be analytically relevant in this conception of autocratic politics. However, all four categories will not necessarily be relevant to answering a particular research question. For instance, for questions relating to intra-regime dynamics (e.g., Brownlee, 2007; Frantz & Stein, 2017), the masses may not be relevant, or for questions relating to collaboration between autocratic regimes (e.g., Tansey, Koehler, & Schmotz, 2017; Yom, 2014), it may be sufficient to treat the regime as a unified actor rather than distinguishing between the dictator and insider elites. Accordingly, the four articles of the dissertation utilize these distinctions—and the resulting analytical categories—in different ways based on the research question of the article. I now summarize the arguments of the articles.

Article A investigates the effects of regime personalization as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, I argue that regime personalization has both positive and negative effects on the survival of dictators, depending on whether mass mobilization is present or absent in the country.[7] In the absence of mass mobilization, regime personalization increases the survival prospects of dictators by lowering their vulnerability to threats from insider elites. However, in the presence of mass mobilization, regime personalization decreases the survival prospects of dictators by increasing their vulnerability to threats from outsider elites, including previous insider elites who defect from the regime during the ongoing mobilization and thereby joins the group of outsider elites. Accordingly, the article shows that the effects of regime personalization on dictator survival are moderated by contextual conditions.

Article B investigates the effects of co-optation as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, I argue that co-optation can both decrease and increase the probability of coups, and that its effects differ depending on the type of coup. On the one hand, by co-opting capable outsider elites, the dictator gives these actors a stake in the regime's survival, which in turn lowers their incentives to attempt to overthrow the regime. In doing so, co-optation reduces the

[7] Note that mass mobilization is treated as a contextual condition in this article. Accordingly, the masses are not treated as an actor with agency, although the group is of course relevant to the theoretical argument.

probability of regime-change coups. On the other hand, by bringing these capable outsider elites into the regime—and thereby turning them into insider elites instead—the dictator creates new players in the internal power struggles of the regime, who can be recruited by potential insider challengers against the dictator. This, in turn, increases the probability of leader-reshuffling coups. Hence, the article shows that by distinguishing between different types of coups—and thereby between the survival of autocratic regimes and the survival of individual dictators—we see that co-optation can be both beneficial and harmful in terms of autocratic survival.

Article C investigates the effects of the implementation (and strengthening) of national fiscal rules as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, my co-author and I argue that national fiscal rules have different effects on the survival of autocratic regimes in the short term and in the long term. In the short term, implementing and/or strengthening fiscal rules can have adverse economic effects for both political elites (especially insider elites) and the masses. This insecurity about access to economic rents (for the elites) and the grievances caused by austerity measures (for the masses) can lead to political instability, which may, in turn, increase the probability of regime breakdown in the short term. However, in the long term, these fiscal rules are likely to improve the economic performance of the country, which, in turn, is expected to reduce the long-term probability of regime breakdown by fostering political stability and by increasing the performance legitimacy of the regime. Thus, the article shows that by accepting a potential short-term destabilizing effect, dictators can increase the durability of their regimes in the long term by implementing a stricter national fiscal rules framework.

Article D investigates the effects of regime type (i.e., from most autocratic to most democratic) on human development. In terms of the autocratic side of the regime spectrum, this implies investigating the effects of the inclusiveness of the regime and thus of the size of the dictator's group of essential supporters. My co-author and I argue that regimes that are more inclusive are likely to generate political outcomes that benefit the population as a whole (rather than a narrow group of elites) to a higher extent than are regimes that are less inclusive. Moreover, the higher the extent to which a regime generates outcomes that benefit the whole population, the higher is popular support for the regime likely to be, which, in turn, is likely to translate into increased regime stability. This presents the dictator with a potential strategy for increasing the durability of the regime that he is leading—that is, by increasing the size of his group of essential supporters. However, this strategy has a downside as well, as increasing the group of essential supporters dilutes the benefits that each member of the group (including the dictator) receives as well as in-

creases the level of constraints on the dictator's discretionary power. Additionally, in the article my co-author and I demonstrate that there is further caveat to this strategy: Increasing the inclusiveness of the regime only increases human development in countries that have a sufficiently well-functioning administrative apparatus in place. Accordingly, the article shows that while the strategy may aid some dictators in increasing the durability of their regimes—provided that they are willing to accept the associated costs in terms of reductions in both their discretionary power and access to material benefits—other dictators do not have this strategic option at their disposal.

I now turn to Chapter 4, where I discuss the research designs that I employ to test the arguments of the four articles.

Chapter 4: Methodology

To test the arguments of the four self-contained articles, I make use of time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) research designs that employ data frames consisting of different country-year panels. In this chapter, I describe and discuss these research designs. I start by discussing the data sources that I have employed in the analyses. I then describe the concrete research designs and discuss my considerations regarding the different statistical modelling choices I have made in connection with these designs. I end the chapter with a discussion of the benefits and drawback of having opted for a quantitative over a qualitative research approach.

Data sources

All four articles rely on a combination of data from different publically available sources. On the one hand, these data sources include information on phenomena that require a substantial amount of judgement on the part of the researcher, such as the occurrence of coups d'état or the political regime types of countries. The information on these types of variables are collected by different research teams in one of two ways: Either the research teams have coded the information themselves based on different sources (such as media reports), or they have conducted expert surveys in order to obtain the information. In both cases, these efforts help quantify somewhat abstract phenomena, like the ones described above, in a systematic and transparent manner, which allows researchers to use the information in TSCS analyses. On the other hand, the data sources I use in the articles also include information on phenomena that require substantially less judgement on the part of the researcher, such as the gross domestic product (GDP) or the population size of countries.[8] Information on these types of variables is available from various types of databanks, such as those of the World Bank and the International

[8] This is of course not to say that collecting data on these types of indicators—perhaps particularly economic indicators—does not require a certain amount of judgement, especially as some countries have an interest in misrepresenting this information (Ross, 2006). Nevertheless, compared to the task of, for instance, assessing whether the elections of a country are 'free and fair', collecting macroeconomic data provided by national governments—and attempting to diagnose and correct potential irregularities in the data—does not require the same kinds of qualitative judgments on the part of the researcher.

Monetary Fund, who provide the information in datasets that are ready for use by researchers.

Using these data sources, for each of the articles I retrieve information on the different variables that are relevant for investigating the research question at hand, after which I merge the components into new datasets that combine information on these variables. In this way, by combining the work of different research teams and data collection organizations, I create new composite datasets with broad geographical as well as temporal coverage that allow me to investigate the research questions of the articles. Furthermore, by leveraging the data collection efforts of different groups of scholars and experts, I am able to obtain datasets that are much more comprehensive both in terms of the variables included, and in terms of the empirical scope of the data, than I would have been able to by collecting and coding the data myself.

In the following, I discuss the specific research designs that I use in the articles as well as discuss the statistical challenges—and potential remedies—associated with analyzing political developments and regime dynamics using country-year panels.

Research designs

In all four articles, I use linear regression models to estimate the effects of the explanatory variables of interest on the outcomes of interest. This is completely uncontroversial in Paper D, where the outcome is continuous, whereas it requires a little more explanation for Papers A-C, where the outcomes are dichotomous. With dichotomous outcomes, one would ordinarily use some type of generalized linear model (GLM) for such as logit or probit. However, for reasons I will return to below, using GLMs in my analyses would have undesirable properties. Fortunately, a non-GLM alternative for dichotomous outcomes does exist, namely the linear probability model (LPM). The LPM is an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model just like a conventional linear regression model, with the difference being that the LPM is estimated with a dichotomous outcome rather than a continuous outcome. The LPM has been shown to be a suitable substitute for the GLM alternatives (Hellevik, 2009), and as this model is not associated with the same undesirable properties as the GLMs, I employ LMPs in the articles.

When analyzing political developments and regime dynamics with country-year as the unit of analysis, it is important to be mindful of the fact that countries differ from each other in fundamental ways due to differences in their history, culture, geography, and so on. If the researcher ignores these fundamental differences, this can lead to biased inferences about the effects of

the explanatory variables of interest on the outcomes of interest, as the associations between explanatory variables and outcomes may be driven by systematic covariation between these variables and underlying country-specific factors rather than reflecting genuine causal relationships. In order to prevent biased estimates—and potentially even spurious associations—due to unobservable, time-invariant factors that are specific to each country, regression models need to be estimated with 'country-fixed effects' (Green, Kim, & Yoon, 2001). This means that country-year observations are only being compared to other observations from the same country (i.e., observations that are measured in different calendar years), rather than being compared to observations from other countries, which has the effect of controlling for country-specific factors that are constant over time (Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Wooldridge, 2014).

If one estimates a GLM using fixed effects, this has the effect of dropping all panels (in this case, countries) that do not vary on the outcome, which is unfortunate, as it leaves the researcher with a truncated and potentially unrepresentative sample of countries (Beck & Katz, 2001). This is the undesirable property of GLMs that I was referring to previously. However, as I also mentioned above, OLS models do not have this property, and this is why I employ LPMs instead of logit or probit models in the analyses of Articles A-C.

Additionally, in all four articles I include dummy variables for the calendar year in which an observation is measured (which is also referred to as 'year-fixed effects') in the regression models in order to guard against potential time trends in, as well as various yearly 'shocks' to, the variables in the model. This helps control for, for instance, temporal patterns in the occurrence of coups or the prevalence of regime personalization as well as, for instance, spill-over effects from other countries in a particular year such as regional protest waves or the fall of the Berlin Wall. The inclusion of year dummies in the models thereby further reduces the risk of bias in the estimated effects from my analyses.

Moreover, in the three articles that employ a dichotomous outcome (Articles A-C), I include cubic polynomials of the number of years since the country last experienced the outcome in the regression models in order to account for potential time dependence in the outcome. This procedure for addressing potential time dependence in models with binary outcomes was originally suggested by Carter and Signorino (2010), and it has since then attained the status of 'best practice' within the field of Political Science.

Lastly, in all four articles, I estimate the regression models using robust standard errors that are clustered at the country-level (i.e., 'on countries') in order to account for potential dependence between country-year observations

from the same country in the models' calculations of the precision of the coefficient estimates (Wooldridge, 2014).

Having described the quantitative research designs of the four articles, I now turn to a discussion of the more general benefits and drawbacks of this quantitative research approach, compared to a qualitative approach.

Benefits and drawbacks of a quantitative approach

The articles of this dissertation solely employ quantitative research designs. This decision to employ a quantitative research approach affects the type of answers that I am able to provide to the research questions of the articles, compared to the answers that could have been provided if a qualitative approach had been employed instead. Quantitative and qualitative approaches have their respective strengths and weaknesses—especially with regard to the 'generality' versus the 'thickness' of explanations (Coppedge, 2012)—and although one approach is not inherently superior to the other, the two approaches are better suited for answering different types of research questions. This leads me to prefer a quantitative approach for the dissertation. This preference is first and foremost due to methodological considerations, which I describe below. However, even if one sets aside these methodological justifications, there are also strong theoretical and empirical reasons for preferring a quantitative approach. Because, while the potential trade-offs of autocratic survival strategies have received insufficient attention in both qualitative and quantitative research on the topic, this oversight is particularly pronounced in the quantitative strand of the literature. Accordingly, there is an especially pressing need for more quantitative studies that investigate these potential trade-offs.

In terms of the methodological reasons for preferring a quantitative approach, these follow from the research focus of the dissertation. In this dissertation, my objective is to investigate and answer general questions about the political dynamics of dictatorships and, ideally, to identify broadly applicable probabilistic causal relationships. In order to arrive at these types of generalizations about the effects of different explanatory factors (in this case, different autocratic survival strategies) that are applicable to dictatorships across time and space, large-N methods that utilize broad samples of autocratic countries across extensive periods of time are required. These types of methods help me achieve my goal of providing explanations with as high levels of generality as possible. However, they do so at the cost of a loss of thickness of the explanations, which qualitative methods are better suited for providing. Nevertheless, while both generality and thickness would have been desirable,

I focus on providing general explanations in this dissertation and thus choose a quantitative research approach in accordance with this focus.

In addition to sacrificing some thickness for higher generality, the choice of a quantitative approach also comes with certain challenges in terms of measurement and data availability. Autocratic countries are notoriously opaque settings, which makes it harder[9] to obtain accurate data of any kind on these countries, and especially data that is comparable both across countries and over time, which is necessary for conducting quantitative analyses. As a result, measuring key concepts related to autocratic politics—such as co-optation and power concentration—can be difficult, both because of the general difficulty of getting access to accurate data on the countries, and because phenomena such as these, owing to their somewhat clandestine nature, in many cases take place beneath the surface. However, while uncovering information on these types of phenomena will often be easier (or, at least, less resource demanding) in small-N settings, this would be at the cost of a loss in the generality of the findings of the studies. Accordingly, these measurement challenges are worth accepting in order to be able to provide more generally applicable—but, at times, less precise—answers to the research questions of the dissertation.

I now turn to the empirical findings of the dissertation, which are discussed in the next chapter. The chapter's discussion of the findings is structured around the dissertation's three sub-research questions, which are answered in turn throughout the chapter.

[9] Compared to democratic countries, which tend to have higher levels of freedom of information, in turn making it easier for researchers to collect accurate data on the countries (Ross, 2006).

Chapter 5: Findings and answers to sub-research questions

This chapter discusses the findings of the four self-contained articles, both in relation to each other and in relation to the three sub-research questions of the dissertation. I reintroduce the sub-research questions one at a time, and I then utilize the arguments and associated findings from the different articles that are relevant to answering the sub-research question at hand. Thus, rather than going through the arguments and findings of the four articles chronologically and at full length in this chapter, I confine my use of the articles to the parts that are relevant to each of the three discussions. In this way, I show how the findings of the articles help answer not only their own self-contained research questions but also the broader research questions of the dissertation. Based on these discussions, I provide an answer to the overall research question in Chapter 6, which concludes the dissertation summary and points to avenues for further research.

Trade-off I: Insider vs. outsider threats

Sub-RQ 1: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their vulnerability to insider threats and outsider threats, respectively?

Dictators face threats to their survival both from actors inside their regimes and from actors outside the regime. Recall from Chapter 3 my distinction between different analytical categories of actors in autocratic politics: Threats to the dictator from inside the regime stem from insider elites, whereas threats to the dictator from outside the regime stem from outsider elites and/or the masses.[10] Dictators' have a range of survival strategies that they can employ in order to defend themselves against these two types of threats. However, a given survival strategy will not always be able to mitigate both types of threats at the same time. On the contrary, some survival strategies are even likely to increase the dictator's vulnerability to one of the types

[10] While outsider elites are able to pose a threat to the dictator without direct involvement of the masses (for instance by staging a coup attempt or by challenging the dictator at the polls), the masses are not able to threaten the dictator without some sort of leadership or coordination, which is usually provided by outsider elites.

while decreasing his vulnerability to the other. Articles A and B of the dissertation demonstrate this trade-off between insider threats and outsider threats for two different autocratic survival strategies.

In *Article A*, I investigate the effects of regime personalization as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, I argue that regime personalization—that is, the systematic concentration of political power in the hands of the dictator at the expense of his elite supporters—decreases dictators' vulnerability to threats from inside the regime but at the cost of increasing their vulnerability to threats from outside the regime. On the one hand, by weakening his elite supporters (i.e., the insider elites) the dictator reduces their capacity to mobilize an effective challenge against him (usually in the form of a coup), which both lowers the probability that insider elites will dare attempting to challenge the dictator and increases the probability that such challenges fail if they are attempted anyway. Both of these effects lower the probability of the dictator being overthrown by actors inside the regime. On the other hand, by weakening his elite supporters, the dictator weakens the very same actors that he relies on to combat popular uprisings. Furthermore, by concentrating power he reduces the benefits that his supporters receive from being members of the regime, which, in turn, gives the supporters an incentive to defect from the regime and side with the challengers if an outsider challenge is to arise. Both of these effects increase the probability that dictators are removed by actors outside of the regime—that is, the complete opposite of what we saw with regard to the effect of regime personalization on insider threats.

I test these arguments by using the continuous, time-varying measure of regime personalization from Geddes et al. (2018) that I also mentioned in Chapter 2. I combine this with data on mass mobilization from the NAVCO 2.0 dataset (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013) and with data on both 'irregular' leader exits in autocracies from the Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, & Chiozza, 2009) and with data on autocratic regime breakdowns from Geddes et al. (2014). The results of the analysis supports the arguments by showing that regime personalization increases the likelihood that popular uprisings will result in the removal of dictators (as well as the breakdown of autocratic regimes), while regime personalization decreases the likelihood that dictators are removed from power when mass mobilization is absent in the country.

In *Article B*, I investigate the effects of co-optation as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, I argue that co-optation—that is, a dictator's incorporation of potential opponents into the ruling coalition (Gerschewski, 2013)—decreases the probability of coups that change the whole regime (i.e., regime-change coups) but increases the probability coups that remove the regime leader while leaving the regime itself in place (i.e., leader-reshuffling coups). On the one hand, by bringing capable outsider elites into the regime

and thereby giving them a stake in its survival, the dictator both lowers the incentives of the co-opted elites to attempt to change the regime as well as diminishes the pool of capable potential challengers outside the regime. Both of these effects are expected to reduce the probability of the regime being overthrown in a coup. On the other hand, by bringing these capable actors into the regime, the dictator increases the pool of potential co-conspirators on which a challenger from inside the regime can draw. This is likely to increase the probability of an insider challenge succeeding, which, in turn, is also likely to increase the probability that such a challenge will be attempted. These effects are therefore expected to increase the probability of the dictator (but not the regime as a whole) being overthrown in a coup and replaced with another regime insider.

I test these arguments by using data on the two types of coups from Aksoy et al. (2015), which I combine with a continuous measure of the degree of co-optation in autocracies that has been developed by Schmotz (2015). As a robustness test, I also proxy the level of co-optation by using the level of ethnic inclusivity of the regime, which I measure with data from the Ethnic Power Relations dataset (Vogt et al., 2015). The results of the analysis support the arguments: Co-optation seems to decrease the probability of regime-change coups (and thereby reduces the dictator's vulnerability to outsider threats), and it seems to increase the probability of leader-reshuffling coups (and thereby increases the dictator's vulnerability to insider threats instead).

In sum, the answer to Sub-Research Question 1 provided by Articles A and B is that (at least) two of the most prominent autocratic survival strategies have opposite effects on the dictator's vulnerability to insider threats and outsider threats, respectively. One the one hand, regime personalization reduces the dictator's vulnerability to insider threats but increases his vulnerability to outsider threats. One the other hand, co-optation, conversely, decreases the dictator's vulnerability to outsider threats but increases his vulnerability to insider threats. Accordingly, both of these strategies come with a clear trade-off in terms of substituting one type of threat for the other.

Trade-off II: Short-term vs. long-term political survival

Sub-RQ 2: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their political survival in the short term and the long term, respectively?

Dictators' choice of survival strategies affects their chances of staying in power not only in the short term but also in the long term. However, the long-term effect of a survival strategy will not necessarily be the same as its short-term effect. On the contrary, a given strategy may be beneficial for autocratic

survival in the short term but downright harmful in the long term, or vice versa. In Article C of the dissertation, my co-author and I provide an example of an autocratic survival strategy that exhibits this temporal heterogeneity in its effects. Furthermore, Article A of the dissertation also provides insights that are relevant to this discussion.

In *Article C*, my co-author and I investigate the effects of implementing and/or strengthening national fiscal rules as an autocratic survival strategy. In the article, we argue that implementing or strengthening national fiscal rules have different effects on the survival of autocratic regimes in the short term and in the long term. In the short term, implementing and strengthening fiscal rules causes fiscal retrenchment, and it may also increase the uncertainty among insider elites about the future provision of patronage and spoils. Both of these short-term effects of the rules can lead to political instability in the short run. However, in the long term, fiscal rules improve fiscal management, which increases investor confidence and economic performance, and through these long-term effects, the rules lead to political stability in the long run.

We test these arguments by using data on countries' national fiscal rules from the International Monetary Fund's Fiscal Rules Dataset (Lledó, Yoon, Fang, Mbaye, & Kim, 2017), which we combine with data on regime breakdowns. For the main tests, we use regime breakdown data from Djuve et al. (2020), and for robustness tests we use regime breakdown data from Geddes et al. (2014). While Geddes et al.'s data includes an indicator variable that can be used to identify autocratic country-years, Djuve et al.'s data does not. Accordingly, for the main tests we identify autocratic country-years by using the dichotomous democracy-autocracy measure from the updated Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013) dataset. The results support our arguments by showing that implementing or strengthening national fiscal rules reduces the probability of autocratic regime breakdown in the long term, whereas they have either no effect, or perhaps even a slightly destabilizing effect, on the survival of autocratic regimes in the short term.

In addition to the findings from Article C, in *Article A*, I showed that regime personalization increases the likelihood that a dictator will survive in office, as long as mass mobilization is absent. This speaks to the question of different short-term and long-term effects of autocratic survival strategies. By concentrating political power, dictators seem to be able to increase their survival prospects as long as a popular uprising does not erupt—that is, in the short to medium term. However, many dictators do experience a popular uprising at some point during their tenure. When this happens—that is, at some point in the long term—dictators who have personalized their regimes are more vulnerable than they would have been if they had not relied on regime

personalization as a survival strategy. This is, for instance, what we saw during the Arab Uprisings of 2010-2011, where long-reigning rulers of highly personalized regimes, such as Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, suddenly were overthrown by popular uprisings (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2013). Hence, for this survival strategy, we see more or less the opposite temporal pattern in its effects than we did for dictators' use of national fiscal rules, that is, a survival-enhancing effect in the short term and a survival-undermining effect in the long term.

In sum, the answer to Sub-Research Question 2 provided by Articles C and A is that some autocratic survival strategies have very different—and perhaps even the opposite—effects in the short term and in the long term, respectively, which is important for researchers to keep in mind when assessing the effectiveness of a particular strategy.

Trade-off III: Discretionary power vs. political survival

Sub-RQ 3: How do dictators' survival strategies affect their discretionary power while they are in office?

When investigating the effects of autocratic survival strategies, political survival is naturally the main parameter of interest. However, it is not the only parameter that is relevant to take into account when assessing the strategies' effects. Aside from affecting dictators' prospects of staying in office, their choice of survival strategies can also affect their discretionary power and access to material benefits while they are in office. This, in turn, affects the utility that dictators gain from being in office (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Svolik, 2012), and thus, it may force some dictators to choose between either sacrificing some security in terms of their hold on power in order to increase the utility gained from being in power, or vice versa. Several of the articles in the dissertation touch upon this potential trade-off.

The first of these is *Article A*, which investigates the effects of regime personalization. Regime personalization is perhaps the clearest example of an autocratic survival strategy that is designed to maximize the dictator's discretionary power, as the process of personalizing the regime is essentially a power concentration process by the dictator (Geddes et al., 2018; Svolik, 2012). Thus, dictators who rule very personalized regimes enjoy high levels of discretionary power and a high degree of control over the distribution of material resources.

However, in the article, I show that even though these 'personalist'[11] dictators enjoy a high degree of security against insider threats in addition to their high discretionary power, these benefits come at the cost of a heightened vulnerability to outsider threats. Hence, as long as mass mobilization is absent in the country, personalist dictators enjoy both high security in office and high discretionary power, but if a popular uprising does break out at some point during their tenure, this survival strategy increases the probability that the dictator will be deposed as a result of the uprising.

The second of these is *Article C*, which investigates the effects of national fiscal rules. Implementing and/or strengthening national fiscal rules limits the discretionary power of the dictator, as it places constraints on his ability to use public finances to pay off his supporters, to finance his pet projects, and to support his own—often rather luxurious—lifestyle.[12] Accordingly, dictators are likely to prefer as few constraints on their discretionary control of public finances and fiscal policy as possible. However, in the article my co-author and I show that by accepting these constraints on their discretionary power in the area of fiscal policy, dictators can increase the long-term stability of their regimes, which, in turn, increases their own chances of staying in office for an extensive period of time. Hence, while the strategy of regime personalization presents dictators with an opportunity to increase their discretionary power at the cost of increasing their vulnerability to outsider threats, the strategy of employing national fiscal rules presents dictators with an inverse opportunity, that is, to increase their likelihood of staying in offices at the cost of a reduction in their discretionary power.

The last of the articles addressing the trade-off between dictators' survival and their discretionary power is *Article D*. In this article, my co-author and I investigate the effect of regime type on human development, with regime type being understood here as a continuum ranging from fully closed autocracies to full-fledged democracies. We argue that moving from the more autocratic end toward the more democratic end of the regime continuum will improve

[11] I use the term 'personalist' here as a shorthand to refer to dictators who rule regimes with high degrees of personalization, in contrast to the categorical use of the term popularized by Geddes (1999).

[12] One could argue that dictators are not bound by laws and other formal rules in the same way that democratic leaders are, and that fiscal rules therefore do not limit dictators' discretionary power. However, in the article my co-author and I refute this objection by arguing that even if dictators are not formally bound by the fiscal rules they adopt, the dictator nonetheless has strong incentives to abide by them in order to maintain his credibility, for instance in the eyes of foreign investors and international donors (see also Wright, 2008, 2009).

the level of human development in the country, as long as a sufficiently capable administrative state apparatus is in place. On the autocratic side of the spectrum, a movement along this continuum implies that the autocratic regime is made more inclusive, that is, that the dictator broadens his coalition of essential supporters. On the one hand, broadening the dictator's coalition of essential supporters is likely to limit the discretionary power of the dictator and reduce his access to material benefits, as he has to be responsive to and share benefits with a broader group of actors (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). On the other hand, improving human development in the country is likely to be popular among the population, as this reflects an increase in their standard of living as well as their general wellbeing. Doing so can therefore increase the performance legitimacy of the dictator and his government (Easton, 1975), which, in turn, is likely to increase the chances of staying in power for both the dictator and the regime as a whole (Gerschewski, 2013). Accordingly, as was the case for dictators' use of national fiscal rules, this is an example of a strategy that presents dictators with an opportunity to improve their survival prospects at the cost of a loss in their discretionary power and access to material benefits.

My co-author and I test the arguments of the article by using two different proxies for human development, specifically the countries' rates of infant mortality and secondary school enrollment, respectively. We combine these with measures of countries' degree of democracy as well as their degree of administrative capacity. All four measures are obtained from version 7.1 of the 'V-Dem + other' dataset from the Varieties of Democracy Project (Coppedge et al., 2017). The results of the analysis support our arguments by showing that higher levels of democracy (and, thus, movements away from closed autocracy) are associated with higher levels of human development, and that this effect is moderated by the country's level of administrative capacity, which means that the effect only materializes at sufficiently high levels of administrative capacity.

In sum, the answer to Sub-Research Question 3 provided by Articles A, C, and D is that strategies that are effective at prolonging the survival of dictators may do so at the cost of a reduction in their discretionary power, and, conversely, that strategies that are effective at increasing the discretionary power of dictators may do so at the cost of increasing their vulnerability to one or more types of threats and thereby potentially jeopardize their political survival. Hence, survival in office is not the only outcome that is affected by dictators' survival strategies.

Overall, for all the autocratic survival strategies that I have investigated in the four articles, a recurrent theme has been that while a particular strategy may have beneficial effects for the dictator in some regards, the same strategy

may have effects that are downright harmful for the dictator in other regards. Accordingly, when we as researchers investigate the effectiveness of dictators' survival strategies, it is important that we remember to ask the question: 'Effective at what?' If we fail to be conscious of the different outcomes that a strategy can affect, we risk drawing conclusions that are, at best, crude and one-sided, or, at worst, outright misleading.

I now turn to the final chapter, which concludes the dissertation summary. In the chapter, I provide an answer to the overall research question of the dissertation and discuss the broader implications of the dissertation's empirical findings. I end the chapter by suggesting avenues for further research on the topic of autocratic survival strategies.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.
—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War, Ch. VI*

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings of the four self-contained articles, and based on these findings, I provided answers to the four sub-research questions. In this chapter, I use the answers to the three sub-research questions to provide an answer to the overall research question of the dissertation. After this, I discuss the theoretical, empirical, and normative implications of the dissertation's findings and point to avenues for future research on the topic.

Answer to overall research question

RQ: How do different strategies for maintaining power affect the political survival of dictators, and what potential trade-offs do dictators face when pursuing these strategies?

The discussion of the dissertation's findings gave rise to three main conclusions about the effects of autocratic survival strategies and the different trade-offs associated with these strategies that dictators may face when pursuing a particular strategy:

Firstly, a given survival strategy may have different effects on dictators' vulnerability to insider threats and outsider threats, respectively. In other words, the same strategy may both decrease dictators' vulnerability to insider threats and increase their vulnerability to outsider threats, or vice versa. Secondly, a given strategy may have different effects in the short term and in the long term. Accordingly, the same strategy may, on the one hand, worsen the dictator's survival prospects in the short term, and, on the other hand, improve his survival prospects in the long term, or the other way around. Thirdly, a given survival strategy may have different effects on a dictator's likelihood of surviving in office and his discretionary power while he is in office. Thus, a particular strategy may increase the dictator's probability of staying in office at the cost of a loss in his discretionary power and access to material benefits,

or, conversely, it may increase his discretionary power at the cost of an increased risk of being removed from office.

In sum, the answer to the overall research question provided by the four articles of the dissertation is that, while dictators have numerous survival strategies at their disposal, many of these strategies are associated with one or more trade-offs, either in terms of vulnerability to different types of threats, in terms of short-term and long-term political survival, or in terms of the political survival and the discretionary power of the dictator. Accordingly, a particular survival strategy will rarely be a panacea that solves all the dictator's problems. Instead, when choosing which survival strategies to rely on, he will often find himself in a dilemma of having to choose which set of drawbacks to accept in order to obtain a set of benefits. Which benefits that are most important for the dictator to obtain, and which drawbacks he is most willing to accept, will depend on the circumstances in which the dictator finds him himself. Thus, it is often not meaningful to say that one strategy is more effective than another, as assessments of a strategy's effectiveness depends on the particular set of challenges that the dictator is interested in addressing.

Implications of findings and future research

Aside from providing answers to the research questions of the dissertation, the findings have a number of broader implications, both in theoretical, empirical, and normative terms:

With regard to the *theoretical implications* of the dissertation's findings, the findings highlight the need for researchers to be more aware of the double-sided nature of autocratic survival strategies, as this is something that previous studies on the topic have tended to disregard, or at least overlook. In other words, researchers need to be mindful of the fact that the same strategy can both improve and worsen the survival prospects of dictators, depending on the type of threats that a dictator face and the time horizon that is used to evaluate the strategy's effectiveness. Furthermore, the findings also highlight the fact that dictators' survival strategies not only affect their survival prospects, but also their discretionary power. This fact is important for understanding why dictators choose to pursue particular survival strategies. By incorporating these insights into theorization about autocratic survival strategies in a more systematic way, the scholarly community can greatly increase its understanding of the effects of these strategies.

Concerning the *empirical implications* of the dissertation's findings, the findings provide new insights into hotly debated topics, such as the effects of regime personalization on dictators' likelihood of surviving in power, the effectiveness (and potential drawbacks) of co-optation as a survival strategy,

and the effects of the use of formal institutions (such as national fiscal rules) in dictatorships. Accordingly, the findings not only serve to advance our knowledge of the research questions that are asked in this dissertation, they also serve as self-contained contributions to different debates within the literature on comparative authoritarianism.

Lastly, concerning the *normative implications* of the findings, it seems appropriate to discuss the ethicality of the topic of this dissertation. One could make the argument that it is unethical for researchers to investigate the effects of autocratic survival strategies, as this research could potentially be read by dictators and their henchmen around the world, which would help them improve their knowledge of which survival strategies to employ—and which not to employ—in particular circumstances. This knowledge, the argument would go, could thereby potentially help dictators and their regimes stay in power and thus contribute to prolonging autocratic rule. While this is not an unreasonable argument, I would argue to the contrary that increasing our knowledge of the effects of autocratic survival strategies is essential to help *shorten* autocratic rule around the world, as the only way for civil society activists and the international community to be able to bring down dictators is to know how they stay in power, and what their weaknesses are. For example, employing targeted sanctions against members of the dictator's regime in the hope of turning the sanctioned regime members against the dictator (Carneiro & Apolinário, 2016) is less likely to be effective in very personalized regimes, where insider elites are unlikely to be able to mount a successful challenge against the dictator. In these regimes, efforts at supporting opposition parties, NGOs, and other groups of actors with the capacity to mobilize mass protests and—potentially—a popular uprising are more likely to be fruitful. For these reasons, I would argue that it would be at least as unethical *not* to explore this topic. In other words, this dissertation is by no means intended as a modern-day version of Machiavelli's 'The Prince', but rather as a contribution to undermining autocracy and furthering democracy worldwide.

The above discussion underlines the importance of more research on this topic. While I have done a lot to advance our knowledge of the effects of autocratic survival strategies, much is still left to be learned. In the following, I provide two examples of questions that could be addressed in future research on the topic:

On the one hand, while I have investigated three of the most important potential trade-offs of autocratic survival strategies, there are certainly other potential trade-offs left that are worthy of investigation. An example of such a potential trade-off is how dictators' survival strategies affect their vulnerability to domestic threats versus their vulnerability to international threats, as the effects on these two types of threats may very well differ. For instance,

dictators' use of state repression against their populations may be effective at quelling domestic threats, but it may also spur international sanctions against the regime (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

On the other hand, while I have provided quantitative, cross-national evidence in favor of my arguments in this dissertation, I have only investigated the micro-foundations of these arguments to a very limited extent. Future research on the topic—especially qualitative research—could focus on these micro-foundations. Doing so would help improve our understanding of the various mechanisms that are driving the cross-national results, and it would provide new empirical insights that can help us revise and refine our theoretical perspectives.

In conclusion, while several questions have yet to be answered, I hope that this dissertation will help both scholars and practitioners improve their understanding of autocratic politics and the strategies that dictators employ to stay in power, and that the dissertation thereby will not only help advance research on the topic but also aid efforts to destabilize autocratic rule and to promote democratic development around the world.

English summary

This PhD dissertation, which consists of a dissertation summary and four self-contained articles, investigates the effects of autocratic survival strategies, that is, the different strategies that dictators can employ in order to maintain their hold on power. Specifically, the dissertation investigates the different potential trade-offs that are associated with these strategies. The dissertation argues that at least three types of trade-offs can be associated with autocratic survival strategies. While all three trade-offs do not apply to all autocratic survival strategies, the same strategy may be associated with more than one of the trade-offs.

Firstly, a strategy can have different effects on a dictator's vulnerability to threats from actors inside the regime and threats from actors outside the regime, respectively. Accordingly, the same strategy may, on the one hand, decrease a dictator's vulnerability to insider threats while, on the other hand, increasing his vulnerability to outsider threats, or vice versa. *Secondly*, a strategy may have different effects on a dictator's vulnerability in the short term and in the long term. Hence, while a strategy may help the dictator secure his hold on power in the long run, the same strategy may jeopardize his hold on power in the short run, or vice versa. *Thirdly*, a strategy may have different effects on a dictator's ability to stay in office and the level of discretionary power that he enjoys while he is in office. As a result, while a strategy may be effective at helping the dictator survive in office, it may do so at the cost of constraining his discretionary power and access to material benefits during his tenure—or the other way around.

These arguments are supported by the four self-contained articles of the dissertation, which investigate the effects of different types of autocratic survival strategies through a series of time-series cross-sectional analyses of global samples of autocratic (and in one of the articles also democratic) country-years. The dissertation concludes by discussing the broader implications of the articles' empirical findings for the literature on comparative authoritarianism and by suggesting avenues for further research on autocratic survival strategies.

Dansk resumé

Denne ph.d.-afhandling, som består af en afhandlingssammenfatning og fire selvbærende artikler, undersøger effekterne af autokratiske overlevelsesstrategier, det vil sige de strategier, som diktatorer anvender for at holde sig selv ved magten. Nærmere bestemt undersøger afhandlingen de mulige afvejninger (”trade-offs”), som er forbundet med diktatorers valg af overlevelsesstrategier. Afhandlingen argumenterer for, at der foreligger mindst tre sådanne afvejninger, som kan være forbundet med en given overlevelsesstrategi. Selvom alle tre afvejninger ikke vil gøre sig gældende for alle autokratiske overlevelsesstrategier, så kan den samme strategi være forbundet med mere end én af afvejningerne.

For det første kan en overlevelsesstrategi have forskellige effekter på diktatorers sårbarhed over for henholdsvis trusler fra aktører inden for regimet og trusler fra aktører uden for regimet. Det vil sige, at en given strategi, på den ene side, kan mindske en diktators sårbarhed over for interne trusler, mens den, på den anden side, øger diktatorens sårbarhed over for eksterne trusler, og vice versa. *For det andet* kan en overlevelsesstrategi have forskellige effekter henholdsvis på kort sigt og på lang sigt. Ergo, selvom en strategi kan være med til at hjælpe en diktator med at holde sig ved magten på lang sigt, kan den samme strategi risikere at bringe hans greb om magten i fare på kort sigt, og vice versa. *For det tredje* kan en overlevelsesstrategi have forskellige effekter på diktatorers evne til at holde sig ved magten og det niveau af diskretionær beslutningskapacitet, som de besidder, mens de er ved magten. Heraf følger det, at selvom en given strategi kan være effektiv med hensyn til at hjælpe diktatoren med at overleve politisk, så kan dette ske på bekostning af en reduktion i hans diskretionære beslutningskapacitet og adgang til materielle goder i løbet af hans tid ved magten – eller omvendt.

Disse argumenter understøttes af afhandlingens fire selvbærende artikler, som undersøger effekterne af forskellige typer af autokratiske overlevelsesstrategier gennem en række tidsserie-tværsnitsanalyser (”time-series cross-sectional analyses”) af globale udsnit af autokratiske (og for én af artiklernes vedkommende også demokratiske) lande-år. Afhandlingen konkluderer ved at diskutere de bredere implikationer af artiklernes empiriske fund for den komparative forskningslitteratur om autokratiske regimer samt ved at foreslå mulige emner for fremtidige studier af autokratiske overlevelsesstrategier.

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