



How has 20th century authoritarianism been analysed? A brief historiography

(i) 1950s and 60s –the totalitarian model and its critics.

The first attempts to analyse these new authoritarian regimes, were produced not by historians but by political scientists like Karl Popper (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1945) - and **Hannah Arendt**. (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951) What these early authors focused on, was the contrast between the contested and limited control exercised over the individual in a liberal democratic society and the attempt by these new authoritarian regimes to totally control the life of the individual. It was in the immediate post-war period, that the term 'totalitarian' became a common way to describe the inter-war dictatorships of Nazi Germany and the USSR.

It was also in this post-war period that the most influential analysis of totalitarianism appeared in the novel by George Orwell, 1984. In many ways, Orwell produced the model dystopia to which all authoritarian regimes have since been compared. The total nature of social control in Orwell's vision of the state is personified by Big Brother whose face appears everywhere:

'On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters, and on the wrappings of a cigarette Packet — everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed — no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull.'
(Orwell 1984 Penguin 1989 edition p.29)

In addition to Orwell, other novelists like Arthur Koestler (*Darkness at Noon* 1940) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* 1962) reinforced the dominant view of authoritarian regimes, in which violence and terror were central to how 'totalitarian' states maintained their rule. The fact that Koestler had been imprisoned in Franco's Spain and Solzhenitsyn in Stalin's USSR, only stood to reinforce the view that totalitarianism was essentially the same phenomenon, irrespective of ideology.

At the height of the Cold War, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich produced the single most influential analysis of 20th century authoritarianism, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 1965. Drawing parallels between Nazi Germany and the then current, post-Stalin regimes in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, Brzezinski and Friedrich famously identified the **six characteristics which constitute the nature of totalitarianism**.

From the beginning the 'model' of totalitarianism was subject to a variety of criticisms. Political critics pointed out that aggressive US foreign policy against 'totalitarian' Soviet regimes was easier to justify if the Cold War struggle was just a continuation of the Second World War's fight against Nazi totalitarianism. Other critics provided a more ethical criticism that the apparent 'total' control over individual actions allowed former authoritarian regime **collaborators** to deny responsibility, because 'resistance was futile' or 'because we were brainwashed'.

But the most powerful criticisms of the 'totalitarian model' have been made by historians. Put simply, the detail of the historical record simply does not match up to the abstract theoretical, totalitarian model. One of the most persistent criticisms by historians has been that the totalitarian model underestimated the practical importance of ideological differences between left-wing and right-wing states. In a sentence, capitalist free-market and a Communist command economies produce significantly different authoritarian societies.

The second major criticism results from the work of social historians who have questioned the extent to which the totalitarian regimes effectively controlled the lives of their citizens. Historians like Hans Mommsen and Ian Kershaw in the case of Hitler's Germany, or Sheila Fitzpatrick and John Arch Getty for the history of Stalin's USSR, have questioned whether direct party and state control, as suggested by the totalitarian model, was actually 'wielded without restraint'. (Brzezinski, Z, *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics*, New York, Praeger, 1967, p.46) Eric Hobsbawm summarized the situation in the USSR, appropriately enough with reference to Orwell's concept of thought control:

'...the system was not 'totalitarian', a fact which throws considerable doubt on the usefulness of the term. It did not exercise effective 'thought control', let alone ensure 'thought conversion', but in fact depoliticized the citizenry to an astonishing degree. The official doctrines of Marxism-Leninism left the bulk of the population virtually untouched, since it had no apparent relevance to them, unless they were interested in a career in which such esoteric knowledge was expected.' (Hobsbawm Age of Extremes p.394.)

Hannah Arendt

Born 14 October 1906 Hanover, Germany died New York City, USA, 4 December 1975. Hannah Arendt was a German-American secular Jew, a political theorist who left Germany for Paris with the coming to power of the Nazis in 1933. With the fall of France she was interned by the Vichy government at Camp Gurs but escaped to the USA in 1941. After the war, she taught at a number of prestigious American universities and in 1951 published her first major book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In 1961 she reported on the war crimes trial of the Nazi Adolf Eichman and for whose actions she coined the phrase the 'banality of evil', to describe a tendency of people to obey orders and conform, rather than question the morality of their actions. In 2012 she became the subject of a feature film 'Hannah Arendt' by German director Margarethe von Trotta.

Six characteristics which constitute the nature of totalitarianism:

1. Elaborate guiding ideology.
2. Single mass party, typically led by a dictator.
3. System of terror, though violence and secret police.
4. Monopoly of the means of communication.
5. Monopoly of weapons.
6. Central direction and control of the economy.

Collaborators

The negative meaning of collaborate as 'traitorous cooperation with the enemy' dates from 1940, originally in reference to the Vichy Government of Frenchmen who cooperated with the occupying German Nazi regime, 1940-44.

(ii) Post-totalitarianism

Although not necessarily rejecting the utility of the totalitarian model completely, political scientists (and sociologists and economists) in the 1970s began to work beyond the basic framework of the totalitarian model. In particular, the relative stability and limited use of terror in the authoritarian regimes in Spain and in the Eastern Bloc and the rise of non-party authoritarian regimes in Central and South America, led analysts to question whether the totalitarian model was still valid. In 1970, Huntington and Moore focused on the one-party state as a dynamic, authoritarian regime, which by the 1960s was producing forms of government that were quite different from their revolutionary origin. They explained that highly ideological regimes led by charismatic dictators and dependent on terror, give way over time, to regimes that are more pragmatic, bureaucratic and less coercive. (Huntington and Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-party Systems*, Basic Books 1970)

An alternative approach was followed by Amos Perlmutter, who focused on the rule of military dictatorships. He distinguished between those military regimes that are established with a temporary ambition to 'restore order', what he calls arbitrator regimes and those that seek to govern with an ideologically defined political programme, the ruler type. (Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times*, Yale UP, 1977)

But the most influential author in this period was Juan J. Linz, whose 1975 article, 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes', is still the foundational text for the comparative study of authoritarian regimes. In particular, he identified a series of characteristics that help us to distinguish totalitarian regimes from authoritarian regimes.

Totalitarianism	Authoritarianism
Ideology plays a strong role, provides legitimacy	Role of ideology is weak
Goals of the regime are social revolution via-mass mobilisation, aiming to transform human nature	Goal is to depoliticize and de-mobilize society producing a sense of sense of political impotence.
Regime has a high level of organization and total control over society	Regime does not exercise total control over society; masses have some political power
Strategy to achieve these goals is to subject society to terror	Terror and propaganda may be used, but not to the same extent as in totalitarian regimes
Key holders of power are the leader, secret police, and party	Small degree of pluralism is allowed. Political parties, if they exist, are non-ideological and may not play an important role in the regime

(Table adapted from Ezrow and Franz, *Dictators and Dictatorships*, Continuum, p.5)

For Linz, the key difference between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes is the level of political engagement of the citizenship. In an authoritarian regime, the main goal is to depoliticize and demobilize the public. Rather than the active, ideologically explicit support for the regime, it is the public apathy and resignation that is the key to understanding the survival of the regime. As Harrop and Hague put it, in an authoritarian, rather than totalitarian regime, 'ordinary people are unlikely to experience a knock on the door as long as they keep away from politics' (Hague and Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, 9th edition, Palgrave, 2013 p 59)

(iii) Trends and Typologies: understanding authoritarianism today

Despite the success of decolonization and the collapse of the USSR, and some extent as a result of these processes, the continued existence of non-democratic regimes in the last decades of the 20th century has led political scientists to try to extend our understanding of the wide variety of different types of authoritarian regimes. At the very least we can conclude that the simple 'continuous' analysis of 'democratic - authoritarian – totalitarian' is too simplistic to make sense of the full range of different types of regime. The alternative to the 'continuous analysis is what political science calls 'categorical typologies'. Categorical explanations identify similarities and differences between authoritarian regimes, either by emphasizing the strategy used by the dictator to stay in power or by how the dictatorship is structured. Ronald Wintrobe, for example, classifies authoritarian regimes based on the relative level of state repression and the loyalty citizens feel for the regime.

The alternative categorical explanation is based on the actual structure of the regime. Barbara Geddes has produced a very influential typology that distinguishes between three types of regime: Military, Single-party and Personalist and a fourth hybrid which mixes characteristics between the first three. It is the Geddes classification that is used extensively in this website. (Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, The University of Michigan Press, 2003)

Wintrobe's classification of authoritarian regimes

- Tinpots (low levels of repression and loyalty)
- Tyrants (high levels of repression and low loyalty)
- Totalitarians (high levels of repression and high loyalty)
- Timocrats (low levels of repression and high loyalty)

(Wintobe, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship*, CUP, 1998)



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