

The Role of Narrative: Stories that Bind

Introduction

Historically, democracy is a recent aberration with authoritarian systems as the norm. The fact that approximately 55% of the global population continues to live under regimes classified as “Partly” or “Not Free” affirms the continued viability of authoritarianism.¹ The continued viability of these regimes is unsurprising, with various mechanisms utilized by these regimes to remain in power. While the use of justifications to rule such as divine right have faded outside the Persian Gulf, authoritarian regimes continue to justify their position beyond simply instrumental rationales. Authoritarian regimes continue to endure despite the international normative pressures to democratize. In fact, the ranks of authoritarian states appear to be growing. States such as Venezuela, Turkey, and Hungary, once consolidated democracies, have undergone a process of authoritarian backsliding. In stark contrast to Huntington’s (1991) “third wave,” authoritarianism remains a viable mode of government in the 21st century (Huntington 1991). Indeed, the trend away from democracy has led some to ask, “Is the Third Wave Over?” and is the world undergoing a “Third Reverse Wave” (Diamond 1996; Diamond 2000, 94)?

If we take the fact that authoritarian states continue to exist and propagate as evidence of their viability, the question becomes how do these states remain viable? Or, more precisely, what are the tactics used by authoritarian regimes to maintain their position? This question has been the subject of a large body of scholarship, with many factors and tactics posited in response (Geddes & Zaller 1989; Przeworski & Limongi 1997; Haber & Menaldo 2011; Svobik 2012; Escriba-Folch 2013). Factors such as authoritarian consolidation, popular incorporation, economic development, among many others, have been shown to increase authoritarian longevity. The importance of these factors should not be understated. However, the narrative

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org>

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justification employed by regimes to validate their position and the effect this has on the population's support remains understudied.

All states, nations, and peoples possess a number of intertwined narratives to explain both their position in the world and the aspirational social values. But these narratives do not emerge absent human action. Narratives are necessarily acted upon by social and political actors for their benefit. Stories are reinterpreted in light of present circumstances to give meanings and lessons to contemporary peoples. Governments use emphasized connections with popular narratives, constructed political narratives, and the state's founding myth, to reinforce and justify their political position. This interconnected narrative framework determines the criteria upon which the citizenry of a state judges the regime.

I argue that the narratives utilized by authoritarian regimes to justify their rule have practical ramifications beyond conditioning the content of their rhetoric. The degree to which citizens of an authoritarian believe in the regime's embodiment of their narrative role modifies both the level of popular support and the evaluative criteria upon which that support is based. Where the public perceives the regime as acting in a right and virtuous manner, the support drawn therefrom is derived from a separate dimension than purely economic considerations. Where some previous research considers popular support to be a unidimensional metric, derived from multiple sources, I argue that these multiple sources result in multiple dimensions of regime support.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the operative definitions used in this research and review the pertinent literature.² The next section discusses the

² Appendix A provides operative definitions for many of the terms used herein.

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theoretical argument of this article. The fourth section lays out the intended data and methods of this project, and the final section discusses the future of this research.

Literature Review

Narratives are the stories told about people and events. Narratives can encompass historical or current events, or the future and idealized destiny, of a people, that is to come. As Griffin (1993) states, “Narratives are made up of the raw materials of sequences of social action but are, from beginning to end, defined and orchestrated by the narrator to include a particular series of actions in a particular temporal order for a particular purpose” (Griffin 1993, 1097). Narratives are stories that necessarily entail a set of values. These values are often represented by the protagonist and antagonist of the narrative, although more complex narratives may blur this neat distinction. Simply put, narratives are stories, with actors, that emblemize values, that the virtuous citizen should emulate (Hart 1992; Patterson & Monroe 1998; Subotić 2013; Breneskoetter 2014).

Values refer to the societally agreed upon conception of how one ought to live. Embedded in narratives, and especially founding or national myths, the protagonist(s) symbolize the metaphysical embodiment of the aspirational being, against which all others are judged. Individuals can thus judge themselves and others against this example. This intersects with authoritarian regimes in that these narratives may possess aspirational values of governance by which any regime should be judged while demarcating the boundaries of political action and discussion (Krebs and Lobasz 2007; Subotić 2013). Narratives exist at multiple levels, where a higher-order narrative may detail a broader series of events, while lower-order narratives are constructed in relation to immediate and specific events. I term these superordinate and subordinate narratives respectively; subordinate narratives draw themes and motifs from the superordinate narrative(s) to provide a greater meaning beyond the subjective truth of an event.

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A politician isn't just corrupt for embezzling funds from the state pension fund; they're morally deficient because they acted in a contrary manner to the idealized narrative conception of what a politician should be. This is conceptually similar to a "classical categorization" of "taxonomic hierarchy" (Collier & Mahon 1993, 845).

Narratives are fluid and malleable, with aspects being emphasized, deemphasized, omitted, and reinterpreted in furtherance of the narrator's ends (Dukalskis & Patane 2019). The social construction of narrative necessarily means that narrative is both a function of the one who is speaking and the one who is hearing. Narratives, therefore, are a mutually constitutive agreement between the two parties; despite the narrator's best efforts, if the narrative falls upon unreceptive ears, it fails to become meaningful. The truth of any narrative is subjective, and the perception of the agreed upon narrative is far more important than the objective truth of a specific event (Bieber 2002). This agreement conditions the relationship between the two by providing a role for each entity. In an ideal-type authoritarian regime, the citizens dutifully obey the government, which in turn, fulfills the role set out in the narrative structure they've employed. Where regimes personify the narrative values and roles set forth and accepted by the citizenry, I term this *narrative embodiment*.

To illustrate this process, the following is a translated speech excerpt, given by Hugo Chavez. To contextualize this excerpt, Chavez is speaking to the National Assembly following the coalescence of the 'extraordinary Congress of the PSUV,' wherein his party earned a popular mandate. This speech was given following the establishment of the *Bolivarian Misiones*, the expropriation of various businesses and industries, and where Chavez had been in power for more than a decade. Chavez had well established his regime's narrative superstructure with emphasized connections to the independence struggle from the Spanish:

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“In the elections of last Sunday, November 15, we chose, among our militancy, the delegates to the Extraordinary Congress of the PSUV: it was another example of the transforming spirit and the revolutionary strength that animates us. We comply once again with the rigor that history demands of us. Obeying the popular design to which we owe, we call for consultation to consolidate the new type of political organization that the Bolivarian Revolution needs, and with the firm orientation of making the country great and worthy. What a way to strengthen us! I am fully sure that through this sovereign and participatory exercise, we choose men and women of Bolivarian spirit and revolutionary solidarity, and with the commitment to serve the people with passion and disinterest. To the people who have set out to their desired destination: socialism. We can not rest our arms or rest our souls until, as our Liberator wanted, the established and practiced equality and the greatest possible amount of happiness are a living and tangible reality for all.”

Taken in isolation, this may simply appear a populist political appeal. In fact, almost every line contains allusions or direct references to the narrative superstructure Chavez crafted. Throughout are references to Simon Bolivar and the continued revolution. Individual strength and passion, with state sovereignty and equality, are heralded as aspirational values, emblemized in Bolivar himself. Militancy and revolutionary zeal are the values of a true Venezuelan. Chavez did not create the foundational myth of Bolivar and the struggles for independence. Rather, he and his regime selectively activated and interpreted useful elements for their goals. In this way, we can observe the practical importance and cohesive power of narrative.

Narratives have been examined at both the national and international level. From the role of narratives affecting the international understanding of the Congolese conflict, to narrative as a cohesive force within NATO, to the value States place on narrative membership within an international community, the effects of international narrative have been rigorously examined in a variety of contexts (Jackson 2003; Mitzen 2006; Autessere 2012). More sociological and discursive approaches highlight the importance of social interactions and the environment in which they take place on international outcomes (Wendt 1992; Somers 1994; Payne 2001). This research adopts a functionalist approach towards the domestic effects of narrative, by drawing on previous scholarship regarding both international and domestic effects of narrative.

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A foundational, or founding, myth is the common story of a people, nation, and/or state regarding a historical coalescence into their conception of the in-group, the people, *la pueblo*, ‘us’, or any other typology of the internal community. Foundational myths often draw upon shared cultural myths (Tanasoiu 2005; Djokic 2009). Foundational myths are narratives, but these myths are less malleable than other, subordinate narratives. The general story of the founding myth is rigid; the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 for Serbia, the War of Independence for the United States, or the Bolivarian Revolution of the early 19th century for many Latin American States (Djokic 2009). These myths contain embedded meaning, often through the metaphysical values of the protagonist or latent symbolism (Hart 1992). However, these historical events are open to alternative interpretations, as regimes and opposition actors will emphasize and deemphasize elements, actors, and motifs to serve their purposes. These superordinate, foundational myths are thus the historical ‘facts’ upon which a regime’s subordinate narratives draw. They are often used by authoritarian regimes to reinforce their position through claims of guardianship and successorship (Mellon 2010; von Soest & Grauvogel 2015).

The factual and historical accuracy of these myths are secondary to their popular salience, as the ‘facts’ in this case are what is popularly agreed upon (Bieber 2002). Foundational myths may change, primarily where the regime seeks to redraw the conception of in- and out-groups. This type of fundamental restructuring is far more difficult than emphasis and de-emphasis of events, figures, values, and lessons drawn from the foundational myth. Previous scholarship has termed foundational myths as “master” or “meta-narratives,” and while this is descriptively correct, I feel as though foundational or founding myth is more precise to describe the superordinate political narrative of a state (Patterson & Monroe 1998; Breneskoetter 2014).

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Foundational myths are a type of meta-narrative, along with religious or cultural narratives that often exist congruently (Tanasoiu 2005).

Authoritarian regimes create, alter, or reinterpret the foundational myth of the state advantageously for themselves. In doing, they may not only alter popular conceptions of the citizen's role within the state, but more importantly the government's purpose for being and the justification thereof. Modern regimes promote these founding myths and emphasize the historical continuity of their rule, to increase legitimacy by drawing real or imagined connections to the past (Mellon 2010; Breneskoetter 2014). By interpreting or creating the foundational myth of a state, the regime emphasizes the grounds on which it seeks to be judged. The successful dissemination of a founding myth and the resultant narrative not only tangentially increases regime support, it fundamentally alters the evaluative criteria by which the regime is judged. By placing themselves at the center of the founding narrative or proclaiming that they are the successor of the narrative's protagonists, the regime provides itself a *raison d'être* beyond their monopoly on violence (von Soest & Grauvogel 2015). A common form of founding myth involves the struggle for independence (Rashiduzzaman 1994). In this way, founding myths interact with another cohesive force; nationalism.

Nationalism is used by regimes to both increase popular support and justify their position. (Gorenburg 2001). National identity necessarily relies on a conception of the in-group and a heroic story about the in-group's triumphalism over externalized forces, to provide a unifying mythology and narrative framework around which the nation-state may coalesce. Authoritarian regimes often utilize these nationalistic myths in furtherance of their position. Nationalism may take the form of a post-independence legacy, where the regime is the descendant of those who struggled against the foreign oppressor or a historical narrative regarding the unity of a nation

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(Rashiduzzaman 1994; Gilley & Holbig 2010). Alternatively, nationalistic myths can revolve around the defense of the homeland against a foreign interloper, often characterized by the non-aspirational values and barbarous character of the outgroup (Byman & Lind 2010). Regardless of the specific tenor, nationalism is generally grounded within the superordinate, founding myth and involves an interwoven web of heroic narratives and symbolism (Hutchinson 2006).

The state's chosen type of nationalism varies dependent on their goals. If they wish to deflect from internal issues, regimes will often promote a form of virulent and aggressive nationalism towards proximate or powerful neighbors, visible minorities, or other groups (Byman & Lind 2010; von Soest & Grauvogel 2015). These external groups are pathologized and attributed both with the Manichean dichotomy as well as collective guilt for the issues currently plaguing the 'good and virtuous' state. Pathological nationalistic narratives have led to abuse and atrocities against minority communities, for example in Bosnia & Herzegovina (Lieberman 2006; Djokic 2009). Conversely, if the regime seeks to celebrate the accomplishments of the state and foster positive relations with their neighbors, they may alter the tenor of their nationalistic rhetoric to one of more cordiality and benevolence. Regimes disseminate and inculcate their chosen nationalist narrative through a variety of mediums. Public schooling, popular media, and displays of military strength are just some of the means by which regimes inculcate nationalism in their populace (Geddes & Zaller 1989; Byman & Lind 2010; Darr 2011).

Nationalism is often functionally useful for regimes in overcoming a legitimacy or credibility deficit. In Post-Soviet, Central Asian nations, authoritarian regimes could no longer rely on the ideology of Communism to legitimize their rule. They adopted nationalism as a legitimizing and cohesive force to fill this deficit. (Mellon 2010, 138). As nationalism is a form

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of narrative, and nationalism is constructed strategically in furtherance of the regime's current aims, it is clear that narratives are employed for pragmatic reasons. Where regimes adopt or modify narratives to overcome specific issues, we can see how these narratives alter the manner in which the public is evaluating the regime. By altering the public's conceptualization of the regime *raison d'être*, the regime emphasizes their best qualities while simultaneously, not only downplaying their worst but, removing these criteria from political considerations altogether.

Nationalism can also be considered as a form of ideology, and authoritarian regimes routinely use ideology as a cohesive force (Bollen & Hoyle 1990, 500; Xu 2001, 125). Hannah Arendt (1979) famously discussed the role of ideology in totalitarian regimes. These regimes used ideology to coopt and control their citizens by justifying their intrusion into all aspects of society and personal life (Arendt 1973; 1979.) However, with the possible exception of North Korea, this level of totalitarian control no longer exists (Byman & Lind 2010; Dukalskis & Gerschewski 2017). Nonetheless, ideology remains important to authoritarian regimes, with most attempting to instill their preferred ideology, with them at the center, into their citizenry through a variety of means (March 2003; Byman & Lind 2010). But ideologies are not narratives; ideologies are founded upon narratives. The narratives that authoritarian regimes propagate contain justification for their ideology and thus position. The regime connects historical events and figures to themselves and emphasizes the 'rightness' of their rule through the embedded values in their preferred narrative framework. These promoted values form the framework within which the ideology is nested. Where ideology is a conceptual framework on the correct role, scope, and function of the government, narrative provides the normative justification for these values beyond purely instrumental or functionalist grounds.

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Authoritarian regimes continue to employ various ideological justifications for their position and form of governance. This justification, where popularly accepted, can increase popular support for the regime. Ideology acts as a linkage mechanism between the rulers and the ruled; in other words, “a political ideology imposed from above can influence the population with the aim to create a feeling of belonging among the ruled” (Dukalskis & Gerschewski 2017, 254-5). In authoritarian systems, ideological justifications generally refer to the regime’s role of guardianship, maintaining order, continuity with historical events, or promoting economic development (Mayer 2001; March 2003; Gilley & Holbig 2010; Omelicheva 2016; Dukalskis & Gerschewski 2017; Dukalskis & Patane 2019). The narrative of regime as providing economic development has emerged as the common narrative in authoritarian systems.

Following the reduction in totalitarian states and the fall of the Soviet Union, authoritarian regimes often justify their position on economic or otherwise instrumental grounds. Regimes will often seek to take credit for the economic development of their nation, and frame continued development as contingent on their position (Mellon 2010). This often overlaps with narrative claims that their tenure prevents disorder and chaos, as in China (Darr 2011; Dukalskis & Gerschewski 2017). This instrumental justification is often made by asking citizens to compare their idealized current situation with an overwrought narrative regarding the privation of times past. In electoral democracies, this type of consideration is termed retrospective voting (Fiorina 1978). This strategy is in contrast to evidence that only political sophisticates are able to make the causal connection between macro-economic trends and personal finances, or that economic considerations are outweighed by other factors (Gomez & Wilson 2001; 2006; Singer 2011). Whether or not these effects are bounded to electoral democracies, and generalizable to determinations of public support in authoritarian regimes, is not the focus of this research.

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Moreover, given the existence of multiple political forces and narrative competition, examining the role of narratives in democratic systems is beyond the scope of this research. Rather, I argue that economic considerations are a separate dimension along which citizens evaluate the current authoritarian regime. The degree to which this affects considerations of the authoritarian system as a whole is conditional on whether the regime's narrative framework emphasizes economic conditions. As discussed below, economic and other purely instrumental considerations primarily affect a form of specific support.

Narratives concerning nationalism, ideology, and economic performance are often crafted in furtherance of a regime legitimation strategy. Democratic systems carry an inherent public perception of legitimacy, at least while functioning properly, due to the normative international context and idealized domestic narrative (Brownlee 2007). But authoritarian regimes must earn their legitimacy via alternative sources (March 2003). These strategies to address legitimacy deficits are not wholly unilateral affairs, with the public offering unconditional acceptance of any narrative appeal. Many of these strategies rely on the regime's activation of embedded values in the narrative superstructure for the public to be effective (Mitzen 2006; Mellon 2010; Byman & Lind 2010; von Soest & Grauvogel 2015).

In democratic systems, the current regime is necessarily incentivized to be mindful of public opinion, as their electoral prospects depend upon positive public sentiment. This existential electoral incentive is absent in authoritarian states, but the concern for public opinion endures. Authoritarian regimes must remain mindful of public opinion to forestall popular unrest, and possible revolution (McDonough 1982; Kurzman 2004). Positive public opinion of the regime does not require liberal democratic processes (Wang 2007). Rather, many authoritarian regimes use material benefits, public incorporation, procedural democracy, and other tactics to

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increase public support, and thus regime longevity (Levitsky & Way 2002; Schedler 2006; Gandhi & Przeworski 2007; Kuntz & Thompson 2009; Svobik 2012).

Previous research has identified a litany of other factors that increase authoritarian regime's support, legitimacy, and their longevity. The degree of economic development is argued to affect the durability of authoritarian systems (Przeworski & Limongi 1997). Relatedly, oil revenues are said to give authoritarian regimes the necessary revenues to effectively purchase popular support (Ross 2001; see Haber & Minaldo 2011 in dissent). Others contend that economic development fosters civil society and organizational development which eventually leads to democratization, and effective authoritarians stifle this development while promoting economic development (Lipset 1959; Moore 1966; Dunning 2008). I instead argue that economic development is a related, but distinct, factor affecting regime support. Citizens can be mollified with economic gains and material incentives, but this is not unbounded. Regimes must also provide a narrative justification of their rule if they are not to endlessly buy off the support of the citizenry. Given the laws of diminishing returns, this is an unwise long-term strategy.

Another factor hypothesized to affect authoritarian longevity and support is the level of popular incorporation, or the degree to which the regime trades status and club goods for in exchange for support (Magaloni 2006; Svobik 2012). Elite incorporation, the suppression of civil liberties, the establishment of power-sharing mechanisms and the power of propaganda also affect the level of popular support and regime durability (Svobik 2009; Egorov & Sonin 2011; Escriba-Folch 2013; Gandhi & Przeworski 2007; Geddes & Zaller 1989). My argument here is not that these factors are unimportant or subordinate to the effect of narrative. Rather, that narrative is an understudied aspect of each of these elements. For example, the regime's justification for the suppression of civil liberties is as important as the suppression itself. If an

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authoritarian regime can provide salient justifications for its actions, drawn from the narrative framework, the level of popular dissatisfaction due to those actions will be diminished.

Theory

Where regime support is contingent on the material benefits they provide, a reduction in these benefits due to the regime's inability to afford or provide said benefits will rapidly diminish regime support. In Venezuela, severe economic mismanagement, shortsighted fiscal policy, and a reliance on oil have drained the Maduro regime's ability to provide the material benefits Venezuelans once enjoyed; public support has fallen rapidly with the conditions of the state. A more robust approach may be to justify the regime's rule on non-material grounds. I theorize that one such way is through narrative embodiment. Even where the regime is struggling to provide economic benefits to its citizens, they may retain support where they are popularly perceived to embody the superordinate narrative values and role of a government. This parallels the concept of diffuse and specific support.

Easton's (1965; 1975) famous theory regarding popular support dichotomized this concept into diffuse and specific support (Easton 1965; 1975). Easton argues, "Some types of evaluations are closely related to what the political authorities do and how they do it. Others are more fundamental in character because they are directed to basic aspects of the system. They represent more enduring bonds and thereby make it possible for members to oppose the incumbents of offices and yet retain respect for the offices themselves...The distinction of roughly this sort I have called 'specific' as against 'diffuse' support" (Easton 1975, 437). Diffuse and specific support have been extensively studied in both democratic and semi-democratic systems, with the corollary of political trust as a related concept (Iyengar 1980; Mishler & Rose 1997; Hetherington 1998; Dalton 1999). Although Easton primarily detailed this categorization

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in democratic systems, this type of binary categorization of popular support is also applicable to authoritarian regimes with, I argue, some modification.

In my modified typology, the concept of diffuse support remains roughly the same; citizens' view of the system of government and the institutions that comprise it. However, their rationale for this diffuse support changes. In this modified typology, specific support does not necessarily pertain to individual officials and their immediate actions. The lack of democratic accountability obscures the attribution of responsibility for negative outcomes (Dickson 2016). Citizens may feel animosity and resentment towards the local magistrate for their failures on a specific issue, but it is difficult to connect the individual's actions to the government as a whole when evaluative criteria remain undefined (Dickson 2016). Easton's (1975) conceptualization necessarily linked the two concepts and discussed how repeated low specific support could slowly drain the reservoir of diffuse support, and vis versa (Easton 1975). But, the lack of connectivity between a specific, non-elected official and the system of government necessitates a reconsideration of this conceptual dichotomy. Indeed, even the grounds along which an official may be criticized is contingent on the public's expectations of officials. These expectations are drawn from the narrative framework within which the official and public reside.

Considering the previous discussion, I posit an alternative definitional dyad for popular support in authoritarian systems; *pragmatic* support is contingent on shorter term, often material, considerations, while *romantic* support concerns the popular conception of the regime, and government, as fulfilling their narrative purpose; narrative embodiment. Individual official's actions are meaningful primarily in relation to expectations of their actions. Failure to adequately perform a specific task is less important than the public's conception of what kind of person the official ought to be and the manner they discharge their duties. This is not wholly novel, as

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Easton (1965) stated, “Such unquestioning loyalty reflects a kind of attachment for which specific benefits are not expected except for the psychic satisfactions of identification with or subordination to a higher cause or object” (Easton 1965, 274). These “psychic satisfactions” from a “higher cause”, in this case, are the result of the regime’s level of narrative embodiment.

Consider a tangential example of the way a question is interpreted can condition the answers. The World Values Survey’s (WVS) question ‘V10’ asks respondents about their ‘Feeling of Happiness.’³ Happiness can clearly be defined in a number of ways, but most often happiness entails some level of fulfillment. The ways in which individuals come to feel fulfilled necessarily entail culturally and societally defined conceptualizations of what a fulfilled life means. The superordinate cultural, societal, religious, and even political, myths, narratives and stories all provide examples of fulfilled individuals and prescriptions that one may follow if they seek fulfillment.

Even where ephemeral or unrelated to the individual’s life, the fact that their society broadly accepts the defined role of the individual within a community living a righteous and proper life allows individuals to find happiness and fulfillment as a function of the narrative superstructure. In this way, the individual defines their happiness in direct reference to the narrative criteria within which they are ensconced. This is neither unbounded nor the only way in which individual happiness is determined; abject material privatization certainly degrades happiness, as constantly worrying about one’s next meal makes happiness less attainable. Rather, this tangential example illustrates the conditioning effect of abstract forces on how individuals make abstract determinations.

³ <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>

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Returning to the example of the unpopular local magistrate, key values of the narrative ideal of a magistrate may be honesty, charity, and compassion: this magistrate is perceived to be corrupt and uncaring of the homeless in their city. Contrast this example with a hypothetical popular magistrate in a different political system and normative context. Perhaps, in this example, the key values are efficacy and order. This magistrate may be corrupt and uncaring towards the dispossessed, but they maintain the appearance of the streets, prosecute crime effectively, and conduct themselves in a highly orderly fashion. The performance and conduct of these two magistrates may be identical, but the political and societal environment in which they operate could result in contrasting popular approval. This is a distinct calculation from the local economic conditions, of which the magistrate may be responsible. Both pragmatic and romantic judgments of the magistrate are made along separate dimensions. They may intersect, but they operate at two distinct levels with two sets of distinct criteria. Only by understanding the evaluative criteria, embedded in the narrative framework, by which the magistrate is judged can one adequately understand the rationale behind the public's approval or disapproval.

I extend this logic to authoritarian regimes. Economic and materialist considerations are distinct from judgments pertaining to the realization of the regime's narrative position. Moreover, only by understanding the salient criteria of a state's narrative can we examine the level of popular support. Authoritarian regimes may propagate narratives, with embedded criteria, that are favorable to their current conduct. But these narratives must resonate in the broader narrative framework to be accepted. Also, narrative diffusion is a slow process – regimes cannot immediately remove an evaluative criterion from public consideration if they fail to fulfill this criterion.

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Authoritarian regimes create, alter, or reinterpret the foundational myth of the state in an advantageous manner for themselves. They draw from this myth to craft a subordinate, narrative framework with themselves at the core. In doing, they may not only alter popular conceptions of the citizen's role within the state but more importantly the government's purpose for being and the justification thereof. By reinterpreting or creating the narrative superstructure of a state, the regime emphasizes the grounds on which it seeks to be judged. The successful dissemination of a founding myth and the resultant narratives not only tangentially increase regime support, it fundamentally alters the evaluative criteria by which the regime is judged. Instrumental and materialist considerations remain, but the regime's fulfillment of their narrative role is a separate calculation in the mind of the population. This distinction is termed pragmatic and romantic support respectively. Popular support may be higher and less malleable where the regime is seen to embodying the values of the founding myth; romantic support.

This hypothesized relationship is bounded. In the absence of narrative embodiment, the regime is not doomed to collapse. The regime may still provide an effective level of material conditions conducive to widespread satisfaction, maintaining a sufficient level of popular, pragmatic support. Conversely, where the population is enduring famine or economic collapse, narrative justifications cannot take the place of staples such as rice, beans, or bread. Moreover, some level of material provision is often included in the founding myth and resultant narratives, or the regime is able to blame the level of material privation on external factors. Finally, where a state is enduring material privatization and the regime is not perceived to be fulfilling its superordinate role, low pragmatic and romantic support, the regime may still endure. Unfortunately, when all else fails authoritarian regimes can use brute force to maintain their

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position (Barany 2011). This is generally the measure of last resort, and thankfully so, but it remains an omnipresent specter available to these regimes (Svolik 2012).

Additionally, the previously studied factors increasing authoritarian survival such as the consolidation of internal factions, public incorporation, the support of the armed forces, suppression of civil liberties, and many others, remain influential. In sum, the existence or absence of narrative embodiment is not a deterministic calculation of a regime's viability or expected longevity. Additional factors remain influential, and possibly outweigh the theorized relationship examined here. But, how regimes are judged, and the evaluative criteria used, are directly related to their founding myth and the narrative framework within which they exist.

This research examines how authoritarian regimes use varied narratives to justify their position, how these narratives affect the grounds upon which citizens judge these regimes, and the effect this has on popular support. I argue that where authoritarian regimes fail to embody their role set out by the founding myth and narrative framework, the population's support is contingent on more materialistic considerations. Conversely, where the regime is acting in accordance with the founding myth and narrative superstructure, the public will be more willing to endure material privation and a lower standard of living. Where the authoritarian regime is both unable to provide a reasonable level of materialistic prosperity to a majority of citizens and is not viewed as performing in accordance with their narrative role, popular unrest and dissatisfaction with the regime will increase. In this way, this research contributes to the extant literature by taking a functionalist view of regime narratives. The chosen narratives and interpretation of the national foundational myth have pragmatic ramifications by affecting the evaluative criteria upon which the regime is judged.

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This conceptualization requires a number of necessary assumptions. These are, (a) narratives exist, in reference to regimes; (b) narratives provide some benefit to regimes, as otherwise the regimes would not invest time and effort on them; (c) narratives carry implicit values and hierarchical evaluative criteria; (d) the regime is thus judged upon these criteria, (d) meeting these criteria are an additional source of legitimacy and support, or not, to purely instrumental considerations by the populace; (e) various narratives interact with one another, acting at varying super- and subordinate levels. I aim to provide support for these assumptions through qualitative analysis, where possible.

H₁: All else equal, where romantic support is low popular support for the authoritarian regime will be more directly tied to economic factors.

H₂: All else equal, where romantic support is high popular support for the authoritarian regime will be more durable, when the public faces economic privation.

Data & Methods

Discussed above, the functional elements of this theory requiring data are the level of narrative embodiment, contributing to romantic support, economic conditions, contributing to pragmatic support, and public opinion data. No holistic dataset with each of these factors exists. To identify the level of romantic support, I will need to understand the founding myth and narrative framework of the regime, to accurately describe the level of narrative embodiment by the regime, and relatedly the public perception of narrative embodiment. The primary way to gauge romantic support is through detailed qualitative analysis. The public's perception of narrative embodiment, romantic support, necessarily entails detailed knowledge regarding a regime's narrative; one cannot judge something without knowing what it is.

Moreover, factors such as narrative and the degree of regime accordance with it, are not conducive to quantitative analysis and cannot be neatly coded. Thus, the best way to understand these factors is through detailed case studies and content analysis. By examining elite discourse

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via speeches, and popular accounts, recurring motifs and themes should illuminate the narrative framework of the state. Alternative evidence may be found longitudinally where a specific failure of the regime is matched with a lagged, altered trend of regime discourse, deemphasizing that element. Also, previous research regarding the narrative structure and founding myths of these states, particularly research from Social Anthropology and Sociology, will prove essential.

The economic conditions of a state, and its citizens are a more straightforward factor to measure. Datasets such as the Human Development Index from the UN and the World Bank dataset provide a robust set of measures capturing a variety of economic and other factors of import. These conditions must be examined longitudinally to illuminate relative change over time. Given the previous discussion of “heterogenous attribution” of economic conditions, factors such as GNI or GDP per capita, or growth, are too broad to effectively capture popular perception of economic conditions (Gomez & Wilson 2006). Thus, this research will use the measures of HDI developed by the UN, as well as the measure of ‘Annualized average growth rate in per capita real survey mean consumption or income, total population (%)’ from the World Bank dataset.⁴ This measure provides a clearer estimate of individual well-being, as while individuals may not attribute macro-level factors, they should be more able to understand change in personal consumption. These measures will provide longitudinal data for economic conditions. These measures may change as this research develops.

The reliability of public opinion data from authoritarian regimes is often suspect. There is plenary reason to view these public opinion data from totalitarian regimes as dubious, due to their oppressive nature and the potential risks to individuals from giving their unfiltered opinion (Byman & Lind 2010). This is a rational decision by individuals, termed “preference

⁴ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>; <https://data.worldbank.org/>

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falsification,” and has been rigorously profiled (Kuran 1987). Another, similar concept, that of a “spiral of silence,” refers to where the refusal to speak one’s mind is mutually reinforcing, as members of a group or society take incorrect cues from their neighbors and form a “silent majority” of dissatisfaction (Noelle-Neumann 1974). Both “preference falsification” and “spirals of silence” rightly call into question the veracity of public opinion data drawn from authoritarian regimes. However, previous research has examined public opinion in the authoritarian state of China with seemingly robust results (Dickson 2016). Thus, although we must approach public opinion data from authoritarian states skeptically, there is no reason to reflexively discard data from these states. This research will thus use public opinion data from these states, where available and not clearly compromised.

Examining states that have either high or low values of pragmatic and romantic support, and the effect this has on the malleability of public support over time, allows for a 2 x 2 matrix to organize case selection. This is illustrated below, in Figure 1.

	Low --	Romantic Support	-- High
-- Low	I	II	
Pragmatic Support			
High --	III	IV	

Figure 1. Illustration of 2x2 Matrix, Aiding Case Selection

Where quadrant I indicates low pragmatic and romantic support, quadrant II indicates high romantic and low pragmatic support, quadrant III indicates low romantic and high pragmatic

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support, and quadrant IV indicates high pragmatic and romantic support. Despite this depiction, these values are not binary and exist on a spectrum, but this illustration clarifies case selection. This research chooses a case in each quadrant to study the theorized relationship. Venezuela will be the case for quadrant I, Cuba for quadrant II, Kazakhstan for quadrant III, and China for quadrant IV. Further research will illuminate the final case selection, but these cases should provide a sufficient degree of variation on both pragmatic and romantic support to observe the hypothesized causal mechanism. Each is authoritarian, but not so ruthlessly totalitarian as to necessarily bias any public opinion data collected; North Korea for example.

The primary way to determine the effect of different levels of pragmatic and romantic support is to examine longitudinal variation in measures of regime support. All else equal, where two authoritarian states, with high and low romantic support, respectively, undergo a period of economic decline, the state with the higher level of romantic support should maintain a higher level of overall popular support. By categorizing the four cases into their respective quadrants, illustrated above, and looking at variations of public support given fluctuation in the provision of public goods or economic well-being, I should be able to distill the distinct effects of each of these forms of support on public opinion. Fundamentally, I will be looking at public support for the regime, given similar declines in economic conditions (HDI and WB indicator), at varied levels of romantic support. I thus adopt a mixed methods approach to study this theorized relationship, using a most-similar design. Given the factors under study, the level of analysis is the state, specifically aggregate measures of support.

Case Studies

[Case studies of Venezuela, Cuba, Kazakhstan, and China will go here]

Quantitative Analysis

[Section will go here, using measures derived from case studies]

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Conclusion

This research is in an early stage, with a great deal of time and effort required before approaching maturity. Nonetheless, I feel that narratives and founding myths are an understudied element of authoritarian resilience and consolidation. Convincing the citizenry of a state that an authoritarian system is good, or at least good enough, requires an incredible expenditure of time and resources. The fact that regimes are willing to expend these resources indicates the importance of these factors. Some may argue that these efforts are relatively low cost, and the effects of narrative are overpowered by more immediate and visceral factors such as the use and threat of force; narrative is only authoritarian window dressing. I disagree. A regime cannot exist in a constant state of high-intensity repression; the wiser tactic is to convince the population that they are not actually oppressed. The long-term effect of successfully inculcating a pro-authoritarian narrative superstructure is to reduce those instances where high-intensity repression is necessary. Where the people believe in the system, a regime does not have to constantly coerce their compliance. The role of narrative may be to increase the duration of authoritarian regimes.

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Appendix A: Definitions of Key Terminology

Term	Definition
Narrative	Stories, with actors that emblemize values, that the virtuous actor(s) should emulate. Can be contemporary or historical, real or contrived.
Narrative Embodiment	The regime's fulfillment of their duties, roles, and position set forth in the narrative superstructure, often drawn from the foundational myth.
Romantic Support	Popular support contingent on narrative embodiment
Pragmatic Support	Popular support contingent on economic conditions and/or material benefits
Narrative Superstructure	The complex, interconnected web of narratives that form a cultural, religious, societal, and governance structure.
Foundational Myth	The narrative told about the origin of a state, or nation-state. Demarcates the in- and out-groups. Provides aspirational values for the regime and citizens.