Wright State University

# CORE Scholar

2021

# Clinging to Power: Authoritarian Leaders and Coercive Effectiveness

Christian J. Wolfe
*Wright State University*

Follow this and additional works at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/etd_all

Part of the International Relations Commons

CLINGING TO POWER: AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS AND COERCIVE

EFFECTIVENESS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of

Arts

BY

CHRISTIAN J. WOLFE

B.A., Lee University, 2017

Wright State University

2021

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

<u>July 7, 2021</u>

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY <u>Christian J. Wolfe</u> ENTITLED <u>Clinging to Power: Authoritarian
Leaders and Coercive Effectiveness</u> BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF <u>Master of Arts</u>.

_____
\_\_\_
Dr. Laura Luehrmann, Ph.D.
Thesis Director

_____
\_\_\_
Dr. Laura Luehrmann, Ph.D.
Chair, Master of Arts Program
in International and
Comparative Politics

Committee on Final Examination:

_____
Laura Luehrmann, PhD
School of Public and International Affairs

_____
Pramod Kantha, PhD
School of Public and International Affairs

_____
Vaughn Shannon, PhD
School of Public and International Affairs

_____
Barry Milligan, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Dean of the Graduate School

# ABSTRACT

Wolfe, Christian J. M.A., School of Public and International Affairs, Wright State University, 2021. Clinging to Power: Authoritarian Leaders and Coercive Effectiveness

This study identifies three tactics authoritarian leaders use to attempt to effectively coerce their citizens without losing power: 1) performance legitimacy, 2) nationalist legitimacy, and 3) institutional legitimacy. To demonstrate these tactics of what I call "coercive effectiveness," the author employs a most-different-systems analysis on the regimes of Xi Jinping (2012-2015) and Bashar al-Assad (2000-2004). The author finds that coercion is more likely to be effective under the following conditions: 1) when leaders use economic performance and institutionalist strategies rather than nationalist tactics, 2) when an authoritarian leader climbs the ladder to power rather than inheriting leadership and 3) when a regime is structured around the party rather than those centered on an individual leader. These findings allow policy makers to make more informed decisions for interacting with leaders. For example, the more that a regime centralizes its power, the more likely they will lose their grip on coercion by making themselves the sole target for blame.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACRONYM LIST

ACA – Anti-Corruption Agencies

AFI – Air Force Intelligence

APC – Armored Personnel Carrier

CCDI – Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (China)

CMC – Central Military Commission (China)

CPC – Chinese Communist Party

CYL – Communist Youth League

DIC – Discipline Inspection Commission (China)

GA – Group Authoritarianism

GSD – General Security Directorate (Syria)

KMT – Chinese Nationalist Party, or the Kuomintang of China

MI – Military Intelligence (Syria)

MOI – Ministry of the Interior (Syria)

MOJ – Ministry of Justice (China)

MOS – Ministry of Supervision (China)

MPS – Ministry of Public Security (China)

MSS – Ministry of State Security (Syria)

NCPB – National Corruption Prevention Bureau (China)

PLA – People's Liberation Army (China)

PRC – People's Republic of China

PSC – Politburo Standing Committee (China)

PSD – Political Security Directorate (Syria)

RG – the Republican Guard (Syria)

RPA – Religious Patriotic Associations

SAA – Syrian Arab Army

SANA – Syrian Arab News Agency

SAR – Syrian Arab Republic

SOE – State-owned Enterprise

SPP – Supreme People's Procuratorate (China)

SSNP – Syrian Social National Party

SSSC – Supreme State Security Court (Syria)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to take this moment to acknowledge several people who were influential in writing this thesis. First, my chair and advisor, Dr. Laura Luehrmann. Throughout this process Dr. Luehrmann was a constant source of support and encouragement. Her advice and expertise helped me in developing ideas and exploring this concept. Dr. Luehrmann was always encouraging me to be my best, highlighting my strengths and coaching up my weaknesses. I enjoyed getting to know her better through this process and will always look back fondly at the time we spent together.

Second, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Vaughn Shannon and Dr. Pramod Kantha for taking the time to read and advise my work. Their support and expertise aided me in writing a better thesis and improving on specific areas. I will always be grateful for their support. I would also like to thank the members of my cohort as we were all there for each other and constantly motivating each other to remain committed to our work.

Finally, I want to thank my wife and best friend Kimberly Wolfe. Kim has been there with me from the very beginning of this process. She has provided feedback and encouragement that was beneficial to finishing this thesis. I am happy to have her in my life and I am excited about what our futures have in store for us.

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**The problem of coercion in authoritarian regimes**

The resiliency and legitimacy of authoritarian regimes have been a point of interest for political scientists. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was hope the era of authoritarianism was coming to an end. In the *End of History and the Last Man,* Francis Fukuyama argued that the era of democracy was likely the last stage of history, meaning that the time of authoritarian regimes was over, and states would begin to transform into democracies and not revert into authoritarian regimes. Despite the many state transitions to democracy in the 1990s and the early 2000s, the duration and resiliency of authoritarian states have become a cause for concern.

While some regimes have followed the path to democratization, others have remained resilient. There has been a dramatic decline in Western democratic values as populist leaders have emerged worldwide (Abramowitz, 2018; Armingeon & Guthmann, 2013). Many states have found means to appear democratic but remain authoritarian. Furthermore, the resiliency of personalist leaders and single-party regimes have proven to be a challenge to the influence of liberalism around the world as their regimes have been able to resist the transition to democracy.

According to a Freedom House report, in 2019, human freedom was in its 15th year of decline (2021). Even nations such as India and the United States, two of the largest democracies in the world, saw significant crackdowns on civil liberties and ethnic minorities appeared to suffer the most from the decline of freedom. This trend of rising autocracies and decline in stable democracies has led to concern for the future of civil liberties around the world.

The recent decline in democratic values and the rise in nationalist and populist ideologies have taken many scholars aback (Repucci, 2020). These phenomena have brought great interest to the nature of authoritarian resiliency and the figures and ideologies that prop up these regimes. Closely tied to authoritarian legitimacy and durability are coercion and coercive institutions, which play a significant role in maintaining autocratic legitimacy. This research seeks to explain how these autocratic regimes have remained intact and how these personalist leaders utilize coercion. What are the coercive strategies employed to maintain their legitimacy? Under what conditions do leaders remain in power despite using and abusing coercion?

Throughout the literature, there are several explanations for how authoritarian leaders cement their legitimacy. These include performance legitimacy, ideological legitimacy, and institutional legitimacy. However, there has been little research done to determine the coercive effectiveness of authoritarian leaders and to what extent do these mechanisms or strategies impact coercive effectiveness. The focus of this thesis is to understand this phenomenon.

This thesis conducts a comparative analysis by looking at three factors (performance legitimacy, ideological legitimacy, and institutional legitimacy) to understand what best explains the phenomena of coercive effectiveness. This study relies on a Most Different Systems (MDS) design to test and examine these factors in more detail. The study will examine two cases of authoritarian leaders at the beginning of their rule: Xi Jinping in China (2012-2016) and Bashar al-Assad in Syria (2000-2004).

This analysis aims to contribute a more profound understanding within the literature on how autocratic leaders utilize coercive effectiveness and avoid negative

repercussions. The intention is neither to empathize with autocrats nor to justify their actions. Instead, by understanding this phenomenon in more detail, researchers and policymakers may have a better means of dealing with authoritarian regimes and promoting democratic interests.

**A Working Definition of Coercion**

For this study, it is vital to establish a working definition of what is meant by coercion. Every regime has some level of coercion. The use of force is necessary for the implementation of some laws and policies. For example, it is not enough to place a speed limit sign on the side of the road to expect citizens to follow the speed limit. It is far more effective to have police officers and state troopers observe the roads and punish those who fail to comply with the speed limit using fines and the eventual taking away of a license. This is coercion, but it is viewed as necessary to maintain order on the roadway.

When one speaks about coercion in politics, they are speaking to a spectrum of coercion. One spectrum of coercion is very lenient, while the other is very extreme. The latter aspect of this is spectrum of coercion is the focus of this study. Understanding what this extreme end of coercion looks like is essential for this analysis. Therefore, coercion can be identified with actions such as: unfair trials and coerced confessions, the lack of freedom of assembly, unwarranted imprisonment and disappearances, censorship of speech and expression, control over media outlets, use of violence to condemn protests and other forms of political expression, the use of executions and torture, and the use of propaganda to force a people to adhere to a dominant ideology. These are the various forms of coercion that this study examines.

Acts of coercion can take place on two dimensions: explicit coercion and implicit coercion. Explicit coercion is the direct use of force. This is obvious and easier to identify, such as the use of torture or censorship. Implicit coercion is a less conspicuous or hidden use of force. This can be specific tactics or behavior that has been implemented for so long that the citizens no longer recognize the coercion. The focus of this study will be on explicit coercion instead of implicit coercion.

It is also essential to define what is meant by coercive effectiveness. Coercive effectiveness is when a leader successfully uses explicit coercion to ward off threats to their legitimacy. By doing so, the leader uses coercive strategies, which can be understood as a combination of mechanisms or concepts capable of justifying coercion. These can take the form of performance legitimacy, ideological legitimacy, or institutional legitimacy that serve the leader in warding off threats. Coercive effectiveness is concerned not so much with the actual legitimacy of a leader but rather with the longevity of a leader. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand which strategies or combination of strategies best affects coercive effectiveness.

**Overview from the Literature**

*Authoritarian resiliency*

Discussions of authoritarian resiliency involve an understanding of legitimacy. Legitimacy, the belief in a government's right to authority, is the basis for any state's rule and ability to use force (Weber, 2002; Turner, 1992). Research indicates that legitimacy can shape an authoritarian regime's means of rule and its susceptibility to external pressure (Grauvogel & Soest 2014, 637; Smith 2007, 31). Furthermore, it is the durability

and stability of a regime that determines its strength as a government (Gryzmala-Busse, 2011).

Central to the survival of an authoritarian regime, or its durability, is its ability to ward off threats to legitimacy. When a problem arises, the regime must avoid it or resolve it to ensure its survival (durability), and how it can handle the crisis will determine its stability (Slater & Fenner, 2011). As Slater and Fenner (2011) observe, while most states (they observe Zimbabwe) can avoid a crisis, its inability to overcome threats affects the overall stability of that regime. Often the primary mechanism for dealing with a crisis in an authoritarian regime is *coercion* (Bellin, 2004). Thus, the use of coercion may play an essential role in determining the survivability of an authoritarian regime.

The use of coercion is risky for authoritarian regimes, however, as there can be unintended consequences of using extreme force to ward off threats. Mass anti-corruption campaigns, for example, are often expensive and require loyal and well-funded institutions or intelligence units to crack down on specific individuals (Markowitz, 2017). Because of this, authoritarian leaders tend to craft their coercive institutions around the particular threats they face (Greitens, 2016). These tactics also run the risk of sparking division within the ruling elites and infuriating the masses, leading to protests and revolt. As the threats differ, the uses of coercion vary to better combat the threats to legitimacy.

The literature on autocracies has identified multiple authoritarian regime types with varying levels of resilience, such as military, single-party, and personalist regimes. The most resilient regime is the single-party regime due to its control over access to power and the ability to distribute its benefits to the members of a state (Geddes, 1999). A personalist regime is centered around a single, charismatic, competent individual who

5

arises when a single-party or military regime cannot assert its autonomy to prevent the leader from taking complete control (Geddes, 1999). The personalist leader can rely on their charisma, lineage, or status to influence the regime in their favor and control the means of power. The rise of a personalist leader is common and often unavoidable.

There is disagreement among scholars on exactly how authoritarians successfully employ coercion, seemingly without consequences. At the core of this debate emerges three approaches or perspectives: the perspective from structuralism, the perspective from rationalism, and the perspective from culture. The approach from structuralism often takes the form of institutionalism. Institutionalism states that some specific agencies or institutions are adaptable and able to address threats as they emerge (Nathan, 2003). The diversity and specialization of institutions prepare them in a way to deal with specific threats that arise. The regime can build strong institutions that lead to stability and, therefore durability, and the ability to use coercion without it harming the legitimacy of the regime.

The rational perspective argues that human beings and states are driven by the desire to improve their optimal social outcomes (Lichbach & Zuckerman, 2009). Instead, those systems are driven to do what is best for them or improve their conditions. A common form of rationalism in the literature is performance legitimacy, which argues that authoritarian leaders can justify their rule by delivering on economic goals and promises (Zhu, 2011). This perspective argues that authoritarian leaders who can deliver on economic goals are able to deploy coercive effectiveness.

The third approach comes from cultural studies, which argue that there are specific norms, values, and beliefs that influence a regime so that it justifies coercion.

David Beetham argues that it is the historical roots and culture that lend to authoritarian legitimacy (1991; 2012). It is because of a specific type of culture or religious background that predisposes the people of a regime to authoritarian rule and serves to create an in-group/out-group mentality where the use of coercion is justified against those who do not identify with the group (Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005).

Most authoritarian regimes are focused on warding off threats to their legitimacy, whether internally or externally. Threats come in various forms, and while the literature provides explanations as to which mechanisms authoritarians use to deal with these threats, there is still a need to understand the conditions that allow authoritarians to utilize coercive effectiveness. These different strategies and mechanisms that support an authoritarian regime are known throughout the literature as performance legitimacy (Zhu 2011, 124), ideological legitimacy (Anderson 1984, 15), and institutionalism (Nathan, 2003). This study seeks to understand which combination of conditions contributes to coercive effectiveness.

*Performance Legitimacy*

Rational choice theorists argue that human beings make decisions based on their optimal social outcomes, or rather, what is in their best interest (Lichbach & Zuckerman, 2009). Authoritarian leaders can rely on providing economic opportunities to satisfy the needs of their people, thus justifying their regime on fulfilling economic goals and promises. Performance legitimacy is a model for sustaining legitimacy by accomplishing concrete economic and social goals that justify a state's rule (Zhu 2011). Authoritarian leaders are capable of sustaining their rule through how well their government performs. If the state can build a stable economy, provide jobs, healthcare, and overall better quality

of life, masses and elites are more likely to go along with the demands of the regime (Teti et al. 2017).

While performance can justify the autocrat's regime and ease tension within the state, it can also hurt legitimacy if the autocrat fails to supply said promises. Much of the popular support that a leader needs, both locally and nationally, comes from the ability to deliver economically (Landry, Lü and Duan, 2018; Naughton & Yang 2004). This garners support from the people and the other institutions of power that hold a regime together. Thus, authoritarian states target specific economic goals and promises that will specifically increase their legitimacy within their nation.

Performance legitimacy is achieved when an authoritarian regime can identify the economic needs of a nation, then crafting specific policies that help address those needs. These policies are then implemented and measured through their ability to accomplish goals such as GDP growth, job creation, and satisfaction of the system. This study will look at how leaders organized and implemented policies to accomplish goals as a means of coercive effectiveness. The ability to complete these goals will determine if performance legitimacy was successful in the given regime.

*Ideological Legitimacy*

Culturalists argue that specific norms, values, and beliefs reinforce a regime's legitimacy. They view a regime as legitimate if it upholds the shared values of a nation or culture. This reliance on beliefs such as myth, religion, and ideologies are also known as ideological legitimacy, a model for sustaining power based on a shared ideology (Zhu, 2011; Zhao, 2016). Belief systems such as Jucheism in North Korea deify the leader and create a familial culture that treats the authoritarian leader as a father figure (David-West,

2011). Political psychology has observed the phenomenon of Group Authoritarianism (Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005), which states that certain cultures or ideologies prime people over centuries to be more accepting of authoritarian rule than others. Samuel Huntington in his work *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) argued that conflicts around the world would be primarily influenced by culture rather than states. Beliefs can play an important role in shaping how regimes are structured or institutions formed. One of the most common and dominant forms of ideological legitimacy can be expressed as nationalism.

Nationalism came to prominence during the Romantic era as states became more secular in their orientation. Nationalism is the belief that the political and national unit should be congruent (Gellner, 1983), meaning that the leaders of a state should share the same cultural, national, or ethnic background as the citizens they rule. These nationalist beliefs have more in common with kin and religion than politics in that they appeal to a shared sentiment (Anderson, 1983). The nationalist sentiment serves as a litmus test for leaders and governments as it can be used to justify the rule of a regime. These sentiments are often motivated by in-group/out-group dynamics as the more an individual identifies with the group or state the stronger their sense of belonging is (Druckman, 1994; Duckitt, 1989). The more that a group identifies together the more likely an authoritarian leader or party can justify their legitimacy (Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005).

One subset of nationalism is populist nationalism, a movement that originates from the people, or masses. This sentiment is triggered by the emotions and slight experienced by the populace when there is division between them and the elites (Mudde, 2004). A populist nationalist movement takes place when the masses believe that the

authoritarian leader represents their interests against the corrupt elites and will unite the people against the forces that seek to divide them (Canovan, 1999). Populism is a "thin ideology" meaning that on its own there is not much to populism as an ideology or movement, it is simply the elites versus the masses. Populism is typically combined with other ideologies such as nationalism and is expressed when a populace feel that the elites have betrayed the past or what made their nation strong.

State sponsored nationalism differs from populist nationalism in that it is enacted by the leader or ruling party of a regime. The regime, in response to threats, promotes cultural policies to promote a national identity within the state to support state goals (Park, 2010). Sponsoring nationalism can be the use of national holidays that commemorate past leaders or key movements of a party, the use of imagery of a leader to inspire loyalty, and music or media that presents the ruling party in a positive light. State sponsored nationalism can also take the form of "rally 'round the flag" phenomenon, when a leader gains brief approval in response to specific foreign policy events (Baum, 2002).

State sponsored nationalism will be a focus of this study. This can be measured by examining the use of national holidays and participation, as well as the use of nationalist imagery and media reception. The use of a rally-round-the-flag phenomenon is also of use due to the approval and support that it can provide a leader.

*Praetorian Guards and Coercive Institutions: Institutional Legitimacy*

Some scholars argue that the shape of institutions is the primary predictor for why states remain resilient to democratization or why some states prosper, and others fail (Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A., 2012). The creation and installation of institutions can

determine the durability of a regime. It is a crucial feature of authoritarian regimes to use force to stamp out resentment and enforce the state's laws (Art, 2012). However, leaders do not carry out coercion on their own and instead rely on coercive institutions to suppress challenges to the regime's authority. Coercive institutions include organizations and practices responsible for gathering intelligence and internal security (Greitens, 2013). These can be police forces, bureaucratic institutions, intelligence agencies, and in some cases, the military.

Coercive institutions, however, can pose a threat to the leader because of the institutions' control over intelligence and proximity to the leader or party. In order to prevent these institutions from betraying the leader, authoritarian regimes often deploy a tactic known as coup proofing, the process of dividing responsibilities amongst multiple coercive institutions (Greitens, 2016; Policzer, 2009). Studies have shown that nearly 68 percent of personalist leaders lose their power through a coup d'état (Svolik, 2008). Coup-proofing is a risky activity as research has found that coup-proofing can also lead to rebellion within an authoritarian regime (Powell, 2019). This places a great deal of pressure on authoritarian regimes to build special relationships within their communities to ensure the loyalty of their agencies and institutions (Quinlivan, 1999). The leader further ensures the loyalty of the coercive institution by selecting and recruiting members based on favorable ethnic or social backgrounds, such as Saddam Hussein did when forming his Special Security Dictorate in Iraq (Perito 2003, 5). A coercive institution will consist of individuals who identify most with the will and personality of the leader.

One particular explicit coercive institution is known as the praetorian guards. These are elite military units whose sole purpose is to serve and protect the leader or

ruling party. Gaining the unwavering support of praetorian guards is a top priority and necessary for ruling effectively within their state (Burnell, 2006). Praetorian units are susceptible to conspiracy and eventual military coups, and to ensure their loyalty, they must be paid off with rewards and incentives or adherence to a dominant ideology (McLauchlin, 2010).

Not all authoritarian regimes rely on praetorian guards for their coercive institutions. Whether they are centralized or decentralized, the structure of institutions tends to determine their uses and place in the authoritarian hierarchy. Some states are dominated by their party, having the institutions follow suit in terms of responsibilities and setting the agenda. In other states, they are influenced by a few powerful coercive institutions that have profound control over the government.

These three explanations found in the literature help us analyze how authoritarian regimes maintain their legitimacy. However, less has been written about how these factors impact a leader or regime's coercive effectiveness. This study observes each mechanism and how they were utilized by an authoritarian regime, and their impact on coercive effectiveness. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand if the order or specific combination of factors contributes to authoritarians' coercive effectiveness.

**Methodology and Research Design**

*Factors*

While the literature has identified a variety of factors that influence coercion, this study focuses on three factors: performance legitimacy, nationalist legitimacy, and institutional legitimacy. These three factors will be observed in each case, specifically how were they used to justify coercive actions and appeal to the elites and masses.

Performance legitimacy can be measured by examining the stated goals of a leader or party and observing GDP and unemployment rates in a state, while also examining other significant milestones reached during a given period. This study looks at performance legitimacy and its impact on coercive effectiveness.

```
┌─────────────────┐
│  Performance    │────────┐
└─────────────────┘        │
┌─────────────────┐        ├───┌──────────────────────┐
│    Ideology     │────────────│  Coercive Effectiveness │
└─────────────────┘        │   └──────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐        │
│  Institutions   │────────┘
└─────────────────┘
```
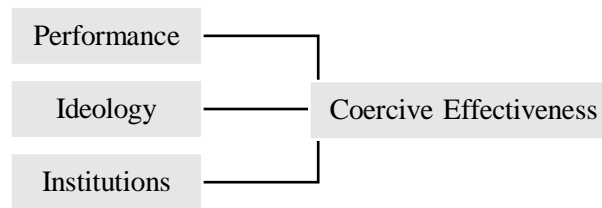
Figure 1.1: Breakdown of Factors

Ideological legitimacy can be measured by examining the stated ideology of the leader or party and how they appealed to this message to gain support. The most common legitimizing belief in authoritarian regimes is nationalism. This can be examined through how a leader uses national holidays, speeches, music, and entertainment in order to garner support from the elites and masses.

A praetorian guard, or praetorianism, is a specific military organization tasked with protecting the dominant party or leader. Praetorian organizations can also be subtle, as legitimate units can behave in a praetorian way such as intelligence agencies or party discipline committees. These organizations prioritize threats to the regime and use coercive action to destabilize the threat. While some authoritarian regimes have praetorian guards, others have detailed and specific coercive institutions with divided responsibilities. This study looks at a case where a praetorian guard is present and one where it is not present and determines its impact on coercive effectiveness.

*Acts of Coercion*

Explicit coercion has been identified as the focus of this study. Actions that are considered explicit are the use of torture, unfair trials, outlawing opposition parties, censorship of the media, executions, restrictions on religious practice and assembly, and restriction on reproductive rights. While numerous factors contribute to coercion, this study focuses on arrests, executions, religious and political restrictions, and media censorship as the main coercive actions to study in each case.

Arrests or executions are often carried out by the coercive institutions that have been identified in this study. They are a direct example of extreme force used against a population. Every authoritarian regime will utilize arrests and executions to silence their opposition, and there are influential organizations such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch* which work to track the number of arrests and specific cases each year.

Restrictions on ideologies such as religion and political parties are often in conflict with authoritarian legitimacy. Religions and political philosophies offer visions and narratives that can run counter to the authoritarian regime's vision, and the more people identify with an opposition party or an opposing religion, it can upset the established order and threaten legitimacy. All authoritarian regimes issue crackdowns and restrictions on opposing ideologies usually mandated by the state and enforced by coercive institutions.

News agencies can offer narratives or reports that threaten the legitimacy of an authoritarian state. Authoritarian regimes often have a state-run agency that serves the regime's narrative, being the mouthpiece of the leader and the party. Internet has created a

challenge to censor speech and alternative narratives that threaten the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes, and coercive institutions work to silence and control these sources through firewalls and cyber tactics.

*Case Selection*

History offers a wide variety of cases to choose from regarding authoritarian regimes and their use of coercion. While the literature provides a number of examples this study has chosen to focus on the regimes of Xi Jinping in China from 2012-2016 and Bashar al-Assad of Syria, from 2000-2004. These years are important as they are the beginning of Xi and Assad's regimes and both will have faced similar challenges in asserting their power.

Both states have similarities in that they are single-party, personalist authoritarian regimes. Both have an extensive history of using coercive tactics such as outlawing ideologies and the use of torture and unfair trials. And both have extensive coercive institutions such as intelligence networks and discipline agencies that work to support the authority and legitimacy of their respective regimes. However, there are a few key differences between these states that are of importance.

Both cases have differences, such as the structure of their regime. In China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the supreme authority in the land. Despite the legacy of Mao, no single person in China can be more important than the party, whereas in Syria every institution and agency exist to prop up the Assad regime. The Ba'athist party in Syria, in comparison to the CCP, is more symbolic in status and the ideology of Ba'athism does not hold the same level of influence as does communism. There is also a difference in terms of praetorian guards, as Syria has the Syrian Republican Guards

(SRG), whereas China has no official praetorian guard and instead has various party institutions.

In China, the research follows the regime of Xi Jinping and will examine his leadership between the years of 2012-2016. As Xi consolidated power, he started to reshape the Chinese government in his image, starting with his anti-corruption campaign in 2012 to weed out political opponents within the party. Becoming President in 2013, Xi Jinping leveraged his position to promote unity within China and spread the regime's influence on a more global scale. All of this led to the removal of term limits for the president (in 2018) and helped enshrine Xi in a seemingly lifetime position of power.

Syria's government is a single-party regime with an autocratic leader, Bashar al-Assad. Assad has cracked down on personal freedoms in Syria. The Syrian Republican Guard as his praetorians serve him and seek to protect Damascus. This study focuses on Assad's early years of power between 2000-2004. During this time, Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, had passed away, and Bashar became the leader of the Syrian government and head of the Ba'athist party. Assad was very diplomatic in foreign policy but domestically continued to engage in coercive activities against the Syrian people. Ba'athism, the dominant ideology of Syria, is a nationalist ideology that excludes others from engagement and favors a specific ethnic and economic group.

There has yet to be a comparative analysis conducted on both China and Syria. While research on authoritarian regimes and coercion is a difficult topic to research, this study aims to contribute to the literature in observing whether institutions or culture impact coercive effectiveness.

| Factors Present | China | Syria |
|---|---|---|
| Performance | Yes | Yes |
| Nationalism | Yes | Yes |
| Praetorianism | No | Yes |

Table 1.1: Factors Present in Each Case

*Methodology*

Due to some of the differences in both cases this study will rely on a Most Different

Systems (MDS) comparative analysis. While the cases differ in terms of structure and use

of institutions, they share a similarity in terms of their factor, that is coercive

effectiveness. Both Xi and Assad differ in the tactics they use to implement coercive

effectiveness, for example economic performance is utilized and prioritized differently in

each state. It is because of their similar outcomes that this study fits an MDS design.

*Hypotheses*

This study will examine three expected findings. The case selection has identified that

there is a praetorian guard present in Syria but not in China. There are also differences in

terms of the structures of the two cases, with China having the regime structured around

the party while Syria is structured around the Assad family. Lastly, Xi Jinping's path to

power was different from the hereditary transition of power experienced by Assad. In

other words, climbing the ladder allows leaders to grow cunning skills that may be more

difficult to obtain through simply inheriting power.

H1 Praetorian versus propaganda: Authoritarian leaders who lack a praetorian guard

will have an extensive propaganda network to reinforce their legitimacy, whereas those

who do have a praetorian guard will lack of an extensive propaganda network. It is

expected that a leader who can utilize propaganda and ideology effectively will not need

to rely on a praetorian guard to check the elites and masses of a state.

17

H2 Party versus personalism: Regimes that are structured around a dominant party will perform better than those structured around a dominant leader in terms of coercive effectiveness. This is because the party serves as more of a symbol than a person can and has the appearance of serving the greater interests of a state, whereas a personalist leader is viewed as acting in their own self-interest. It is expected that leaders who structure their regime around the party or a uniting ideology are more likely implement coercive effectiveness successfully than those who center their regime around themselves.

H3 Path to power: Leaders that must climb the ladder of political power are better able implement coercive effectiveness in contrast to leaders that inherit political power. This is expected because leaders who climb the ladder are viewed as having to work for their position of power. In contrast leaders who inherent their power is viewed as not having to work for their position of power, and therefore are less likely to have coercive effectiveness because they are seen as being selfish or entitled.

**Thesis Organization**

This study consists of four chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on levels of coercion prior to Xi Jinping as well as the essential coercive institutions that are active in China. Then Chapter 2 examines coercion under Xi Jinping, and the factors that contributed to coercive effectiveness. Chapter 3 follows a similar structure to Chapter 2 focusing on Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Chapter 4 conducts an analysis and summary of the findings, discusses limitations with the study, as well as implications for future research.

**Chapter 2: Coercion in China Under Xi Jinping, 2012-2016**

This chapter looks at the beginning of Xi Jinping's rule. It will start by examining the critical coercive institutions active in China and an assessment of what coercion in China was like before Xi. Then the chapter will provide a quick biography of Xi Jinping and his role in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Following that, this chapter examines the use of coercion under Xi Jinping and how the different factors were utilized to limit challenge to his rule.

**Coercive Institutions in China**

In China, there is an essential definitional difference between state institutions and party institutions. State institutions are organizations and departments run by the government, both locally and nationally, and are typically responsible for specific functions within the state. On the other hand, Party institutions are organizations and departments that serve the interest of the party and tend to oversee many programs and policies that overlap with state institutions. Functionally, however, this distinction disappears.

Police and prison systems are major institutions within China's coercive apparatus. Prisons in China have various functions, both by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). The MoJ oversees the CCP's policies throughout the law enforcement in China (Ministry of Justice [MoJ] of the People's Republic of China, 2020). On top of conducting research on law implementation efficiency and interpreting administrative regulations, the MoJ observes the administration of prisons in China and supervises the enforcement of the criminal penalty (MoJ, 2020). The MPS is under the state council in China and is responsible for public

security (Ministry of Public Security [MPS], 2021). The responsibilities of the MPS agencies in China include fighting against terrorist activities, preventing criminal activities, managing gatherings and parades, supervising public information networks, administering registration, and protecting the border (MPS, 2021).

The MoJ and MPS are also responsible for enacting the death penalty in China. According to Amnesty International, while it is not confirmed, China is believed to conduct over a thousand executions per year, more than any other nation-state (2019). However, it is reported that China deploys the use of torture, unfair trials, and other means of execution. Between 2005-2010 China was ranked number one among Iran, Yemen, North Korea, the United States, and Saudi Arabia for executions (Amnesty International, 2011; Death Penalty Information Center, 2019). Executions include the use of firing squads and lethal injections.

According to the MoJ, there are twenty-five institutions and agencies under their supervision (2020). These include the National Police University for Criminal Science, Yancheng Prison, the Bureau of Prison Administration, and the Crime Prevention Research Institute, to name a few. The MoJ exists to implement policies at a state bureaucratic level and serve the CPC Central Committee and the State Council. Their official website states that they accomplish this through extensive research on significant issues and collect public suggestions for better-informed decision making (2020).

The use of cybersecurity and internet censorship is of importance in China. The "Great Firewall" of China is the PRC's attempt to regulate and censor the internet. The purpose of the Great Firewall is to promote the values and interests of the CCP, blocking ideas or narratives that discourage citizens from discovering platforms critical of the

CCP. China's first efforts to censor information on the internet goes back to 1999 when Fang Binxing helped design the "Golden Shield," which was created to detect data that was received or sent and to ban IP addresses and domain names (King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M., 2013). Fang is considered the father of the "Great Firewall" and helped build the foundation for China's ability to censor the internet.

In attempting to control the content of information, China censors calls for public protest and gatherings while letting individual criticisms of the CCP slide (Lu & Zhao, 2018). For example, the Hong Kong protests in 2019 were heavily censored on social media, blocking posts from within and without China (China Digital Network, 2019). Individual criticisms of Xi Jinping or the government from Chinese citizens were left alone, whereas expressions and posts to protest and gather were blocked immediately (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). China also censored criticisms from people of influence outside of China to control foreign impact on public opinion. This is a common tactic deployed by the CCP to silence dissent from the masses.

Advancements in technology have also changed the way China censors the internet. The CCP employed commentators whose primary focus was to guide online discussions in acceptable ways to the CCP (Griffiths, 2019). There have been attempts by the people of China to work around this firewall with one such tactic known as "ren rou sousuo" (human flesh search engine), where web users and bloggers work together to discover the identity of a person in a picture or video (Griffiths, 2019). Controlling information on the internet is made difficult by the span and reach of online content. Even for the Great Firewall, the task of censoring information is far too challenging for any agency to do. The Bo Xilai scandal opened the door to the levels of corruption within

the government, and the issue of corruption came to the forefront in China. This led the CCP to adopt a new strategy for handling information and policing the internet, which would be extrapolated upon by Xi.

China relies on four Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACA) to combat corruption within the party and the government (Quah, 2011). These are the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) or the Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC), the Ministry of Supervision (MOS), the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), and the National Corruption Prevention Bureau (NCPB). Within the CCP, the Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC) focuses on perceived (or alleged) corruption within the party (Yong 2012). The People's Procuratorate oversees prosecution and investigation in the PRC. Like the DIC, the Procuratorate is tasked with removing corruption from within the party (Yong 2012). Corruption in China is tied closely to legitimacy, and anti-corruption campaigns are critical to "purify" the party (Fu, 2017).

The DIC and other agencies serve the interests of the party. The use of anti-corruption campaigns is common practice in communist states, and although they are not very effective at combating corruption, they are effective at removing rivals from the party. While the primary purpose of the DIC is to root out corruption within the CCP, the DIC is not just a statutory law supervision agency. It has responsibilities that go beyond anti-corruption (Yong 2012). DIC leaders are responsible for reviewing those under their authority (Guo 2014), carrying out inspections in various departments such as the State Council. There is also the expectation that the DIC will implement the CCP policies within the departments that it investigates.

The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) in China is also under the supervision of the State Council. Their focus is on countering terrorist activities, border security, managing parades and gatherings, and supervising public information networks (Ministry of Public Security 2020). Similar to the MoJ, the MPS works at the bureaucratic level overseeing multiple departments such as intelligence, prisons, police, and communications. Xi Jinping serves as the head of the State Council which gives him authority over their actions.

The Ministry of State Security (MSS) in China is responsible for protecting the mainland from spies and other means of counterintelligence, similar to the CIA in the United States (Shambaugh, 2007; Eftimiades, 1992). Their focus is directed towards foreign relations and on foreigners entering China, whether for work or travel. The MSS is a highly classified and secretive organization and there is still quite a bit of debate over their actual influence. Their mission is described as protecting the nation from spies and foreign threats meant to overthrow the CCP (Shambaugh, 2007).

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is China's standing military. The PLA is officially under the authority of the Communist Party and is the world's largest standing army with over two million active members. The PLA has been a tool for enforcing the agenda of the CCP in the past (Genevaz, 2015), and while they fight for the security of the nation, they owe their allegiance to the Communist Party. The CCP agenda and ideology flows through the PLA and drives the motivations of the military and the party will often use the military as a means of enforcing its ideology and protecting the party from threats within and without the country (Saich, 2015). It should be no surprise then that Xi Jinping has made strengthening the military an essential part of his regime.

Having the support of the PLA helps the leader protect their interests against the elites and masses who may seek to overthrow their authority.

The PLA and the CCP are connected through the Central Military Commission (CMC), and serves the function of managing human resources and overseeing political commissars, military officers who specialize in political work (Genevaz, 2015). This political work consists of indoctrinating recruits and serving as liaisons for county-level party members and foreign counter-parts (Genevaz, 2015). Hu Jintao stated in 2004 that the PLA's mission was to cement and ensure the rule of the CCP at home and abroad (Mohanty, 2012). The PLA has been an important piece in maintaining party legitimacy in China and protecting it from foreign threats as well. The Communist party has taken steps to ensure the army's loyalty.

These are the key institutions and organizations responsible for coercion in China. In order to understand how these institutions are used to benefit individual leaders, I begin with a brief overview of coercion under Hu Jintao (2002-2012), and then focus on China's current leader, Xi Jinping. The life and philosophy of Xi can shed light on how he used coercion in his early years of office and how this affected his attempts to maintain legitimacy.

**Assessing Coercion in China Prior to Xi Jinping**

The modern Chinese state utilizes coercive tactics to assert its legitimacy. Reports document that the use of coerced confessions, disappearances of dissidents, torture, home raids, and unfair trials are prevalent within China. Due to the variety of coercion in China, to narrow the focus of this study, the use of arrests and prison conditions, treatment of religious groups, and the crackdown on freedom of assembly will be

24

highlighted under Xi Jinping. This examines what these forms of coercion looked like under Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, to establish a basis of coercion.

As a single-party regime, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the primary source of power, and the paths to control come from within the party. From 2002-2012, China was under the leadership of Hu Jintao. Commonly viewed as too conservative and hesitant to take advantage of opportunities such as reforming the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) of China, Hu effectively utilized coercion in his fragmented approach (Mohanty, 2012). There were several pressing issues that Hu consistently faced, such as the growing gap in wealth between China's rich and poor and the problem of corruption in the government. Hu tried combating corruption by initiating his "8 Honors and 8 Shames" campaign, which strived to encourage better behavior within the government (Bandurski, 2007).

While viewed as weak or soft in China, Hu utilized coercion in a fragmented bottom-up approach (Fu & Distelhorst, 2017). The means of coercion were decentralized so that local authorities could discretely distribute coercion, such as intimidating petitioners and activists. In splitting his authority in such a way, Hu hoped that coercive actions in China would not damage the reputation of the CCP and instead shift the blame to these local agencies, which would bear the brunt of the backlash from the Chinese masses. This style had success as a survey in 2012 showed that 91.8% of the people were satisfied with the central government, while only 63.8% were satisfied with the local agencies (Saich). While this saved the image of the CCP, it served to weaken its authority over the local agencies and made Hu look as though he had little power over what they did.

*Arrests, Unfair Trials, and Executions*

Punishment is handled severely in China, as the state relies on the death penalty for criminals and in some cases political opponents. Although not confirmed, it is estimated that China executes over 1,000 people per year (Amnesty International, 2020). The use of capital punishment has been steady for decades with the CCP using the firing squad as one form of execution, and the use of lethal injection becoming more frequent (Amnesty International, 2011). Reasons for issuing the death penalty vary from heinous crimes such as murder to lesser crimes that include non-violent offenses.

Chinese prison systems are a powerful tool of coercion. In 2010 it was estimated that there were roughly 1,656,773 prisoners in China (World Prison Brief, 2020), including men, women, foreigners, and ethnic minorities, being held in 628 prisons. The number of women in prison in China has done nothing but increase over the years. In 2000 it was estimated that there were nearly 47,100 women in the prison system, whereas by 2010, there were an estimated 84,600 women in the prison system (World Prison Brief, 2020).

The penal system in China is under the Bureau of Prison Administration's supervision and is directly under the MOJ. Forced labor, torture, and beatings are common in the Chinese prison system (International Society for Human Rights [ISHR], 2019). Those released from prison often have visible bruises, scars, and other noticeable injuries on the bodies of those in prison (ISHR, 2019). The use of torture to coerce prisoners' confessions is every day and is primarily used against criminal suspects in pre-detention (Amnesty International, 2015). Some standard practices of torture include but are not limited to sleep deprivation, "tiger bench" where prisoners lie flat on a bench and

have bricks tied to their feet, bending their legs backward (Amnesty International, 2015). The use of exposure to extreme heat or cold, and the "hanging restraint chair" where an individual is incapable of leaning backward or forward (Amnesty International, 2015).

Disappearances in China have been documented, and it is believed that the government abducts dissidents and activists. Forced disappearances are when a political agency or a third-party kidnap and abduct a person who opposes the authority and refuses to acknowledge the person's whereabouts (Henckaerts, 2005). This can take place with political opponents who do not adhere to the authority of the party. Many are held in captivity in various detention centers, some even awaiting execution. The use of torture is also a common occurrence in China, as prisoners are coerced into confessions even if they are not valid (Amnesty International, 2019).

*Restrictions on Religious Freedoms*

The issue of religious freedom and religious expression in China has had a long and violent history. This conflict has much to do with the ideological war, as religions offer different competing ideologies and values that are at odds with the Marxist-Leninist Maoism, which is the dominant ideology in China. Christianity and Christian missionaries experienced discrimination and regulations to ban missionaries from working in China and faced harassment from the government (FitzGerald, 1967). In China, the Cultural Revolution was Mao's attempt to revitalize the Marxist revolutionary spirit in the PRC and sought to do away with competing ideologies that challenged the Marxist-Leninist narrative. The Cultural Revolution was violent and saw many churches, mosques, and temples shut down and members coerced into re-education camps (Plänkers, 2011; Zenz, 2019).

Since the Cultural Revolution, there was a desire to ease crackdowns on religions and religious expression. The diversity of religion in China has led to much ethnic tension between the CCP and its citizens. This ranges from Buddhists at 18.2%, Christians 5.1%, Muslims 1.8%, Folk 21.9%, Hindu <1%, Jewish <1%, and non-religious being the most prominent at 52.2% (CIA Fact Book, 2010). Most of China's religious and ethnic tension has been centered around the Tibetans and Uighurs, and Christian missionaries. In 1951, the CCP established the Religious Affairs Bureau to regulate the five recognized religions: Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Taoism, and Buddhism (Schak, 2011). To practice religion and organize in China, citizens must receive permission from the government, and even then, they must receive instruction on how they can manage and conduct themselves.

While these five religions are regulated and recognized in China, there is still tremendous pressure to conform to the dominant ideology. To be a member of the CCP, individuals must be non-religious. This was reaffirmed in 2008 by Wang Zuo'an on an official visit to the United States (Laliberté, 2011). In a 2012 Human Rights Watch report, citizens were limited to practicing their religion at officially approved temples, mosques, and churches. House churches or any other acts of a religious organization that the government did not formally approve were shut down, and members were fined and/or arrested. From 2010-2012 there was also an attempt to crack down on religious activity in Tibet and Xinjiang in the name of security and countering terrorism.

*Restrictions on the Freedom of Assembly*

Freedom of assembly in China has experienced an evolution since the forming of the PRC. There has always been tight control over expression and criticism and the

ability to organize in China (Findlay & Chor-Wing, 1991). While China has opened up in recent years, the ability to freely criticize the CCP is a privilege few have in the PRC. The right to criticize falls into the hands of an elite class of citizens, namely those who held senior positions in the CCP and other sectors of the government, such as Li Rui, a former aide to Mao and senior member of the CCP, who criticized the lack of democratic values in China (McGovern & Merkley, 2020).

The age of the internet has challenged the CCP's ability to control the narrative in the mainland. Although the Great Firewall has been effective, the reach and speed of the internet make it impossible to completely control the narrative (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). Cybersecurity in China directly targets attempts of mobilization or gatherings, preventing protests or other forms of assembly. Attempts to create political parties or platforms are prohibited, as was the case with the arrest of activists like Li Tie (Freedom House, 2013). The Chinese government balances appeals to the UN and Western powers by easing crackdowns on the assembly while also trying to solidify the party's position by silencing opposition.

Hu's fragmented approach to governance allowed local agencies and bureaus to act on their own accord. This eased the tension on the CCP and created an even more favorable image of the party. However, it allowed local parties to operate with less supervision from the party, which led to agencies becoming more violent and the treatment of citizens to worsen. By the end of Hu's term, corruption was viewed as a significant problem for China. According to Transparency International, in 2010, China was ranked 78th out of 178 countries for corruption (2010). This, along with the Bo Xilai

scandal that would unfold in the following years, paved a path for Xi Jinping to rise to power.

**Profile of Xi Jinping**

The following provides a brief overview of Xi Jinping, his life and relation to the CCP, the layout of the CCP, as well as how Xi Jinping used each of the mechanisms (performance, nationalism, and praetorianism) to determine his coercive effectiveness. The following assesses the different coercive institutions in China, and which are most important in assessing coercive effectiveness.

*A Brief Overview of the Life of Xi Jinping*

Xi Jinping was born in 1953, the first Chinese leader born after the revolution. His father, Xi Zhoungxun, was an early and prominent member of the CCP. He grew up during the reign of Mao and lived to see many of his achievements and shortcomings. Xi lived through the Cultural Revolution, eventually joining the Communist Youth League (CYL) and the CCP in 1974. He studied chemical engineering at Tsinghua University and was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Mao.

The rule and ideology of Mao played an essential part in shaping Xi Jinping's political philosophy and his vision for China. The image of Mao is still prevalent in China, his likeness appearing everywhere, including China's currency. His body is on display in Tiananmen Square and is frequently visited this day. Mao's regime is still debated. While he did a lot to bring China out of poverty and modernize China, his Cultural Revolution and attempts to silence dissent were often associated with violence. Although the PRC has never officially apologized for the leader's crimes, the CCP has been pressed to state that Mao was 70% correct and 30% incorrect on issues (Wei, 2011).

Xi Jinping holds Mao in high regard, even though Mao's policies and actions resulted in the imprisonment of Xi's father and the death of his sister (Bandow, 2020). The image and legacy of Mao are too important and central to the founding of the PRC and CCP to distance oneself from Mao would be to hurt the legitimacy of the PRC as a whole. Instead, to be critical of Mao and highlight the brutalities of his regime would be to undo the foundation of the PRC. Xi believes that the people of China should follow in the spirit of Mao and has used his image as a means of legitimizing his regime (Peters, 2017).

Due to his father's status, Xi is considered a "princeling," meaning that he was destined for leadership in the CCP due to his familial connections. Growing up with familial ties to the party, Xi had the opportunity to see how the CCP operates and how tensions and division form amongst the elites (Lam, 2015). Although well-traveled, Xi has never lived outside of China for more than a month. After the death of Mao, Deng Xiaoping took China in a radically different direction in terms of economics and foreign policy. This was meant to open up China to the rest of the world in stark contrast to the isolationist approach of Mao.

In 2007, Xi became a Politburo Standing Committee member (PSC), the most elite political body in China. He was viewed as a potential successor to Hu Jintao and would continue to climb the political ladder. He would also become the Vice President of the Central Military Commission (CMC) later in 2008. Eventually, he made his push and became general secretary of the CCP and would hold this position along with the Vice President of the CMC. This provided Xi with enough power to seize control and deal with any means of opposition to his rule.

Part of Xi's consolidation of power was due to his local grassroots movement and experience from multiple regions of China (Zheng & Chen, 2009). This was in contrast with his opposition, Bo Xilai and Li Keqiang, who were not as well connected with the regions of China as Xi. Another advantage that Xi had over his rivals was his connection to the PLA. This began with his work as a personal secretary in the CMC's office, working for his father's friend, Geng Biao (Zhiyue, 2012; Quah, 2016) and allowing Xi the opportunity to connect with crucial military members and travel to different bases and locations, strengthening his name and image. His experience as Governor of Fujian Province and other cabinet and administrative positions appealed to people as someone well qualified for his position (Zheng & Chen, 2009).

This experience and connections allowed Xi to climb the ranks of the CCP and cement himself within the party. He had an image of being incorruptible (Quah, 2016) and someone who would battle corruption in China. The familial connections of Xi Jinping helped him stand out from his competition (Zheng & Chen, 2009), along with the scandal of Bo Xilai, which seemed to symbolize corruption in China and identify a need for more decisive leadership. It was clear that Xi's life was destined for some leadership role, as his experience gave him the tools and connections he needed to claim power in China. The CCP is the ultimate power source in China as the party oversees all bureaucracies and the PLA.

*The Communist Party in China*

As a single-party authoritarian regime, the Communist Party in China holds a unique position of reverence and authority. The CCP was influenced by the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism and the ideals and leadership of Mao Zedong. The origins of the CCP

are also connected to the nationalist party in China, the KMT, which played an initial role in developing the CCP, although the two would eventually become bitter enemies. Ultimately, the CCP is on par with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and is the dominant authority in China (Steiner 1951).

The CCP controls national policy in China and puts on the mask of a "people's government" (Steiner 1951), being the vanguard of the Chinese working class (Kuo-Chün 1959). The central core and source of authority within the CCP come from the PSC, where many party elites are seated (Köllner 2013). The CCP sets the standards and expectations for the country while acting on behalf of the people of China, crafting an image of fighting for the working class or the proletariat.

The CCP follows the ideology of Lenin and adheres to the concept of constant revolution or permanent revolution, meaning that the process of establishing a communist state will be filled with contradictions and continue the dialectical materialist process (Galway 2019). The philosophy of Marxism-Leninism is at the core of Chinese communist thought, and while there have been disagreements and discussions concerning the role of Marxism in China, this brand of communism remains key to the CCP. Furthermore, the CCP adheres to the Leninist structure despite political reforms and adaptations made over the years (Saich 2015).

The party demands a lot from its citizens, mainly that the "individual is subordinate to the organization, the minority subordinate to the Central Committee" (Saich 2015, 85). The CCP strives for collective leadership, wanting to avoid the trappings of what happened under Chairman Mao and the cult of personality that embodied his regime. The party always takes precedence in the Chinese state. The CCP

will is more significant than one person, despite the level of charisma and influence they may have.

**Coercion under Xi Jinping 2012-2016**

Coercion under Xi Jinping in many ways continued the trends and tactics from previous regimes, such as the death penalty and crackdowns on religion. However, with Xi's push to centralize power in China and create a unified China, there was an increase in coercive tactics. The government continued to increase surveillance of ethnic minorities and political activism (Freedom House, 2013).

*Arrests, Unfair Trials, and Executions*

On March 14, 2013, Xi was officially named PRC president and began to implement his anti-corruption policies. The discipline and removal of low-tier officials from office, while security forces conducted home-to-home raids, cracking down on grassroots movements and activists, continued under Xi Jinping (Freedom House, 2014). Although the government promised to stop the use of re-education camps, they continued to use alternative means of detention (Freedom House, 2014). Amnesty International reported that approximately sixty-five political activists were arrested for organization, and the government concerted its efforts online shutting down freedom of expression on various websites (Amnesty International, 2015).

Home raids were constant under Xi Jinping, with special emphasis placed on Muslims and members of the Falun Gong spiritual group (Freedom House, 2014). In March of 2013, twenty Uighurs were sentenced to prison for encouraging "splittism", while later that year an English teacher, Wang Hongxia, was sentenced to twelve years in prison for helping Falun Gong members find attorneys (Freedom House, 2014). In

December, Reporter's Without Borders reported that there were roughly thirty-two journalists behind bars (2014). All of this was in an attempt to centralize the power in China under Xi compared to Hu's fragmented approach.

The increasing pace of mass arrests under Xi necessitated the construction of new prisons where prisoners experienced terrible conditions (Tang, 2016). The overcrowded prisons and cells consisted of those imprisoned for activism, corruption, ethnic minorities, and those practicing differing religions. The number of journalists imprisoned in China increased in 2014, as did the number of citizens involved in free speech issues on the internet (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2014). Charges and sentences to prison could include various accounts such as "leaking state secrets" and "encouraging civil unrest" with little to no evidence. As power centralized in the hands of Xi Jinping, so did the number of arrests for those who stood in his way.

*Restrictions on Religious Expression*

Crackdowns on religion increased through Xi Jinping's first years as there was more of an attempt to ban and censor specific sects of Christians and Buddhists in China. There was an intense attempt to curb Islam including the abducting and detaining of Uighurs framed as an effort to win the perceived "culture war" in China (Freedom House, 2015). Various groups were considered in direct opposition to the party politics and philosophy of Xi and the CCP. The freedom to worship and meet for religious activities requires government permission, and those who fail to adhere to the approved practices were met with punishment from the CCP (Koesel, 2014).

In the 1950s, the Religious Patriotic Associations (RPAs) were designed to monitor and guide the five official religions in China and make sure that they adhere to

the policies laid down by the party (Koesel, 2014). Despite these attempts to control and restrict religion in China, they appear to have been in vain. Christianity, for example, has seen growth in China by about 10% per year since 1979 (Albert, 2018). The Tibetans and Uighurs also grew in China despite the pressure from the CCP to crackdown on religious practices.

Focusing on groups like the Falun Gong and Muslims, Xi used this as an opportunity to silence these groups as they have remained stubborn in their opposition to the CCP. According to a Freedom House report, nearly 933 practitioners were arrested between 2013-2016 (Cook, 2017). Xi utilized China's cybersecurity to purge the internet of searches and articles related to the Falun Gong to hinder the group's activity. Xi also crack down on these groups via forced disappearances as many adherents to the group were abducted and held without trial (Cook, 2017). Xi's attempts to rigidly enforce a defined sense of unity in China led to coercive actions against religious groups who stood in opposition to the dominant ideology.

*Restrictions on Freedom to Assembly*

In 2012 there were a series of protests, petitions, and online campaigns led by political activists and Chinese citizens to ensure their rights. The corruption and scandals at work in China, such as the Bo Xilai scandal, left many leftists and liberals feeling disenchanted and helpless from the government and seeking other alternatives (Zheng, 2012). This was met by the CCP reinforcing their security and intelligence units while also increasing their grip on social media (Freedom House, 2013). There were multiple crackdowns on freedom of assembly. For example, in January of 2012, the activist Li Tie was imprisoned for ten years for starting the China Social Democracy Party (Freedom

House 2013) and Cao Haibo, who also attempted to start an online political party. The number of arrests of Tibetans, Uighurs, Christians, journalists, and activists was believed to be over 10,000 (Freedom House, 2013).

Coming into office, Xi Jinping replaced members of the PSC with members that would remain loyal to him. The government saw many low-tier officials removed and disciplined as part of Xi's initiative to do away with corruption in China. The Bo Xilai scandal took up much of the attention and focus, as he and his wife were facing severe charges. Bo was a prominent member of the PSC and was leading his own campaign for office against Xi (Saich, 2015). He was a serious candidate who offered a real challenge to Xi Jinping until his sudden fall from fame. This was brought on by his wife

China focused on cracking down on the internet, blocking popular websites such as Facebook and Twitter (Xu, Mao, & Halderman, 2011; Wang & Mark, 2015). Xi gave a speech to party members, encouraging them to "wage a war over public opinion." Emphasizing the importance of Marxism as core to the governing body, Xi focused on preventing other ideologies from spreading in China and turning people away from the Marxist spirit. Realizing that the Cold War between the US and USSR was a cultural one, Xi believed that the United States could attack the Soviet Union through the subversion of culture (Greer, 2019). Journalists, for example, were required to take and pass a "Marxist ideology exam" in order to continue to work in China (Koesel, 2014). The nationalist rhetoric in China and the "pop nationalism" was a part of this culture war. Xi Jinping had weaponized ideology for his cultural war.

Consolidating much of his power in China, Xi led smaller groups to have supervision over policy areas (Freedom House, 2015). In 2015, Xi pushed many policy

changes that affected the right to petition, household registration, and laws on domestic violence. Many of these revisions to the law harmed personal freedoms in China as the legislation passed cracked down on opposition to the party. Xi also pushed the PRC to censor the internet more and continue repressing Tibetans, Uighurs, and other minorities in China (2015).

Attempts to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 was met with swift opposition from security forces. Support for Hong Kong protests was a target for Xi Jinping, as participants were sentenced to prison for seven years, including Beijing lawyer Xu Zhiyoung (Freedom House, 2015). Discipline within the party continued under Xi in 2014, and 2015 as thirty members of the CCP were detained; among them was Xu Caihou, a former general.

The use of coercion seemed to increase under Xi Jinping in his early years of office (Fu & Distelhorst, 2017). Much of this was done in the name of combating corruption and centralizing power. Moving away from the fragmented approach of Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping focused on creating a central, consolidated power in China. While presenting himself as a reformer, much of the old uses of torture and coerced confessions remained prevalent. Xi's vision of a united China and the goal of the CCP to become a global power drove the agenda of his regime. Next, this study discusses each of the factors for maintaining legitimacy as discussed in the literature and determine which were most effective at enabling coercive effectiveness. Through examining the factors of performance legitimacy and nationalist legitimacy this study makes several key observations about Xi Jinping's coercive effectiveness.

**Performance Legitimacy**

Xi Jinping relied on economic performance as a means of supporting his coercive effectiveness. This was due to the specific goals and plans identified by the CCP, that have carried over from successor to successor in China. The CCP has clearly stated objectives, and while there are rivalries in the party there is a unified plan to see the economy develop and grow. This speaks to the strength of a single-party regime.

Performance legitimacy is a model for sustaining longevity by accomplishing concrete economic and social goals that justify a state's rule (Zhu, 2011). Being able to deliver on financial promises increases the amount of trust that the citizens of a regime will put in the leader. This can be measured by examining the leader's promises and economic goals and whether they could deliver on them. GDP growth, job opportunities, and other satisfaction measurements will be used to show if performance legitimacy positively or negatively impacted Xi's coercive effectiveness.

Since Deng Xiaoping, the main drivers of China's economic growth are state investment and foreign trade (Saich, 2015). The goals campaigned by Xi and his Premier of the State Council, Li Keqiang, were similar to those of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. These were to reform State-Owned Enterprises (SOE's), fight corruption, and reform the financial sector (Saich, 2015). Economic growth had been on the rise by 10% per year since Deng's reforms in the 1980s, and the CCP hoped to double their GDP amount from 2010 by 2021 (Mohanty, 2013). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was a radical plan to increase economic development across various regions, including Africa, Asia, and Europe (Huang, 2016; Wong, 2019). The CCP sets the agenda for economic policy in China.

With much of the economic plans laid out by the CCP, Xi Jinping focused on domestic development. Improving the conditions of the working class in China was a focus for the CCP, and in 2013 at a Politburo meeting, the CCP adopted a more "humanistic model" (Xinhua, 2013). The need to develop the rural areas of China and increase livelihood was a significant issue and one that Xi took on himself. The term "Chinese Dream" had frequently appeared in speeches and articles all around the world. Although Xi did not originate the term, he embraced it, stating that "rejuvenating the Chinese nation is the greatest Chinese Dream" (Mohanty, 2013). Xi first mentioned this Chinese Dream while visiting the National Historical Museum, and again nine times on March 17, 2013, in his concluding speech after becoming President (Mohanty, 2013).

The Chinese Dream became a part of Xi's regime and was a testament to the hard work that would continue to go into the Chinese economy to reach its doubled GDP by 2021. The CCP placed pressure on Xi to maintain many of the previous economic goals laid out by the previous administration, hoping that Xi's stronger character and vision would compensate for the weaker character of Hu Jintao (Saich, 2015). Since 2005, income inequality had risen to high levels and became a point of tension between the elites and masses in China (Xie & Zhou, 2014). Xi made it a point in his campaign and early years to guide the economic development to fruition and to fight corruption within the government at all levels.

The reception of Xi Jinping appeared positive, in contrast to the Bo scandal and the perceived weakness of Hu. The masses in China were primarily concerned with corruption, income inequality, and environmental and food safety (Xie & Zhou, 2014). Surveys collected by Zhong and Chen in 2011 show 67.2% of 4,892 participants from

across various regions in China felt that official corruption was a severe problem in China. Xi continued to implement the economic policies and plans of the CCP while utilizing a top-level design as a means of measuring growth in a socialist market reform (He, 2020). Instead, Xi's niche in the Chinese economic model was to become more centralized and holistic and to be more comprehensive in how it went about implementing the economic plans.

According to the World Bank, in 2011 China's GDP was estimated to be around $7.552 trillion, increasing to $8.532 trillion in 2012 as Xi Jinping prepared for office (World Bank, 2020). While Xi stressed the need to adhere to the Marxist ideology and centralize the party, he also emphasized the need to build off of prior successes of the CCP. This included being the largest exporter of goods and to increase trade relations in Asia. From 2012-2015 China saw its GDP grow exponentially reaching $11.062 trillion (World Bank, 2020). The GDP per capita also saw significant development, rising from $6,316.92 in 2012 to $8,147.94 in 2016 (World Bank, 2020). The economic progress China made during Xi's early years was astounding, as the CCP had the goal of reaching over 6% GDP by 2021.

While the CCP has enjoyed economic growth, satisfaction in Xi seemed to approve during his early tenure. A study conducted by Cunningham, Saich, and Turiel found that satisfaction for the Central government (CCP and top leadership) gradually increased from 91.8% to 93.1% by 2016 (2020). Their study found that low-income residents reported higher levels of satisfaction with the government, which means that much of the focus on Xi's urban economic development was effective. Although the struggles with income inequality persisted and so to the environmental concerns, the

overall reaction from the people of China is that economic performance was heading in the right direction under Xi's leadership.

This suggests progress, including in Xi's ability to provide economic support towards healthcare and other developmental areas may have decreased pressure to challenge his coercive actions. China's economic development has continued to trend positively, which is believed to be a significant contributing factor towards both Xi's policies as well as the resilience of the CPP.

| Year | GDP | Net |
|------|-----|-----|
| 2012 | $8.53 Trillion | $0.97 Trillion |
| 2013 | $9.57 Trillion | $1.04 Trillion |
| 2014 | $10.48 Trillion | $0.91 Trillion |
| 2015 | $11.06 Trillion | $0.58 Trillion |
| 2016 | $11.23 Trillion | $0.17 Trillion |

Table 2.1: GDP Per Year in China

Source: The World Bank, Data – China GDP (2020)

| Year | GDP Per Capita | Net |
|------|----------------|-----|
| 2012 | $6,316.92 | $698.79 |
| 2013 | $7,050.65 | $733.73 |
| 2014 | $7,678.60 | $627.95 |
| 2015 | $8,066.94 | $388.34 |
| 2016 | $8,147.94 | $81.00 |

Table 2.2: GDP Per Capita Per Year in China

Source: The World Bank, Data – China GDP Per Capita (2020)

**Party over personality**

Xi frequently utilized state-sponsored nationalism to solidify the dominant ideology in China. Xi was afraid that losing the revolutionary spirit in China would contribute to the collapse of the CCP, just as the Soviet Union lost its way (Mohanty, 2013). Using state-sponsored nationalism in different ways, such as appeals to the past (Mao era), pop nationalism, combating corruption, and iconography, Xi fought the culture war against those who would threaten the party's legitimacy. Ultimately, it is difficult to assess how effective Xi's attempts were. Despite Xi's efforts, separate studies conducted by Al Johnston and Jessica Weiss found that nationalism did not have the impact that Xi intended. While it appears that nationalism may not have resonated with the people as Xi hoped it is hard to determine just how accurate this is.

The use of nationalism and the nationalist sentiment was utilized heavily under Xi Jinping. The actions of a leader are justified if they are acting in the interest of the nationalist sentiment. This reliance on beliefs such as nationalism to justify the rule of a leader is also known as ideological legitimacy, a model for sustaining power based on a shared ideology (Zhu, 2011; Zhao, 2016).

Since being named General Secretary in 2012, Xi Jinping has tried to inspire the people of China by appealing to a mixture of ideologies such as nationalism, communism, and Leninism in the hopes of leading a Maoist revival (Zhao, 2016). Appeals to nationalism, however, can have unexpected consequences in that it opens the regime up to criticism when it does not live up to the nationalist sentiment propagated by the regime. Thus, Xi had to compliment his nationalist rhetoric by pairing it with economic success.

Leninism served as a litmus test for members of the CCP (Zeng, 2016; Zhao, 2016) meant to judge those who could oppose the agenda of Xi's China. During an inspection tour in the Guandong Province in December 2012, Xi spoke about the importance of ideology and that one of the contributing factors to the collapse of the Soviet Union was that members had lost their belief in ideology, stating:

> To dismiss the history of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party, to dismiss Lenin and Stalin, and to dismiss everything else is to engage in historic nihilism, and it confuses our thoughts and undermines the party's organization on all levels.
> [Further] Much has been said about the spirit of the 18th National Party Congress, but it all boils down to one point only, that is, to adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics (Fewsmith, 2013).

Xi's mass anti-corruption campaigns were different from previous predecessors in that they were broader in scope, targeting senior officials as well as junior officials (the "Tigers and Flies"), and in that, it was much more ideological compared to the focuses of past leaders like Hu Jintao and Deng Xiaoping (Quah, 2015). Instead, Xi embraced the role of being a culture warrior and wanted to win the hearts and minds of China's elites and masses. Roughly 40,000 government officials, both high ranking ("Tigers") and local ("Flies"), were disciplined and faced imprisonment in 2013 alone (Hatton, 2014; Quah, 2015).

The use of "Dream Walls" for posters of Xi was conducted like Mao (Mohanty, 2013). A large part of the culture war, Xi did not shy away from Mao's image and symbolic power and fashioned himself after the leader. "Pop nationalism" was every day in the media and music in China. Folk songs were played frequently by pop stars on the radio to tie Xi's likeness to the nationalist sentiment in China (Mohanty, 2013). These bands would throw their support around Xi in the hopes that this would inspire the

Chinese citizens to do the same. The privatization of the music market allowed pop nationalism to become the primary source where state and consumer interacted and experienced the propaganda (Gao, 2015).

The battle against corruption in China was essential to the early years of Xi. Corruption was so widespread that the people of China grew disillusioned with bribery in the government (Quah, 2015). Xi's fast and aggressive approach to fighting corruption was supplemented by populist and nationalist rhetoric to bolster the legitimacy of the party and raise support from the people (Fewsmith, 2013). The Chinese Dream culminated in populist and nationalist rhetoric, appealing to China's past and resiliency against outside pressures and struggles. In order to help boost this support, Xi's regime saw the implementation of Party study sessions and democratic life meetings, meant to ensure unity and purity within the party (Garrick & Bennett, 2018).

Holidays and other national events can be a means of inspiring nationalist pride in a people. Days dedicated to the remembrance of a cause or sacrifice can appeal to the masses' sentiments and give purpose to the ruling regime, as they are fighting to protect the values and culture of a state. There is the belief that the West and Japan have humiliated China and that many of the problems they suffer today are the fault of foreign powers (Gries, 2005). For example, the National Day of the PRC is a significant holiday that honors the victory in the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the PRC in 1949. This is a week-long break in China, giving the people a chance to commemorate the founding of the PRC properly.

Other, less significant holidays honor the CCP and communism in China. These include the CCP Founding Day, PLA Day, Victory Over Japan Day, and National

Memorial Day. Each plays up the significance of Chinese nationalism and the importance of the party. Monuments and buildings help to inspire the ruling ideology in China, such as the Great Hall of the People, the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum, the Mausoleum of Mao, and the National Museum of China. The Mausoleum of Mao is significant because it holds Mao's preserved body for citizens to see and pay their respects.

Nevertheless, despite the many attempts to appeal to the nationalist sentiment in China, studies found that this message did not always resonate with younger Chinese citizens while older generations of China tend to be more patriotic in their beliefs about China. Research conducted by Johnston (in Beijing, at least) (2017) found that younger generations of Chinese citizens were not affected by the nationalist rhetoric. Participants in the study were less likely to agree with the statements "I would prefer to be a Chinese citizen," "China is a better country than most," and "You should support your country even when it is wrong" (Johnston, 2017).

Jessica Chen Weiss (2019) found that while the elites and masses in China may be more hawkish in their foreign policy approach, the overall nationalist sentiment or nationalist identity was shallow amongst citizens. Nationalist rhetoric appeared to resonate with more older and rural citizens, and in one study, female participants were drawn slightly more to nationalist appeals than male participants (Hoffman & Larner, 2013). Thus, the image of nationalism in China may be exaggerated in its effects and attachment to its citizens (Xiaolin, 2017).

The findings show that the nationalist sentiment may not be as vital in China, despite the efforts to appeal to it. Patriotism may resonate more with older generations

than younger ones, but research shows that nationalism is not quite as strong as outside observers have long thought. In terms of coercion, nationalism may not be as great of an explanation as to how Xi employs coercive effectiveness. While Xi waged a culture war in China and wanted to return to the Maoist-Leninism of the past, this did not have the impact he intended as studies (Johnston, 2017; Weiss 2019) have indicated.

**Conclusions**

Despite the nationalist rhetoric of Xi Jinping and the use of specific institutions such as the PLA and ACAs, the primary factor facilitating coercive effectiveness is that of economic performance. It appears that the party and Xi Jinping agree in terms of economic goals and agenda. Being on the same page when it comes to economic goals allows the leader and the party to work together efficiently. Providing jobs and wealth, at least in China, lends credibility to performance legitimacy in that Xi Jinping and the CCP can buy their legitimacy from the people through their ability to provide economic incentives.

**Chapter 3: Coercion in Syria Under Bashar al-Assad, 2000-2004**

This chapter looks at the beginning of Bashar al-Assad's rule. It starts by examining the key coercive institutions that are active in Syria and an assessment of what coercion in Syria was like before Bashar al-Assad. Then the chapter provides a brief overview of Assad's life and the history of the Ba'athist Party. The chapter also looks at coercion under Assad from 2000-2004 and how each of the identified factors impacted coercive effectiveness.

**Coercive Institutions in Syria**

In Syria, there over twenty different state institutions. All government institutions are guided by the direction and ideology of the Ba'ath party and its leader. The leader of this party has total control of these institutions, and all leadership and vision come from the Assad family. While many of these institutions serve different functions and oversight within Syria, such as the Ministry of Education, those institutions that seek to uphold the regime's legitimacy through the means of coercion are of utmost concern here. Perhaps the most important of these would be the Syrian Republican Guard, sometimes known as the Presidential Guard.

The Republican Guard (RG) is an elite fighting unit whose primary objective is to defend the capital of Damascus. The unit was formed in 1976 to combat anti-Syrian Palestinian forces that were attacking the country. In addition to protecting the nation's capital, the RG is tasked with protecting the Assad family and other high-ranking elites within the party from any domestic threats, fulfilling the role of a praetorian guard (MEIB, 2000). The RG military leadership has been deemed to have unquestionable loyalty to the Assad regime. Members of the RG receive a cut of the revenue collected

from the oil fields in Syria (MEIB, 2000). Members of the Assad family have served in the RG, including Bashar himself, only helping to tighten the connection between the elite fighting unit and the ruling family of Syria.

Although in recent years, the RG has become more of a military unit, filling in for where other parts of the Syrian military have been inadequate or falling apart, the RG had a particular function for serving and defending the party's ruling class. The unit is a mechanized force, meaning that they are accompanied by an armored personnel carrier (APC) or heavy vehicle used for transportation and combat, such as a tank (Bielakowski, 2010). The RG usually consists of 25,000-60,000 soldiers and, along with the Syrian army as a whole, is equipped with Russian-type equipment and weapons (Pradhan-Blach, 2012). It is expected for Assad family members to serve for a brief time in the RG, as Bashar did in 1988, and his brother, Maher Al-Assad, currently does.

In Syria, several intelligence institutions work to protect the state from espionage, counter-intelligence, and the safeguarding of information vital to the survival of the Assad regime. These security services are amongst the most important in maintaining the power structure in Syria (Rais, 2004). At one point it is believed that an estimated 1 out of every 153 citizens in Syria works for an intelligence agency (George, 2003). The Political Security Directorate (PSD) is an intelligence force in Syria divided into two units, an Internal Security Department and an External Security Department (Bar, 2006). Part of the PSD's responsibilities is to detect and stop attempts at political dissent and subversion, focusing on foreign influence. This institution also observes and monitors various media platforms and registered political parties and their members (Todd &

Bloch, 2003). This is important for thwarting attempts at overthrowing the regime and keeping tabs on the elite members who may plan to betray the Assad's.

The Military Intelligence (MI) is a significant and influential force in the Syrian government (Bar, 2006). Controlled by the president, the MI has complete oversight of the Military Police in Syria and the Chief of Reconnaissance. These institutions track tactical intelligence and coordinate unconventional warfare tactics such as assassination attempts and terrorism, and other threats to the president.

The General Security Directorate (GSD) is the leading institution responsible for intelligence and is divided into three branches: internal security, external security, and Palestinian affairs (Bar, 2006). The GSD is responsible for surveying and tracking the Ba'ath party and the masses of Syria. This a crucial way to spot discontent amongst the elites and masses and any attempts to overthrow the ruling regime. The various intelligence units in Syria speak to the process of coup proofing, dividing responsibilities amongst institutions, so not one institution becomes too powerful to overthrow the leader (Bar, 2006). Thus, this diversity serves to protect the leader by ensuring that information and security do not flow into one unit or institution.

The Air Force Intelligence (AFI) is the fourth intelligence agency that plays a vital role in supporting the Assad regime. Although the agency is named the Air Force Intelligence, it is less focused on aerial intelligence and focuses on combating and spying on opposition groups (Rathmell, 1996). The agency was founded by Hafez and is considered the most powerful and secretive of the intelligence agencies in Syria (Gambill, 2002), as Hafez was the commander of the Syrian Air Force before the military

coup of 1963. Each of these four military agencies is loyal to Assad and is dedicated to the security of the Assad regime over the security of Syria.

Each of the four intelligence agencies runs the prison systems in Syria. The PSD, MI, GSD, and AFI each have their own detention centers and operate outside the law in Syria. Syrian prisons have faced accusations for failing to implement proper standards for maintaining functioning prisons, violating many of the United Nations codes. Such violations include the prisoner's right to activities to reintegrate them into society and access to health services (United Nations, 1990). These agencies were able to detain any voice of opposition and political activism without a fair trial and hold them for as long as needed.

The judicial system of Syria is subservient to the Assads, and Bashar had free reign to select judges and officials who would remain loyal to the regime. The Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in Syria is responsible for hearing threats to the political and national security (Bellafronto, 2004). The courts in Syria, primarily the SSSC, are presided over by Bashar al-Assad and can be used as a means of cracking down on elite and mass opposition to his rule. It should also be noted that the SSSC is exempted from the rules of procedure (George, 2003), allowing it to operate without consequences.

Since the military coup of 1963 Syria has been under martial law, which has been used to justify the Assad's complete control over the government. The Emergency Law is the legislation that allows Assad to suppress and violate individual liberties laid out in the Syrian constitution as a matter of national emergency (George, 2003). Another vital piece of legislation is the 1958 Law of Associations which oversees the establishment and practice of organizations in Syria which reinforces the Assad regime's grip on political

association (George, 2003; Hinnebusch, 1993). These laws are used to justify Assad's crackdown on the opposition and his right to arrest and imprison those who may oppose his authority.

The police forces in Syria are under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior. There are four divisions of police: the Emergency police, Traffic police, Neighborhood police, and Riot police. The police that are of interest are the Emergency Police and the Riot Police. The Emergency Police are responsible for emergencies and patrols (Cordesman, Nerguzian, & Popescu, 2008), while the Riot Police respond to crowd control and protect diplomatic missions and officials on some occasions in the case of protest (Holliday, 2011). While carrying out law enforcement, the police in Syria are ultimately under the control of the Assad's and serve to enforce his legitimacy.

Another force of institutional coercion within Syria is the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), which has been used as a means of combating dissent within Syria. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the army comprises roughly 200,000 military personnel (2010). Although the SAA has primarily been involved in combating foreign enemies, the SAA has a history of dealing with internal conflict in Syria and is under the command of Bashar al-Assad. While currently, the SAA is rebuilding due to the Syrian civil war, at the time of Bashar's early presidency, they were a large force and accounted for 80% of the Syrian forces (IISS, 2010).

As it did for his father, all power comes from Bashar al-Assad, as each of these organizations and forces answer to him. Assad has oversight over the actions of these institutions, and they prioritize the security and interests of the Assad family over the interests of Syria and its people. Throughout the presidency of Bashar al-Assad, these

institutions are reliable sources for implementing the legitimacy and agenda of the Assad regime. Understanding how these institutions are used to prop up the Assad regime will help in the process of determining how Bashar was successful at coercive effectiveness.

**Assessing Coercion in Syria Prior to Bashar al-Assad**

The Regime of Hafez al-Assad (1971-2000) was a bloody one, known for solving conflicts violently. The infamous Hama massacre of 1982 saw over one thousand citizens' deaths and saw the violent end of the Sunni-led Muslim Brotherhood uprising (Fisk, 2010). The Hama massacre also saw many door-to-door raids, which resulted in the killing of citizens deemed to be a part of the opposition. The SAA committed these acts under General Shafiq Fayadh, a cousin of Hafez. The military and intelligence forces in Syria are often used to silence opposition to the Assad regime.

*Arrests, Unfair Trials, and Executions*

Although there were numerous attempts at reform before Assad, the use of torture in the detention process of political detainees has a long history (Amnesty International, 2001). Tensions between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian security forces escalated to mass killings in the 1980s. This was initiated by the Syrian government outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood from participating in the political scene and, in some cases, making it punishable by death. The ethnic tension and conflict between Arabs and Alawites in Syria have been the cause of many hate crimes and killings before Assad and would continue to be a point of conflict under his presidency (Jasser, 2014; Goldsmith, 2013).

Imprisonment and disappearances have long been concerns within Syria. Hafez al-Assad had released many prisoners in 1998, mainly Jordanians and Lebanese prisoners

who were taken captive due to their political and religious association. Furthermore, the Syrian government also holds relatives of detainees and prisoner's hostage (Amnesty International, 2001). These hostages are meant to take the place of a political target the government was unable to apprehend and used as a means of coercing the target into compiling with the demands of the Syrian regime.

The issue of fair trials is also a concern in Syria, as Military Courts and the SSSC are frequent as a means of apprehending critics of the regime and often face severe sentence punishments. Within these courts, it was common practice for there to be no legal representation present when holding sessions. The sentences in these trials were of significant consequence as many citizens would be sentenced to life in prison or even given the death penalty. These trials also relied on coerced confessions from prisoners who had been tortured and mistreated to support vague charges against them.

The intelligence agencies in Syria have their own prisons and detainment centers, and due to the Emergency Law (martial law), these agencies can make arrests outside of the judicial jurisdiction. The Political Security Directorate (PSD), Military Intelligence (MI), General Security Directorate (GSD), and Air Force Intelligence (AFI) are allowed to arrest and hold citizens on dubious charges and even use torture to coerce confessions in the state military courts (Freedom House, 2001). Security forces in Syria would use a wide variety of surveillance techniques to spy on political targets, and other citizens deemed a threat to the regime's existence. This would be collected and analyzed in the military courts to condemn them of treason and imprisonment.

*Restrictions on Religious Freedom and Ethnic Tension*

Another form of coercion in Syria is the crackdown on religious and political expression. Syria is 50% Arab, 15% Alawite, 10% Kurd, 10% Levantine, and 15% other (CIA World Fact Book, 2021). In 1999 the MI detained hundreds of citizens due to their association with the Muslim Brotherhood and other leftist organizations (Amnesty International, 2001). Bashar would eventually release these detainees in 2000 as a part of his campaign to be the reformer of Syria. These different ethnic groups reveal tension between the Assad's and elites, who are Alawite. The majority of their country is Sunni Muslim, placing them at odds with the Alawite sect, a minority in the region.

Sectarianism has been a driver of conflict between the elites and masses of Syria. While the Syrian government respects religious freedom in its constitution, the emergency law grants Assad powers and loopholes around the constitution. There are religious and ethnic restrictions to power in Syria, for example, to be the president one must be a Muslim and so is the case for other positions of power (Bellafronto, 2004). Alawites are favored for political positions over Sunni Muslims which has led to tension between the elite ruling class and the masses in Syria (Phillips, 2015).

Discrimination against ethnic groups in Syria is commonplace, with Alawites getting privileged positions and the constitution being bended to favor the regime (Balanche, 2005). Such was the case with the election of Bashar al-Assad, as the minimum age was lowered in order for him to be eligible. This refusal to share power was a slight to the Sunni people of the region. This is also the case with the intelligence agencies and army, as high-ranking positions tend to go towards Alawites rather than Sunnis (Abosedra, Fakih, & Haimoun, 2021). Ethnic tensions were exacerbated by the lack of sharing power in Syria and the limit of opportunities to climb the social ladder.

Religious minorities were allowed to practice their religion so long as they did not oppose the Assad regime (Jasser, 2013). Sunni Islam faced many restrictions under the Assad's, with the government having control over selecting Imams and establishing places of worship (Jasser, 2013). The restriction of Imams and Mosques was meant to control and monitor potential opposition to the regime and hinder threats to the Alawite ruling class. Other religious communities such as Jews, Druze, and other Kurds faced similar restrictions on religious and political activity both under Hafez and Bashar al-Assad.

*Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly*

Freedom of expression and the press has long been an issue of concern in Syria. Freedom of Assembly is not allowed in Syria unless the party or persons receive permission from the government through the Ministry of Interior (MOI) (Freedom House, 2001). Before Assad, citizens were reluctant to criticize the government for fear of punishment from the regime. This was partly due to the rule of Hafez and his strong personality. Without the support to form civil institutions and organizations, the masses and elites were less likely to assemble democratically. This did not prevent some groups from trying, however, as religious and political groups formed trying to promote change within Syria.

The media outlets that existed in Syria before Assad were all state-owned and run organizations. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) was established in 1965 and is the primary source of news and information in Syria (George, 2003). The organization is a mouthpiece for the Assad regime and has sided with the party on controversial matters. Other forms of journalism and media have been oppressed and held back from

participating in the production of information. Although the Syrian government technically allowed freedom of expression and media alternatives, the Emergency Law allowed the government and spy networks to crack down on alternative sources.

Many positions within the government and military are given to the Alawite sect over those of the Sunni sect. This favoritism has to do with the Alawites adhering to the French during the founding of the colony and occupation (Absodera, Fakih, & Haimoun, 2021). The lack of power sharing comes as a slight to many Sunni Arabs in the region. Often being denied positions within the military and the government due to their ethnicity this put the Sunnis at odds with the regime as it led to a failure of the social contract in Syria (Makdisi & Soto, 2019). It was the personality and leadership of Hafez al-Assad that prevented this conflict from boiling over and leading to the collapse of the Syrian government.

**Profile of Bashar al-Assad**

Bashar al-Assad attained his power through inheritance familial position. The expectations for him would change dramatically in his life as he was thrust into power following the death of his brother and father. The dynamics of having to work with both the elites, the "Old Guard", of the party and the masses puts Assad in a tough place. It is necessary to examine the life of Assad and his relation to the Ba'athist Party, as well as how he used each of the factors (performance, nationalism, and institutionalism) to determine his coercive effectiveness.

*A Brief Overview of the Life of Bashar al-Assad*

The Assads are members of the Alawite sect, a minority of Shia Islam. Family connections are vital within the party, as key members of the Ba'ath party were relatives

of Hafez al-Assad and would hold positions of power within the Syrian government. Assad's name meant lion in Arabic and was a nickname given to Hafez's father, Ali Sulayman, who officially made it his surname in 1927. Assad was born in 1965 and pursued an education at the University of Damascus, where he would graduate with a degree in medicine in 1988. Shortly after then, he would continue to further his education in London, England. His time in London gave many Western intellectuals and politicians the hope that his exposure to Western culture would have a positive impact on him and possibly influence the Syrian government.

Assad was described as quiet and reserved and came from a big family (McHugo, 2017). His older brother Basel al-Assad was the heir apparent and was expected to rule after his father until his untimely death in a car crash in 1994. This would change Assad's future forever as he was now the heir to the Syrian government and had new, lofty expectations placed on him. His wife, Asma al-Assad, would marry Bashar in 2000 when he assumed office. Asma was born in London, England, to Syrian parents and is considered more liberal in her politics and approach. There was also initial hope that Asma would positively influence her husband and sway his political thinking towards liberalizing and modernizing (McHugo, 2017).

Entering 2000, Assad had only a few years to adopt a new persona, from an aspiring doctor to now the leader of a nation and the Ba'athist party. The Assad family has reigned in Syria since the 1970's. His non-competitive "election" was successful, although pre-ordained.

Assad's father, Hafez, was a controversial leader whose secular policies and approach to governance were at odds with the Muslim Brotherhood and other religious

sects. Some viewed his occasional support of Iran and Saddam Hussein as a betrayal of the Ba'athist movement. His father was also known for having opponents executed, such as General Muhammad Umran, a colleague who helped carry out the coup of 1967 (McHugo, 2017). Hafez had tight control over the party and the state of Syria, and despite frequent challenges from Israel and the West and criticisms from within, he was able to maintain control.

During his first term as president, Bashar al-Assad appealed to mass sentiments by making a stand against corruption within the party and the Syrian government. His inaugural speech appeals to the desire to return to the Golan Heights and maintain peace with Israel. More importantly, he criticized many of the institutions in Syria for their corruption and the need for reform (McHugo, 2017). He also voiced a desire to create better conditions for women, adopt some practices from free-market capitalism, and an appeal to democratic thinking famously saying that "you should not rely solely on the state nor the state solely on you: let us work together as one team (Assad, 2000)." There seemed to be an attempt to liberalize and create a more democratic Syria that would work with the people.

*The Ba'athist Party in Syria*

The Ba'athist party in Syria was founded in 1947 by a teacher, Michel Aflaq. The party has a solid Arab nationalist ideology at its core that could appeal to the masses of Syria who wanted to do away with the European-backed government, specifically influenced by the French. There was a sense that the party was initially genuine in its approach of wanting justice for the citizens of Syria (McHugo, 2017) and provided a voice for those who felt they were unheard by the government of the time. The party was

founded in Damascus, which adds to its legitimacy and authority, being from the capital of Syria and much of the Arab world.

Aflaq was regarded as the potential "Gandhi of Arab Nationalism" (McHugo, 2017). The Ba'ath party would be given the official position of "leader of the state and society" in 1973, which is enshrined in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) constitution (Bar, 2006). The party was primarily responsible for encouraging support from the people and for organizing political activities. The Ba'athist party was seen as a party for the people, helping to restore actual Syrian/Arab nationalist order and values while resisting the West's values and culture.

This would change as the Assads became prominent figures within the party and the overall descent into a single-party authoritarian regime. What was meant to be a middle-class, populist movement was quickly taken over by the military. Hafez al-Assad came into power in 1970 and inherited the economic structure laid out by the previous regime, which relied on land reform and a series of nationalizing the economy and attempting to take control away from the bourgeoisie of Syria (Galvani, 1974). The ideology and philosophy of the Ba'athist party were anti-communist, nationalistic, socialist, secular, and populist in the sense that it wanted to create a government for the Syrian/Arab peoples. This philosophy appealed to very few of the working class of Syria and had more of an impact on the landowners and the merchants of Syria.

The antagonism towards the Western imperialist forces was expressed in Aflaq and Salah Bitar's works, believing that the divide and struggles that Syria was experiencing were the faults of the West (Galvani, 1974). The secularism of the Ba'ath party was initially off-putting to many Muslims but eventually found support in the non-

Sunni peasants and merchants for its emphasis on rural areas and by helping citizens gain membership in the military (McHugo, 2017). Pan-Arab nationalism believes that the Arabian people in the territories from West Asia to North Africa should be united or harmonious, is a core tenant. This Arab nationalism became a litmus test for judging political parties and their claims to rule in Arab lands (Delvin, 1991).

Many of the differences and aspirations of the party began to change with the ascension of the Assad family, particularly Hafez al-Assad. The addition of Alawite members to the party opened an opportunity for Hafez al-Assad, who was only sixteen years old and a recruit of Dr. Wahib al-Ghanim and his socialist vision for Syria (Delvin, 1991). The coup would cause a deep rift between the Syrian Ba'athists of Hafez Al-Assad, the nationalists, and the Ba'athists of Aflaq, the progressives, who would find refuge in Iraq and help solidify the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein.

The Ba'athist party in Syria aspires for unquestioned control, having oversight of the trade unions, implementation, and indoctrination of the schools' ideology. The political parties in Syria are viewed as illegitimate, and they do not hold the leading role over society and the state that the Ba'athist party has. Power is distributed through the Assad's, their family and close relatives, the military, and other prominent members. The party has been at odds internally with Sunni Muslims and different factions and guerrilla groups and externally with its neighbors in Turkey, Israel, and Iraq and the constant pressure and reach of the West (Quinlivan, 1999).

In terms of its hierarchal importance in Syria, the Ba'ath party is more of a symbol of the ruling regime than an entity of power. True power resides in Bashar al-Assad as all institutions, bureaucratic and military, and the Ba'athist party are under his

control. What was meant to be a pan-Arab movement to unite Arab-speaking people in the Middle East and North Africa has been reduced to a means of supporting the Assad legitimacy and agenda.

**Coercion under Assad 2000-2004**

When Bashar al-Assad come into power in 2000, many were hopeful of what his regime could mean for the future of Syria (McHugo, 2017). His inaugural speech included many mentions of reform, a need to open up to the world and perhaps change from many of the coercive measures taken under his father. For example, in his inaugural speech Assad stated that "we are in desperate need of constructive criticism… that we should view each topic from more than one perspective" hinting at lightening up on the restrictions of freedom of speech and assembly (Assad, 2000). He encouraged democratic thinking and the need for coordination, making it appear that his regime would be different than his father's. In truth, the early years of Assad were no different than the previous regime.

*Arrests and Unfair Trials*

In 2000 Assad appeared to hold up to his promises by releasing almost 600 prisoners from the many detention centers in Syria. Furthermore, he closed the infamous Mazzeh prison and welcomed Syrian dissidents back into the country (Freedom House, 2002). The Syrian government even allowed an opposition bloc to form in the country, led by Riad Seif, who believed that it was time to lift the state of emergency and that the single-party system was obsolete. Assad appeared to want to craft a democracy that was true to Syria's history and the people of the region. This was a part of the "Damascus

Spring", a brief period of relaxation from the Syrian government (Library of Congress, 2005).

As opposition groups became too critical of Assad, he returned to the coercive ways of his father. By cracking down on opposition in Syria many reformers were arrested and sentenced to prison to counter the resistance to the old ways. Security agencies arrested dozens of journalists, activists, and other individuals both from the elite and masses who challenged Assad's authority (Freedom House, 2002). It is believed that the Damascus Spring of 2001, while a genuine movement by the Syrian people, was an attempt to oust political rivals and those who were not loyal to the party and the Assad regime, as his control of the government only increased. The year saw numerous arrests of politicians and citizens, including Ma'mun al-Homsi, a deputy in the People's Assembly for his critiques of the Assad regime (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Assad continued the use of torture and execution for his opposition. During his early years in power, the use of torture to coerce confessions was used frequently with opposition members (Freedom House, 2002). Holdings incommunicado were joint as prisoners were utterly cut off from their families, friends and denied access to lawyers (Freedom House, 2002). They could be held for days or, in some cases years, without being released or allowed to contact their family. Family members of prisoners could not make appeals to the government and even faced persecution and imprisonment themselves.

The court systems saw no fundamental changes, and the SSSC still did not allow appeals. Courts under Assad still relied on evidence that was acquired employing torture, and many trials were conducted behind closed doors without proper representation. Many

politicians, including Riad Seif, were sentenced to prison terms of 2 to 10 years due to their criticisms of Assad and the Syrian government (Amnesty International, 2002). Security agencies took extreme measures to ensure the survival of the Assad regime and the successful cementation of Bashar al-Assad's rule in his early years.

According to Amnesty International (2001) common methods for torture were severe beatings by guards in prisons such as the Tadmur Military Prison. Beatings were also exercised in what was known as the "tyre", where the victim is hung up from a tyre and beaten with sticks and cables (Amnesty International, 2001). Torture was practiced as a means of punishment to obtain information and confessions. It was reported that in the Tadmur Prison, for example, former prisoners stated that eye-gouging and crushing fingers were frequent in the prison, and openly embraced the chance of being shot to be put out of their misery (Amnesty International, 2001). The fear of losing legitimacy pushed Assad to revert to the old ways and to crush opposition to his regime (McHugo, 2017).

*Restrictions on Freedom of Religion and Ethnicity*

Despite stated intentions of reform and a Syrian democracy, tensions between the Sunni Arab masses and the Alawite elites was prevalent in Assad's early years of rule. Religious minorities are permitted in Syria but require monitoring and restrictions from the Assad regime (Jasser, 2013). Economic advancements still favored those of the Alawite sect over Sunni Arabs in Syria. Jobs created by Assad's economic policies were limited to the military and intelligence agencies, and many of the high-ranking positions were given to Alawites or any Sunnis who showed great loyalty to Assad (Jasser, 2013).

The Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic extremism were still a target for the Syrian government. At odds with the secularism of the Syrian government, the Muslim Brotherhood had tried for decades to bring about change in Syria through both violence and extremism as well as through democracy and activism (Lund, 2013). By the time Assad came to power in 2000 most of the Brotherhood had been pushed out of Syria and there was little influence remaining. Still, the Assad regime used the Brotherhood's ideology as justification for arrests and crackdowns on groups. Believing that they would rally to overthrow the Ba'athist ideology, Assad (and the "Old Guard") aimed to stop all opposition.

Many of the restrictions and practices under Hafez continued with his son. Conditions did not change much for the Sunni Arabs in Syria, with still having limited access to positions of power and restrictions on how they could organize. Assad may have initially wanted to seek some kind of change but with the elites clinging to the old ways, and signs that the activists in Syria were wanting to do away with many of the laws and practices keeping Assad in permanent power Bashar al-Assad went back to what had supported his father's regime before. However, the strength of Hafez al-Assad's regime was his personality and strong character, which was something that Bashar al-Assad clearly lacked (McHugo, 2017).

*Restrictions on Freedom of Assembly*

While Assad initially allowed some freedom of assembly and independent organizations to organize, this was eventually met with censorship and imprisonment of citizens, as these groups were far too critical of the regime (Freedom House, 2002). Running under the guise of fighting corruption within the administration, Assad utilized

this as a means of cracking down on opposition within and without the government. Thus, speaking out against the government and calling for other means of reform was just a way to oust oneself and become a target by the Assad regime.

When it became clear that these opposition parties and blocs stood for the existing regime, Assad put an end to their freedom of assembly. In 2001 Assad launched a campaign aimed at the reformation groups to intimidate and harass members of the opposition parties forming under his rule. In an interview, Assad stated that "when the consequences of an action affect the stability of the homeland, there are two possibilities: either the perpetrator is a foreign agent acting on behalf of an outside power, or else he is a simple person acting unintentionally… in both cases, a service is being done to a country's enemies, and both are dealt with similar action" (Assad, 2001). It became clear that criticism of the Assad regime would be treated as an attempt to bring down the authority of the land and would be met with swift discipline.

The internet was heavily censored as all servers in Syria were government-operated and controlled. For example, in 2002 the journalist Aziza Sbayni and her sister were arrested on espionage charges and held in detention before being tried by the SSSC (Freedom House, 2003). In 2002 Reporters Without Borders ranked Syria 126 out of 180 for their treatment of journalists and the press's widespread censorship of the media. The news networks in Syria, all state-owned but for a few, witnessed harassment and arrests for specific coverage of Assad. For example, in 2003, two bureau officials were arrested for not omitting criticism of Assad from a US ambassador regarding Syria sponsoring terrorist organizations.

The reliance on the intelligence agencies for cracking down on dissent was prevalent during Assad's early years of power. There was mounting pressure from the "old guard" in Syria, members who served Assad's father, to reverse his open policies and promises he made in 2000 (Zisser, 2003). The government targeted vital individuals who were challenged to Assad's legitimacy and used coercion methods to silence them from travel bans on individuals and their families to abductions and to place them in detention centers.

The use of coercive methods increased slightly under Bashar al-Assad, which was contradictory to his promises of reform. This may have been due to fear that his opening up of the freedom of expression would result in widespread support against him and his regime and encourage insurrection. There was also significant pressure from the military and "old guard" to revert back to the old ways of doing things, as the old guard in Syria were unhappy with the initial reforms in the country. These acts of coercion were an attempt to protect the legitimacy of Assad and to secure his rule for the future. How Assad was able to utilize coercion would rely on how effectively he utilized the mechanisms for reaffirming legitimacy.

**Performance Legitimacy**

The purpose of performance legitimacy is to deliver on economic goals and promises to receive support from the citizens. The more a regime can deliver in terms of growth and jobs, the more likely the people are to ignore or accept coercion enacted by the government. Thus, building a thriving economy and providing resources can be an effective means of coercive effectiveness. From 1990 to 2000 the economy in Syria was often stagnant and poor, with little to no development. Assad made many reforms to the

economy to improve his legitimacy in 2000, yet many of these economic goals fell short for the following reasons.

Prior to Assad's coming to power, the economy in Syria could be described as stagnant with unemployment reaching high levels of more than 25% (State Department, 2004). The two main sources of GDP in Syria are agriculture and oil, making up almost half of Syria's GDP and accounted for roughly a quarter of the labor force (FAO, 2018). At the time Assad came to power, Syria was facing many existential challenges that were domestic, social, and economic (Zisser, 2004). Assad made it a point of emphasis for his regime to build up the economy and create more job opportunities for his people. The government made a concerted effort to trade with other nations and to modernize in a sense. In his inauguration, Assad stressed the need to "move in steady, though gradual, steps towards performing economic changes through the modernization of laws" (2000).

The modernization of the Syrian economy began in 2001 with the legalization of private banks in Syria followed by a request to join the WTO (State Department, 2004). The quality of agriculture and labor in the field were improved by irrigation systems helping to produce cotton, wheat, fruits, and vegetables (State Department, 2004). The industry in Syria is a mixture of traditional crafts such as weaving and modern heavy industry, showing the gradual and slow process of modernizing the economy (Library of Congress, 2005). Much of Assad's policies were attempting to make a change from the previous forty years, yet this process was hindered by lack of trade and resources in Syria. It has been noted that Assad's economic goals were similar to the China model in that they work alongside a single-party regime (Prados & Sharp, 2005).

Assad introduced new investment laws that helped open up the private sector and turn away from an overcrowded public sector (Library of Congress, 2005). Many of the implementations and advancements undertaken by Assad did seem to work from 2001-2004. The economy saw growth and a desire to open up to the world and become more involved. Tourism in Syria actually increased from 1.1 million to 3.2 million in 2002, with people coming mostly from Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq (Library of Congress, 2005). While slow, Assad's economic policies did bring growth and more job opportunities to a desperate region even though they did not fully live up to his expectations (Rais, 2004).

In 1999, the GDP in Syria was estimated at $15.874 billion, while coming into office in 2000 it rose to $19.326 billion (World Bank). Things seemed to be heading in a positive direction as the GDP continued to increase to $21.828 billion by the end of 2003. While unemployment rates hit a high of 11.63% in 2001 there was a gradual decrease in following two years reaching 10.28% in 2003, and even lower following that (Statista, 2021). These numbers were mostly a positive for the Syrian people, although a study conducted by the UN revealed that most of these jobs and benefits created by the economic growth were unevenly distributed and a decline in wages began in 2002 (UNDP, 2018). The lack of real substantial economic change made Assad's reliance on performance legitimacy very sparse.

Part of Assad's struggles with economic reform were tied to regime reform. To drastically liberalize the economy would also run the risk of changing the structure of the government in Syria. The intelligence agencies who have sway over what Bashar al-Assad chooses to do in Syria hindered his ability to get any meaningful economic policies

done (Rais, 2004). A good testament to the meddling of the intelligence agencies in Assad's regime comes from a report from ICG (2004) which found that from 2000 to 2004 Assad issued roughly 1900 decrees, laws, and orders with very few actually implemented. Fear from the ruling elites of losing their control on power created a resistance to economic reform. Despite efforts to clean house with older members and fill their positions with younger bureaucrats who would be loyal to Assad, the economic growth that was needed failed to take form.

A UN report on Syrian economic and labor developments prior to the civil war identified that while there was general positive growth in the economy a number of factors such as a lack of interest in agriculture and industry and improper measures taken by the government went on to have long term negative effects (UNDP, 2018). Many of the jobs created were intelligence related jobs with the four main intelligence agencies in Syria. Alhough there was still substantial growth in terms of opportunities between 2000-2003 which may have contributed to the support of Assad and his policies to open up the socialist market.

Performance legitimacy was not an effective means of coercive effectiveness due to the slow development of the economy and the lack of career prospects. This was also hindered by the lack of support from elites in Syria both within the party and the intelligence agencies. Assad could not effectively deploy performance legitimacy as a way to justify his coercion. Therefore, he would have to rely more on ideological legitimacy and praetorianism to improve his coercive effectiveness.

| Year | GDP | Net |
|------|-----|-----|
| 2000 | $19.33 Billion | $3.456 Billion |
| 2001 | $21.1 Billion | $1.77 Billion |
| 2002 | $21.58 Billion | $0.57 Billion |
| 2003 | $21.83 Billion | $0.25 Billion |
| 2004 | $25.09 Billion | $3.56 Billion |

Table 3.1 GDP Per Year in Syria

Source: The World Bank, Data – Syria GDP (2020)

| Year | GDP Per Capita | Net |
|------|----------------|-----|
| 2000 | $1,177.63 | $186.38 |
| 2001 | $1,258.45 | $80.82 |
| 2002 | $1,263.26 | $4.81 |
| 2003 | $1,253.40 | -$9.86 |
| 2004 | $1,407.18 | $153.78 |

Table 3.2 GDP Per Capita Per Year in Syria

Source: The World Bank, Data – Syria GDP Per Capita (2020)

**Party over personality**

Nationalism promotes that the people of a region and the state should be congruent (Gellner, 1983). When a leader has ideological legitimacy, the actions taken by that leader are justified. Pan-Arabism, the belief that all Arabs should be united in a single state (Rubin, 1991), was present in Syria due to constant pressure from Israel and the US-led war on terror that would affect Assad's early years. Bashar al-Assad had an opportunity to take advantage of Israel and Americans in the Middle East to rally the Arab people of Syria around his regime. Assad is more focused on maintaining coercion through ideological legitimacy than performance legitimacy. This is illustrated by the appeals to Syrianism, the inclusion of parties in the National Progressive Front, and rallying around the flag against foreign nations.

While Pan-Arabism can be considered a failure because it did not unit a single Arab state in the Middle East, the ideology was still present across the states of the Middle East. Assad stated that "the Americans think that our generation is more pragmatic than that of my father, but in reality, our generation shows more commitment to pan-Arab nationalist principles than that of my father" (Zisser, 2006). Early in his presidency, Assad showed a commitment to nationalism and pan-Arabism, as he was viewed as not only the voice of Syria but perceived as a voice for the Arab nation wherever it resided (Zisser, 2006). Not only did Assad espouse pan-Arab rhetoric but also a strong sense of Syrian pride and nationalism. The city of Damascus holds a special seat of significance in Arab history as it was the capital of the Arab Empire from 650 to 750, Salah al-Din, the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, spent much of his life in Syria, and

pre-Islamic history of a Syrian identity which could be used to ground Arab nationalism (Gelvin, 1998).

While pan-Arabism and Syrianism may initially be seen as contradictory, a solid Syrian state was seen as the first step towards Arab unity in the region. The Ba'ath party in Syria attempted to synthesize pan-Arabism with Syrianism and create a new consciousness and identity for the Syrian people. National holidays in Syria speak to this attempt of crafting identity in Syria, such as "the establishment of the Ba'ath party," "Ba'ath Revolution day," "Arab national unity day," and "Independence Day."

Assad identified with being Syrian more than Arab but believed that the Syrian state could be the model for all other Arab states (Zisser, 2006). While Assad tried to promote the Syrian message, it appears that it did not land with his people as he may have hoped. This, coupled with his inability to stand out from the shadow his father cast, made him appear weak to the elites and masses of Syria (Rais, 2004). He could not also deliver on most of the social and political reforms that he promised that lost hope with the Syrian people, both the masses and the elites. The end of the "Damascus Spring" was significant in that it saw Assad revert to the tactics and coercive actions present under his father, Hafez.

To bolster his support in Syria, Assad embraced many of the ideals and beliefs of the Syrian Social-National Party (SSNP), a former rival party that began to yield to Ba'athism in the late 1990s (Zisser, 2006). The Ba'athist party adopted concepts such as "Greater Syria," "Syrian Unity," and "Syrian Nation," and in 2003, Assad lifted the ban on the SSNP and joined the National Progressive Front in Syria (Zisser, 2006). The party's ideals were frequently viewed and expressed online and promoted Syrianism and

nationalism to all viewers on the internet. The nationalist message was also prevalent on television, with shows such as "The Weaver from Mari" promoted the once-great Syrian atmosphere that dominated the lands of old (Zisser, 2006).

The SSNP and other leftist parties operated as satellite parties to the Ba'athist party (Zisser, 2004). Under the National Progressive Front, these parties helped reinforce the regime's legitimacy by appearing to speak on behalf of different groups within Syria who had long been excluded from parliament. Besides these parties in the Front, Assad also pushed the establishment of organizations that represented the interests of various factions of the Syrian population, such as women's groups, union workers, farmers, and other professionals (Zisser, 2004). This allowed other parties to have some form of recognition without stamping on the legitimacy of the leading party.

The presence of Israel is perceived as a threat to Arab unity, as the conflict between Israel-Palestine is close to Syria, and the seizing of the Golan Heights in 1967 was a significant loss for Syria which they never fully recovered (Zisser, 2002). This tension with Israel has been a selling point for the Assad regime as a rally around the flag effect. The threat of Israel serves as a worthwhile diversion, one to focus attention away from the oppression of the Assad regime and two, to garner outside support from around the world (Lawson, 1996). Harsh rhetoric against Israel is also an attempt to reinforce the legitimacy of the Ba'athist regime as it presents Assad as someone willing to stand up to Israel and defend Arabs everywhere.

The stalling of peace talks between Israel and Syria began in 2000, with Syria demanding that Israel leave the Golan Heights and give back the territories taken (Prados & Sharp, 2005). The demands from Syria were rejected outright by Israel and seemed to

increase the tensions between the two states. This tension with Israel gave Assad firm

basis to appear strong to his people and continue supporting his regime as fighting for the

Arab world (Zisser, 2006).

The War on Terror placed tremendous pressure on Syria as the United States was

suspicious of its intentions and loyalties. The US concerted its efforts to push Syria to

better its Syria-Iraq borders for fighters entering the country and stop the backing of

Lebanese and Palestinian terrorist organizations and their attacks on Israel (Prados &

Sharp, 2005). This suspicion and the presence of US forces in the Middle East played

into the nationalist rhetoric of Assad and his regime. The presence of the US made it an

easy target for Syria to critique, an imperial power coming to the Middle East and

reshaping it in its image, drawing comparisons to French occupation in the past.

The attempts to appeal to nationalism in Syria and pan-Arabism during Assad's

regime were an attempt to legitimize him not just as the protector of Syria but the

protector of the Arab world. These attempts were initially tempered by the "Damascus

Spring" of 2000, which saw the creation of various forums and meetings in salons to

discuss politics in Syria. However, pressure from Israel and the presence of the US in the

Middle East helped craft the image of Assad as a true patriot for the pan-Arab cause.

With the shortcomings of the economy, Assad had to rely more on nationalist legitimacy

to justify his coercion and actions in Syria.

**Conclusions**

After reviewing the levels of coercion that are present in Syria, both prior and

during Assad, and looking at the different factors that impact coercive effectiveness there

are interesting patterns that begin to appear. In short, Syria lacked a strong economy for

performance legitimacy to have any sway. Rather, it was through appeals to nationalism

(rallying against US and Israel interests), and the overall effectiveness of the coercive

institutions in Syria that had a greater impact on authoritarian legitimacy.

**Chapter 4: Analysis**

This research aims to examine the notion of coercive effectiveness in two authoritarian regimes, China and Syria. In this chapter, I compare the findings from the case studies. I also examine what contributed most to authoritarian leaders' coercive effectiveness. Some of the factors that explain coercive effectiveness are structural differences, economic factors, and institutionalism.

**Hypothesis 1: Praetorianism versus propaganda**

The first hypothesis expects that authoritarian leaders who lack a praetorian guard will have extensive propaganda networks. This hypothesis holds in the case of China, but not necessarily in Syria. The absence of an official praetorian guard in China seems to be partially due to the success of their propaganda and the economy. Due to the amount of progress the economy has made and the positive response from the masses to the CCP (Cunningham, Saich, & Turial, 2020), Xi Jinping and China have relied heavily on their economic success as a means of legitimacy for coercive actions (Landry, Lü, & Duan, 2018). There are important differences in how this is implemented in both China and Syria, with China relying more on its economy while Syria relies more on their institutions.

In China, nationalism, Maoism, and the ideology of China's past are connected to their economic performance. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a prime example of this, with an emphasis on promoting the "China Model" to other states via trade and access. So much of the BRI is used as propaganda meant to support and establish the Chinese model as the standard to increase other states dependence on China. It also plays a role domestically not only by creating jobs for Chinese citizens but also promoting the

nationalist message and rhetoric at home. The party is very direct and open with the political and economic goals they want to achieve, and it is used as a threshold for measuring success for its leaders and for the citizens of China.

The use of dream walls, communist iconography and pop music were prevalent during the first few years of Xi's rule. Xi Jinping relied heavily on propaganda and the culture war to solidify his rule as a defender of China and the communist model. Along with these attempts, Xi likened himself to Mao as a means of gaining more support from the people of China as Mao's name still holds sway over the masses and even elites. Using his connections and power within the CCP Xi was able to do away with term limits, enshrine his personal philosophy, also referred to as "Xi Jinping Thought," into the CCP constitution, and as a symbol of power for Xi outside the tomb of Mao there is a small shop which sells images and figures of Mao, among them are images of Xi Jinping alongside Mao Zedong.

While China has no official praetorian guard, Xi Jinping was able to make use of institutions to enforce his rule. These include the Anti-corruption Agencies (ACAs) within the Party that are used for officials (or opposition, rather) standing in the way of Xi Jinping. The government also continued cracking down on groups such as the Falun Gong and the creation of political grassroots movements and rival political parties in China. These institutions and the use of propaganda in China helped to ensure the survival of Xi's regime and the installation of his political philosophy. The multiple appeals to nationalism, socialism with Chinese characteristics, and crafting an image similar to Mao were prevalent aspects of Xi's early days in power in order to solidify his legitimacy.

While Syria does have a praetorian guard, there is also a propaganda network prevalent in Syria. This is evident through their use of national holidays which serve to reaffirm the nationalism and ideology of Syria such as "Revolution Day", "October War Anniversary", and the "Corrective Movement". There was also the "rally-around-the-flag" effect in Syria with the US War on Terror, and the continuing presence of Israel to the south. It was easy to blame many of the problems in Syria on the invading Western powers in the region, and that Assad was the defender of the Syrian people and Arab nationalism. Assad also made use of television with shows that made appeals to Syrian nationalism and the internet to direct traffic to articles and websites that reaffirmed his legitimacy on the party and the government (Zisser, 2007).

Although there were a few economic achievements made during Assad's early years, he failed to bring about the economic reform that he initially promised. Part of this was due to Syria's economic climate, relying heavily on oil and agriculture. Sanctions and lack of international support limit Syria's trading partners and hinder Syria's ability to open up other opportunities in the job market leaving jobs in the military and intelligence networks as the primary sources of employment. Many of these jobs are also granted to Alawites over Sunnis which only seeks to increase tension between the two classes.

Another reason Assad was unable to deliver on his economic promises was due to the Old Guard in Syria and other elites who did not seek to reform the regime. Leading members of the intelligence agencies and the Ba'ath party resisted his attempts to reform the economy and the structure of the government. The elite in Syria were afraid of losing their power if radical reforms took place, leaving Assad with no choice but to side with

the elites as they had his best interests in mind. Assad was limited in what he could do for the economy in terms of being sanctioned, having limited resources, and an elite class that worked against his economic policies of reform.

In contrast, China and the CCP are unified in their economic goals during the years of this study. While there is infighting in China, and rivals constantly try to climb the ladder while foiling opposition from taking their spot, there is no doubt that the party sets the agenda. With economic goals such as the BRI, the goal to double GDP in China by 2021, and the 2049 plan the CCP has a vision and plan that is in place regardless of who the leader is. The party is united partially due to the structure of the government in China. In contrast, the Assads are the head of the Syrian regime, and all institutions are built around them and the other ruling elite. Thus, the goals and plans of Assad are pressured to support the regime over the people or even the Ba'athist party. A regime's longevity is a testament to their legitimacy.

The size of China complements their economy. This is an advantage that Syria does not have. Syria is limited due to their terrain and region, mostly relying on oil and agriculture in order to sustain themselves. Most of their jobs are intelligence based or military based, offering fewer opportunities to their citizens. China has a much larger economy and resources to draw upon which gives them a stronger base to rely on. They have far more extensive trade networks and demands which give their citizens more diversity in types of jobs. This is part of the reason why China can lean on their economy for support whereas Syria must turn to alternative means such as nationalism to gain legitimacy.

Xi Jinping has been able to make use of coercion because he could buy the legitimacy from the people with economic performance and opportunity. Since Bashar al-Assad lacked the economic opportunity that the CCP had, he was forced to turn to other alternatives for getting away with coercion such as the SRG and intelligence agencies, most of which were put in place long before he came to power. Economic performance is closely connected to propaganda in China, as they can use progress as a form of justification for their regime's actions. Thus, China lacks the need for a praetorian guard because they can rely on propaganda and economic success to garner support. Syria, on the other hand, lacking a strong economy and resources, must rely more on a praetorian guard and intelligence agencies to limit opposition and promote support. Assad does not have an economy that can buy the support he needs to ward off threats, and instead must rely more on ideology and institutional forces of the Syrian government.

**Hypothesis 2: Party versus personalism**

The second hypothesis expects that regimes structured around a single party will perform better than those structured around the leader. This appears to hold, as the PRC is structured around the party and not the leader whereas in Syria the regime is structured around the leader and not the party. This enables the CCP, and Xi Jinping, to utilize coercive effectiveness more frequently as it is perceived as an entity doing the coercion rather than in Syria where Assad is the figure of the party and thus is perceived as being directly behind acts of coercion.

The institutions that exist in China are there to serve the interests of the party. Economic goals and agenda are set by the party in China regardless of who the leader is. While core leaders had different approaches for how they would implement these policies

the CCP remains the most important governing body in China. With the possible

exception of Mao Zedong, the party in China is larger than any one person, and there are

institutions within the party such as the DIC which prevent many leaders from gaining

too much sway over the party.

Since 2012, Xi Jinping has worked to become the central leading figure in China.

He has drawn on the image of Mao to solidify his legitimacy and has waged a culture war

in China, believing that losing touch with the Maoist-Marxist principles could lead to

collapse. While Xi was able to position himself in a seat of power and has experienced

support from the people and the party he still does not hold the same level of respect and

authority that Mao Zedong did, although Xi has worked to reach this level of admiration.

Also concerning for Xi is that the more he works to centralize his power the more likely

he will be to lose it as his regime becomes more personalistic.

By centralizing his power, Xi Jinping runs the risk of having the anger and

disapproval that was directed at the local agencies in China turned on him. Making his

actions the center of the government Xi is likely to lose legitimacy when problems arise

in China as he will be viewed as the primary leader responsible for the direction of the

country. The excuse of the local agencies will be gone, and with the CCP turning more

into a personalist regime rather than a single party regime Xi Jinping makes himself the

target for blame if things should run awry. Ultimately this will hinder his legitimacy and

ability to take advantage of coercion, making him vulnerable to ambitious politicians

seeking to climb the ladder of the CCP.

The structure in Syria is organized around the Assad family rather than the

Ba'athist party. While the Ba'ath party originally was the driving piece of pan-Arabism

and reform in Syria, the coup of 1970 placed Ba'athism and the pan-Arab movement in lower regard of importance. More of a mouthpiece for the regime, Ba'athism in Syria serves to do away with political opposition and is a means of holding politicians, officials, and other elites subservient to the Assads. It is also a means for cracking down on political opposition and forcing participants to operate within the Ba'athist party and not from a place outside the ruling order or a grassroots movement.

The institutions in Syria, from the intelligence agencies to the SSSC and the Ba'athist party are designed to support Assad. The Air Force Intelligence agency, for example, was formed with the directive of explicitly protecting the Assad family and their power (Gambill, 2002). These institutions operate to serve Assad's interests over the party, elites, and masses of Syria, thus putting Assad at odds with the people of his nation. By placing Assad at the top of the hierarchy and working to serve his interests Assad runs the risk of losing legitimacy when trouble arises internally in Syria, as he makes himself the prime target for the masses to put the blame on for their struggles. The shortcomings of the Ba'athist movement in Syria ultimately serve to hinder Assad in the long run as there is a lack of a symbol or ideology to unite the people of Syria under Assad's regime and against their common enemies.

Ba'athism never had the influence or impact in Syria and the Middle East that communism and the CCP did in China and even other parts of Southeast Asia. This is not to say it had no impact, but it is clear that communism is a far more widespread and reaching ideology than pan-Arabism or Ba'athism desired to be. The coup in 1963 succeeded in putting the Assad's into power but led to the loss of Ba'athism as a uniting ideology, as many of the Syrian citizens saw Assad as taker rather than the heir apparent

to an ideology. Xi Jinping benefits from the influence and appeal of communism and that it resonates with a strong collectivist culture in China. The work of past leaders created a stronger bond and uniting ideology for the Chinese people that lends credibility and legitimacy to Xi's coercive actions. Xi does it for the ideology, whereas Assad does it for his personal gain.

Ultimately, what kept Syria together and made the government efficient, in terms of being able to coerce citizens with little penalty, was the strong personality of Hafez al-Assad. Bashar al-Assad was never meant to rule; he was a medical student who was thrown into power when his older brother and heir apparent, Basel al-Assad, died. Bashar al-Assad has been described as a bit soft and reserved, other depiction portray him as dependent on what the other military elites want, or of a man who initially wanted to bring about reform to Syria but when politicians and activists were critical of his rule and legislation he retreated to the old ways of his father Hafez. While there are varying profiles of Bashar al-Assad and who he is it is clear that they all have in common a description of a person who lacked the personality of his father, and that the regime was structured around the strong personality of Hafez. The efficiency of these institutions and the Syrian government came not from the economy or necessarily the Ba'athist movement but rather from the leadership of Hafez al-Assad, and Bashar al-Assad was not able to quite capture that.

I contend that regimes structured around the party perform better than those structured around the leader as they are able to last longer than personalist regimes. The party serves as a symbol and represents a broader ideology that reaches beyond just the personality of one person. A regime structured around the personality of one person

requires a strong or charismatic quality that transcends life and is able to win people over with either their strength or charisma. When a regime is structured this way, leaders are more likely to possess coercive effectiveness because it is done in the name of the movement or the acting ideology, instead of the interests of one man. The more that Xi Jinping centralizes his power and tries to emulate the following of Mao the more he runs the risk of losing his power, despite the strength he has acquired. Xi Jinping's strength will depend on his ability to sway people with his personality which is harder to do.

|   | China | Syria |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Chinese Communist Party | The leader, Bashar al-Assad |
| 2 | The leader, Xi Jinping | SRG and Intel Agencies |
| 3 | Party Institutions and Military | Bureaucratic Institutions |
| 4 | Bureaucratic Institutions | The Ba'athist Party |

Table 4.1: Hierarchical Structure of Each Regime ranked by Order of Significance

Table 4.1 shows how each regime is structured in both China and Syria. From the most important (CCP in China, and Assad family in Syria) this table illustrates the hierarchies of each regime in terms of significance. In China, the CCP is at the top with all other branches of government and institutions descending from it. Syria, in contrast, has the Assad family at the top. The intelligence agencies, Republican Guard, and the Ba'athist party are positioned to support the Assad regime. In later years outside of the time periods discussed in this study, Xi Jinping is starting to consolidate his grip on power in China and craft a more personalist regime. Eventually this will make him more vulnerable to losing coercive effectiveness as the goals in China become less about the party and more about Xi the person.

Looking at the following five years for Assad and Xi may shed light on what is to be expected when a leader begins to mold a more personalist regime rather than one based on a party. From 2005-2009 the economy in Syria began to fall apart and any progress Assad had made in his early years of rule were now long forgotten. On top of this was the rumblings of the Arab Spring, a series of protests across the Arab world that would be a cause of concern for Assad, eventually plunging Syria into a brutal civil war. The repeated coercive actions practiced by Assad created too many enemies within the state of Syria for him to maintain.

The structure of Syria being centered around Assad rather than the party made him an easier target of blame for what went wrong. The lack of a strong political party or movement hurt Assad's ability to utilize coercive effectiveness as the citizens in Syria knew that the institutions of power were there to serve him and his interests above the people. Furthermore, Assad's grip on power began to loosen as challenges arose that were too difficult for the ideology of pan-Arabism or the coercive institutions to handle. While Assad was able to remain in power during the civil war his weakening regime pushed him to turn to even more coercive actions such as using chemical weapons on his own people.

Had it not been for the support from Russia as well as the strength of the intelligence agencies and SRG, Assad could have met a similar fate to that of his neighbor Saddam Hussein. Thus, this speaks to the importance of coercive effectiveness as although Assad may not be viewed as legitimate in the eyes of some of his citizens, the institutions backing him reaffirm his position. The party and ideology matter in helping to aid a leader's longevity. In China, the fragmented approach of Hu Jintao did appear to

work and protect the image and legitimacy of the CCP. This directed any anger or resentment from the people towards the smaller local agencies, allowing the CCP to avoid much of the protest and blame for shortcomings within China. Xi Jinping, however, appears to be tampering with this.

From 2016-2020 Xi Jinping has done away with term limits in China, enshrined his philosophy into the party constitution, and has increased his use of propaganda and comparisons to the likeness of Mao Zedong. These actions demonstrate that Xi is embracing personalism and shaping the CCP around a more charismatic leader similar to that of Mao rather than allowing the party to serve the role of leader. These actions could bear the consequences of hurting Xi's legitimacy and coercive effectiveness as he becomes an easier target for when problems arise.

Xi Jinping has yet to be really tested as a leader. The protests from Hong Kong and the human rights concerns over the Uighurs will present challenges to his rule. The issue of Taiwan will place him at odds with the United States and will be a testament to his leadership abilities and effectiveness as a ruler. While the economy has been growing in China it has yet to have to deal with a shock or challenge which could hurt the reliance on performance legitimacy. Eventually, the economy will have a period of stagnation or shock and there will be some push back to China's progress. With the advance towards personalism Xi is potentially setting himself up to be the sole target of blame from both the masses as well as ambitious elites who will be eager to climb the ladder of the CCP themselves.

Thus, coercive effectiveness is more potent and durable when a regime is structured over a party rather than personalism. Past research on the resiliency of single-

party regimes (Geddes, 1999) speaks to this as they are the most durable of the authoritarian types. When a leader begins to establish their regime around personalism they are most likely putting themselves at risk of losing coercive effectiveness.

**Hypothesis 3: Paths to power**

The third hypothesis expects that leaders who had to climb the ladder will perform better than those who inherit their power in terms of coercive effectiveness. This is harder to assess in that both leaders faced challenges to their legitimacy and ascension to power. The key difference, however, is in their path. A leader who must climb the ladder will be more efficient at coercive effectiveness than a leader who inherits his power. Xi, while a princeling, had to work and wait for his chance to achieve power in China, moving up from within the CCP. Assad, in contrast, was born into power, and while his older brother Basel al-Assad was the heir apparent Assad still had the system rigged in his favor, with the age for holding office in Syria was changed from 45 to 37 to compensate specifically for him. Another key difference is the predecessors who came before them. Xi, for example, had four predecessors who helped set the agenda for the CCP, in contrast Assad only had one, his father Hafez al-Assad.

Assad had to win over the support of the elites in Syria, mainly the "Old Guard" and those who remained loyal to his father. It was clear that they were loyal to Assad for his name and position and because he was useful to them and not out of a sense of loyalty to Assad as a person. Assad also wanted to win over the masses of Syria, as is apparent with his attempts to open up the Syrian government and his appeals to reform. When it became obvious that the people in Syria wanted to do away with many of the important institutions and legislations that kept Assad in power, such as the Emergency Act, Assad

was forced to seek out the support of the Intelligence Agencies and other elites within the Ba'athist party to ward off threats to his legitimacy. There were also struggles with the economy as many of the economic goals his administration promised were not delivered. What perhaps aided him was the War on Terror and pressure from the United States, as this allowed him to make appeals to Syrian nationalism and the rally-around-the-flag mentality.

Xi Jinping had his own initial challenges that faced him. First, the Bo Xilai scandal highlighted the depth of corruption within the Chinese Communist Party. Corruption eventually provided him a platform to champion his cause as a fighter of corruption. Xi did not face the level of challenges that Assad did, mostly due to how the CCP and the economy were established in China, with the strength of the economy being a crutch to lean on for legitimacy. Xi benefited from being a new face, someone who appeared to have a stronger personality than his predecessor, Hu Jintao, and he seemed to understand and care for the socialist principles that had guided China in the past.

Although he was considered a "princeling" in China and had connections in the government that the average citizen would not have, Xi did not inherit his power. Much of the power that he would obtain was a part of a long process and mentoring that took place throughout his life. While difficult to confirm it appears that from an early age Xi seemed to have a philosophical mind and an interest in politics and China's history. He grew to admire Mao and the ideals of communism and was committed to seeing China thrive as a nation. This admiration and ambition in his character seemed to push him to a career in politics and motivated him to climb the ladder of leadership in China.

Xi's appeal, at least in part, came from his likeness to Mao, his admiration for China's past and his commitment to its future. Taking on the culture war in China, Xi used his position to crackdown on corruption and demonstrate to the Chinese people that he was fighting to restore China's greatness and to carry on the legacy of the CCP. Xi crafted an image that was similar to Mao and used what legitimacy the former leader had left to show that he was a strong leader himself and that he would uphold the principles of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Xi came from a less privileged background and thus in the eyes of his people has the perception of someone who has really worked to earn his place in the CCP. Ultimately, this lends credibility in his ability to make use of coercion in that he was not born into power, but rather had to earn it.

The challenge for Assad is that he was not raised to rule nor does his name command the same level of respect that his father did. He will always be compared to his father, Hafez, and was unable to escape his shadow. His father set the precedent for how to rule in Syria and this hinders Assad for he lacks the type of personality to lead in the same way. In the eyes of his citizens there are those who consider he and his family hijackers of the Ba'athist movement and as someone who did not have to earn his position of power. This ultimately creates a challenge for him when it comes to coercive effectiveness as he is unable to conjure the same charisma and strength as his father.

A leader's past matters. How a leader came to power and what they did to earn that power says a lot to those who are ruled by them, whether elites or masses. Xi's path to leadership is viewed as earned and something he had to work for, whereas for Assad he was gifted the position of power by being a member of the ruling family. Xi's upbringing to his position seemed to mold him for power and to lead with being a part of

the Communist Youth League, shadowing his mentors and getting to travel throughout China and other parts of the world, and being a part of the government. It was as if he was groomed to rule. Assad was of course not meant to hold power; it was meant for his older brother Basel.

I contend that leaders who climb the ladder are more efficient at coercive effectiveness than those who inherit it. Because a leader who must climb the ladder is has the appearance of working for their power and acquiring skills along the way, whereas a leader who inherits their power has the appearance of not having to work for their position. Assad is at risk of losing his power because he inherited it, rather than climbing the ladder to leadership. Leaders who had to earn their position of power are able to garner more support from their people, as it lends a sense of understanding the system better for having to work their way up as Xi Jinping did. Leaders who inherit their position of power almost must work harder to gain legitimacy in the sense that there is something to prove, as they must live up to the previous expectations of their father's or family. Leaders like Assad also cannot escape comparisons to their predecessor which can hinder them in the long run. This is because whatever they do will always be compared to their predecessor and will be judged as a success of failure in how their actions compare to that of their predecessor.

**Institutionalism and Culture**

There has been frequent debate amongst scholars over the role of institutions and culture in shaping coercive effectiveness and authoritarian regimes. Institutionalism argues that leaders can implement coercive effectiveness because the regime has been structured in such a way to do so. Despite the opposition from the elites and masses of a

state an authoritarian leader can survive due to the strength of the institutions in their regime. This is prevalent in the case of Syria, as despite obstacles to Assad's rule the opposition was never quite able to overtake him as the institutions, the various intelligence agencies and SRG, are designed in such a way to ward off threats. The party institutions in the CCP are also highly effective at preventing change and protecting the interests of the party as well as the leader.

Culturalism argues that the primary influence for a regimes coercive effectiveness is due to the certain norms and beliefs that are present within a region. Such beliefs could prime people to be more tolerant of coercion than others, and to even accept authoritarian governments over democratic ones. Syria and China have very deep, rich histories of religion and collectivism that may have primed the minds of their citizens over centuries to be more susceptible to authoritarianism and by extension coercion. The concept of Group Authoritarianism, a psychological phenomenon, posits that certain societies are more likely to lean authoritarian due to the religions and practices present in their country.

This study focused more on institutionalism than culturalism and its impact on coercive effectiveness primarily due to specific intuitions present in each case, such as praetorian guards and single-party regimes. While culture is important and should not be ignored, I contend that institutions play a more immediate impact on how a state operates and what options are available for an authoritarian leader to act on. For example, following the events of Assad's early years of power the state of Syria quickly turned to turmoil. The economy collapsed and the nation was on the verge of civil war. Even today, after much bloodshed and conflict Assad is still in power.

Part of this is due to backing from Russia, and to the lack of resources from the opposition groups. Assad's staying power, however, also speaks to the strength of the institutions which were designed to keep him in power. These different agencies and institutions were not necessarily designed to build strong, vibrant economies nor to bring about democracy. Rather, they were designed (such as the AFI) to protect the Assad's and the other ruling elites of Syria. Both cases speak to the power and influence that institutions can have as they can serve as barriers against change as well as protection from threats. How an institution is designed and implemented can have a profound effect on the legitimacy and longevity of a leader.

While culture certainly plays a role on coercive effectiveness, it is harder to assess the impact of cultural norms on longevity. Beliefs and practices influence how people think and behave and can help explain why some states are more tolerant of coercion than others. Ultimately, this study wanted to focus more on the role that institutions have on coercive effectiveness rather than culture. I contend that institutions have a more profound effect on coercion and how leaders implement coercive tactics than necessarily culture does.

**Limitations and Future Research Implications**

This study aims to contribute to the research on authoritarian regimes and their ability to implement coercive effectiveness. While there is still more to be examined, this study provides a foundation for future work that can be carried on to better understand the nature of authoritarian coercive strategies. A few key observations can be made.

While conducting this study there were a few limitations that were encountered. First, was the difficulty of the topic of study, authoritarian coercion. Authoritarian

regimes design their institutions and networks in such a way as to hide coercion and coercive activities. An example of this would be executions and treatment of prisoners in China. While there are excellent organizations such as *Amnesty International*, *Freedom House*, and the *Death Penalty Information Center* who track executions across the globe with care and precision governments such as the PRC are difficult to obtain information from. Although there are reports from survivors and estimations of executions in China the secrecy around it makes it difficult to obtain confirmed data.

It is also difficult to gauge perceptions of authoritarian regimes from the masses. While a survey would be the best way to gain a sense of how citizens feel about their regime and leader, this is difficult. One reason is that citizens of authoritarian states are less likely to be open about how they feel regarding the leadership of their state. Syrians and Chinese citizens are unlikely to answer how they openly feel about Assad or Xi out of fear of being punished for expressing their opinion. Most replies would remark about how they enjoy living in their country and how much they approve of leadership. The questions would have to be asked in such a way that they can obtain an honest response without the participant feeling that they are putting themselves in danger.

Studies such as those conducted by Cunningham, Saich, and Turial as well as those from the University of Michigan in China, for example, are as close to valid representations of honest opinions of the government in the PRC. Their surveys, however, ask questions related to the perception of the party and bureaucratic institutions and not the leader in question, Xi Jinping. The leaders of regimes are usually not open to criticism and therefore surveys and data will be limited in what they can cover. This is a common challenge to anyone researching authoritarian leaders and their regimes.

Another issue encountered in this study was the time periods for each of the cases. Since the events concerning both Xi and Assad were in the past the research was limited to what could be obtained. Due to the nature of authoritarian regimes, there is a difficulty in studying them as much of their actions will be hidden or covered from outside attention. Trying to understand events that took place years or even decades ago will be difficult to research, but not impossible.

*Future Research Implications*

This study provides a foundation for future work that can be carried on in order to better understand the nature of authoritarian coercive strategies. These include the prospect of implicit coercion, replicating the study with different cases, different authoritarian leaders, and the role of Anti-corruption Campaigns.

This study primarily focused on instances of explicit coercion, coercion that is obvious such as executions, arrests, oppression of religious expression, etc. Implicit coercion is less obvious in nature and could be an area of study for future research. An example of implicit coercion could be happening in China with how Tiananmen Square is covered. In China, there is an entire generation of citizens who have never heard of "Tank Man" or what took place at Tiananmen Square in 1989. The CCP has gone to extreme lengths to remove references or limit Internet searches to the event, thus the younger generations in China are being coerced without even knowing it.

Conducting a psychological study, such as compiling a code book to track words and phrases to assess levels of implicit coercion would be an additional approach. Past studies have identified the phenomena of Group Authoritarianism (Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005) which attempts to explain the justification of authoritarian rule by looking at

dispositions and situational effects in a group. The more a group has certain cultural dispositions such as collectivism or religions like Confucianism the more this will trigger authoritarian complacency. Ultimately, this speaks to the power of in-group/out-group dynamics and its influence on human psychology. Both of the states in this study, China and Syria have levels of group authoritarianism apparent such as being collectivist cultures and having hierarchical religious backgrounds that may lead to the justification of authoritarian rule with Xi and Assad.

Different cases would add to the richness of these findings. This thesis looked at specific single-party authoritarian regimes with emerging personalist leaders. Perhaps looking at different authoritarian state's cases such as Russia or North Korea, or specific different leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Rodrigo Duertre in the Philippines could elaborate more on the findings and explore the concepts in more detail. Looking at leaders who centralize their power, for example, are more likely to lose it is an idea that would be interesting to explore in other cases to further develop it.

**Conclusions**

Looking at the regimes of both Xi Jinping and Bashar al-Assad years later, both were efficient at implementing coercive effectiveness as they have been able to survive the many obstacles they faced. Xi has done away with term limits and looks to be the leader in China for the foreseeable future. "Xi Jinping Thought" has been enshrined into the constitution in China and, although consolidating his power will run the risk of losing legitimacy, now his position of power appears to be firm as the celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. Syria since 2004 has experienced economic and environmental challenges, another "Arab Spring", and civil war. Despite this Bashar al-

Assad has remained in power in Syria and looks to keep it that way. The fact that these leaders continue to lead in their respective states shows an ability to make use of coercion.

There is still more that needs to be done regarding our understanding of how authoritarians continue to lead regimes while engaging in well known, documented campaigns of coercion. This study looked at three different concepts identified in the literature and observed how they were utilized in China and Syria. Examining the leadership of Xi Jinping and Bashar al-Assad led to a few key discoveries of authoritarian coercion and resiliency. Leaders who make use of a propaganda network in place of a praetorian guard, have regimes that are structured around the party and not one individual, and had to climb the ladder to ascension are more likely to take advantage of coercion. The more leaders centralize their power the more likely they are to lose it. And when leaders structure their regime around the party, they perform better than those who do not.

The two most important factors that impact an authoritarian leader's coercive effectiveness are economic performance and institutionalism. While ideologies such as nationalism are important, a regimes ability to buy the legitimacy from their people via economic performance or through the creation of resilient institutions has a greater impact on coercive effectiveness, as observed in the two case studies. The economic achievements that an authoritarian state can provide carry more weight than ideology, and the strength of institutions can create many barriers and structures to democratic transition that reaffirm the authority of a ruling party. This is significant in that able to

affirm their staying power, even if they are not legitimate in the eyes of their citizens, they are secure in terms of their staying power, their longevity.

These findings will need to be repeated and examined to elaborate further on their meanings. Autocracies and their leaders remain resilient to internal and external pressures.  Their ability to employ coercive tactics is a testament to their institutions and economic achievements. It is important for democratic states and researchers to continue to understand how authoritarians utilize coercion as it is a significant component to legitimacy. As democratic principles continue to face challenges around the world, this issue will remain crucial.

REFERENCES

Abramowitz, M. J. (2018). Democracy in Crisis. *Freedom House*.

Abosedra, S., Fakih, A., & Haimoun, N. (2021). *Ethnic Divisions and the Onset of Civil Wars in Syria* (No. 754). GLO Discussion Paper.

Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty.* Currency. Chicago

Albert, E. (2018). Christianity in China. *Council on Foreign Relations.*

Amnesty International (2010). Syria Smothering Freedom of Expression: the Detention of Peaceful Critics," *AI Index*: MDE 24/007/2002, June 6, 2002, http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE240072002

Amnesty International (2011). *China Overview: Death penalty in China.* Web.

Amnesty International (2015). Torture in China: Who, what, why, and how. *Amnesty International.*

Amnesty International (2019). *China Overview.* Web.

Anderson, Benedict (1983). Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism. *Verso*.

Armingeon, K., and K. Guthmann (2013). Democracy in Crisis? The declining support for national democracy in European countries, 2007-2011. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(3), 423-442.

Art, D. (2012). What do we know about authoritarianism after ten years?. *Comparative Politics*, *44*(3), 351-373.

Balanche, F. (2006). *The Alawite religion and the Syrian power*. Paris: Karthala.

Bandow, Doug (2020). Xi Jinping Wants to Become the New Mao. *CATO Institute*.

Bandurski, David (2007). Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces. *China Media Project*. Web.

Bar, S. (2006). Bashar's Syria: The Regime and its Strategic Worldview. *IDC Herzliya: Conference for Policy and Strategy*, 352-445.

Baum, M. A. (2002). The constituent foundations of the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon. *International Studies Quarterly*, *46*(2), 263-298.

Beetham, D. (1991). The Legitimation of Power. *Palgrave MacMillan.*

Beetham, D. (2012). Political legitimacy. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology. Blackwell Publishing, West Sussex*, 120-129.

Bellafronto, C. (2004). Syria. *Freedom House.*

Bielakowski, A. (2010). U.S. Army Mechanized Reconnaissance in the Cold War. *On Point*, 15(4), 34-41.

Burnell, P. (2006). Autocratic Opening to Democracy: Why Legitimacy Matters. *Third World Quarterly*, 27 (4): 545-562.

Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political studies,* 47(1), 2-16.

Chang, C. M. (1950). Communism and Nationalism in China. *Foreign Affairs*, 28(4), 548-564.

*China Digital Times* (2019). The Great Fire Wall: Internet censorship.

CIA World Fact Book (2010). The World Fact Book: East Asia/Southeast Asia: China. *Central Intelligence Agency*.

Cook, S. (2017). Falun Gong: Religious Freedom in China. *Freedom House.*

Cordesman, A. H., Nerguizian, A., & Popescu, I. C. (2008). Israel and Syria: The Military Balance and Prospects of War: The Military Balance and Prospects of War. *ABC-CLIO*.

Cunningham, E., Saich, T., and Turiel, J. (2020). Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time. *Harvard Kennedy School: Ash Center,* Web

David-West, A. (2011). Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chŏng Tasan. *Korean Studies*, 35, 93-121.

Death Penalty Information Center (2019). "Executions Around the World".

Delvin, J. F. (1991). "The Baath Party: Rise and metamorphosis". *The American Historical Review*, 96(5), 1396-1407.

Druckman, D. (1994). "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Group Loyalty: A Social Psychological Perspective". *Mershon International Review*, 38(1), 43-68.

Duckitt, J. (1989). "Authoritarianism and Group Identification: A New View of an Old Construct". *Political Psychology*, 10(1), 63-84.

Eftimiades, N. (1992). "China's Ministry of State Security: Coming of Age in the International Arena". *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, *1992*(2), 1.

FAO (2018). Counting the Cost: Agriculture in Syria after six years of crisis. *FAO in Emergencies,* Web.

Fewsmith, J. (2013). "Xi Jinping's fast start". *China Leadership Monitor*, *41*(3), 4.

Findlay, M., & Chor-Wing, T. (1991). "The Law of Assembly in the People's Republic of China: Implications of the Retreat to Formal Legalism for the Legislative Process in China". *Journal of Law and Society, 18*(3), 365-373. doi:10.2307/1410201

Fisk, R. (2010). *Robert Fisk: freedom, democracy and human rights in Syria.* The Independent.

FitzGerald, C. P. (1967). Religion and China's cultural revolution.

Freedom in the World Report (2013). *Freedom House.*

Freedom in the World Report (2014). *Freedom House.*

Freedom in the World Report (2015). *Freedom House.*

Fry, L. (2011). Chinese Women and Economic Human Rights*, from *Human Rights and Human Welfare.*

Fu, H. 2017. "China's Striking Anti-Corruption Adventure: A Political Journey Towards the Rule of Law?" In Weitseng Chen (ed.), The Beijing Consensus? How China Has Changed the Western Ideas of Law and Economic Development. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*. 249-274

Fu, D. & Distlehorst, G. (2017). Grassroots Participation and Repression under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. *The China Journal*, 79, 100-122.

Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man.* New York: Free Press.

Gavlani, J. (1974). Syria and the Baath Party. *MERIP Reports,* 25, 3-16.

Galway, M. (2019). Permanent Revolution. In Sorace C., Franceschini I., & Loubere N. (Eds.), Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi (pp. 181-188). *Australia: ANU Press*.

Gambill, G. C. (2002). The military-intelligence shakeup in Syria. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, *4*(2).

Gao, Z. (2015). When Nationalism Goes to the Market: The Case of Chinese Patriotic Songs. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *35*(4), 473-488. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146715573079

Garrick, J., & Bennett, Y. (2018). "Xi Jinping Thought": Realisation of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation? China Perspectives, (1-2 (113)), 99-106. doi:10.2307/26531916

Geddes, B. (1999). What do we know about Democratization after 20 Years? *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:115-44.

Gellner, E. (1983; 2006). *Nations and Nationalism.* Cornell University Press.

Gelvin, J. (1998). Divided Loyalties, Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of the Empire. *Berkeley: University of California Press,*

Genevaz, J. (2015). China's People's Liberation Army: The politico-military nexus. *European Union Institute for Security Studies* (EUSS).

George, A. (2003). Syria: neither bread nor freedom. *Zed Books*.

Goldsmith, L. (2013). 'God Wanted Diversity': Alawite Pluralist Ideals and their Integration into Syrian Society 1832-1973. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 40(4), 392-409.

Grauvogel, J. & C. von Soest (2014). Claims to legitimacy count: Why sanctions fail to instigate democratization in authoritarian regimes. *European Journal of Political Research* 53: 635-653.

Greer, T. (2019). Xi Jinping Knows Who His Enemies Are. *Foreign Policy.*

Greitens, S. E. (2013). Coercive Institutions and State Violence Under Authoritarianism. *Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University*.

Greitens, S. E. (2016). Dictators and their Secret Police: coercive institutions and state violence. *New York: Cambridge University Press*.

Gries, P.H. (2005). Nationalism, Indignation, and China's Japan Policy. *SAIS Review of International Affairs 25*(2), 105-114. doi:10.1353/sais.2005.0034.

Griffiths, J. (2019). *The great firewall of China: How to build and control an alternative version of the internet*. Zed Books Ltd.

Gryzmala-Busse, A. (2011). Time will tell? Temporality and the analysis of causal mechanisms and processes. *Comparative Political Studies,* 44(9), 1267-12967.

Guo, X. (2014). Controlling corruption in the party: China's central discipline inspection commission. In *Critical Readings on the Communist Party of China (4 Vols. Set)* (pp. 1179-1214). Brill.

Haddad, B. (2005). Syria's Curious Dilemma. *Middle East Report,*(236), 4-13. doi:10.2307/30042456

Hatton, C. (2014). China's Xi Jinping: What has he achieved in his first year? *BBC News, Beijing,* Web.

He, A. (2020). Top-level Design for Supremacy: Economic Policy Making in China under President Xi (pp. 3-6, Rep.). Centre for International Governance Innovation. doi:10.2307/resrep25329.7

Heaslet, J. (1972). The Red Guards: Instruments of Destruction in the Cultural Revolution. *Asian Survey, 12*(12), 1032-1047. doi:10.2307/2643022

Henckaerts, J. M. (2005). *Customary international humanitarian law: Volume 1, Rules* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Hinnebusch, R. A. (1993). State and civil society in Syria. *Middle East Journal*, *47*(2), 243-257.

Holliday, J. (2011). The struggle for Syria in 2011. *Institute for the Study of War*, *16*, 7-29.

Huang, Y. (2016). Understanding China's Belt & Road initiative: motivation, framework and assessment. *China Economic Review*, *40*, 314-321.

Hurley, J., Morris, S., & Portelance, G. (2019). Examining the debt implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a policy perspective. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, *3*(1), 139-175.

Human Rights Watch (2010)."Interview with Bashar al-Asad," *Asharq al-Awsat*, February 8, 2001, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/countries/syria/bashar0102b.htm

Humans Right Watch (2012). *World Report 2012: China.*

Huntington, S. (1993). *The Clash of Civilizations.*

ICG (2004). Middle East Report, 24, 8-11.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (2010). Military Balance. *International Institute for Strategic Studies,* 272-273.

International Society for Human Rights (2019). Common methods of torture and abuse in the People's Republic of China. *International Society for Human Rights.*

Jasser, M. (2014). Sectarian Conflict in Syria. PRISM, 4, 58-67.

Johnston, A. I. (2017). Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing. *International Security*, *41*(3), 7-43.

Jingling, T. (2016). A Prisoner's Human Rights Report. *China Change,* Web.

Kalu, K. (2000). The Praetorian Orthodoxy: Crisis of the Nigerian Military State. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, 28(2), 271-292.

King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. (2013). How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression. *The American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326-343.

Koesel, K. (2014). Religious Freedom and Restriction in China. *Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs.* Web.

Köllner, P. (2013). (Rep.). German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA).

Kuo-chün, C. (1959). Leadership in the Chinese Communist Party. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 321, 40-50.

Lam, W. W. L. (2015). *Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping: renaissance, reform, or retrogression?* Routledge.

Landry, P. F., Lü, X., & Duan, H. (2018). Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder. *Comparative Political Studies*, *51*(8), 1074-1105.

Laliberté, A. (2011). Religion and the State in China: The limits of institutionalization. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 40(2), 3-15.

Lawson, F. (1996). Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontations.

Li, Y. (2000). Women's Movement and Change of Women's Status in China. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 1(1), 30-40.

Library of Congress (2005). Country Profile: Syria, 2005. *Library of Congress – Federal Research Division,*

Lichbach, M. I., & Zuckerman, A. S. (2009). *Comparative politics: rationality, culture, and structure*. Cambridge University Press.

Lin, B., & Zhu, J. (2019). The role of renewable energy technological innovation on climate change: empirical evidence from China. *Science of the Total Environment*, *659*, 1505-1512.

Lu, J., & Zhao, Y. (2018). Implicit and explicit control: Modeling the effect of internet censorship on political protest in China. *International Journal of Communication*, *12*, 23.

Lund, A. (2013). (Rep.). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Makdisi, S. & Soto, R. (2019). Economic agenda for post-conflict reconstruction, Unpublished Manuscript.

Markowitz, L. (2017). Beyond Kompromat: Coercion, Corruption, and Deterred Defection in Uzbekistan. Comparative Politics, 50(1), 103-121.

McGovern, J. P., & Merkley, J. (2020). Freedom of Expression in China: A Privilege, Not A Right. *Congressional-Executive Commission on China.*

McLauchlin, T. (2010). Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion. Comparative Politics, 42(3), 333-350.

Mohanty, M. (2012). "Harmonious Society": Hu Jintao's vision and the Chinese Party Congress. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(50), 12-16.

Mohanty, M. (2013). Xi Jinping and the 'Chinese Dream'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(38), 34-40.

MEIB (2000). Syria's Praetorian Guards: a primer. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, 2(7).

Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China (2020). *Affiliated Units.* Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China. Web.

Ministry of Public Security (2021). *The State Council of the People's Republic of China: Ministry of Public Security.*

McGrath, J. E., Arrow, H., & Berdahl, J. L. (2000). The Study of Groups: Past, Present, and Future. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*(1), 95–105. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0401_8

McHugo, J. (2017). Syria: A recent history. *SAQI Books*.

Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541-563.

Nathan, A. (2003). Authoritarian Resilience. *Journal of Democracy,* 14(1), 6-16.

Naughton, B., & Yang, D. L. (2004). Holding China together: Diversity and national integration in the post-Deng era (pp. 101-119). New York, NY: *Cambridge University Press*.

Park, S. M. (2010). The paradox of postcolonial Korean nationalism: state-sponsored cultural policy in South Korea, 1965–present. *Journal of Korean Studies*, *15*(1), 67-93.

Perito, R. M. (2003). Establishing the Rule of Law in Iraq. *US Institute of Peace*, 104, 1-16.

Peters, M. A. (2017). The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era.

Phillips, C. (2015). Sectarianism and conflict in Syria. *Third World Quarterly*, *36*(2), 357-376.

Plänkers, T. (2011). Psychic Impact and Outcome of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). A Psychoanalytic Research Project at the Sigmund-Freud-Institut, Frankfurt (Germany). *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, *8*(3), 227-238.

Policzer, P, (2009). The Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile. *University of Notre Dame Press*.

Powell, J. (2019). Leader Survival Strategies and the Onset of Civil Conflict: A Coup-Proofing Paradox. *Armed Forces & Society,* 45(1), 27-44.

Pradhan-Blach, F. (2012). (Rep.). Centre for Military Studies.

Quah, J. S. (2015). Hunting the corrupt "tigers" and "flies" in China: An evaluation of Xi Jinping's Anti-corruption campaign (November 2012 to March 2015). *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, *2015*(1), 1.

Quah, J. S. (2011). *Curbing corruption in Asian countries: An impossible dream?* Emerald Group Publishing.

Quinlivan, J. (1999). Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East. *International Security, 24(2),* 131-165.

Rathmell, A. (1996). Syria's Intelligence Services: Origins and Development1. *Journal of Conflict Studies*.

Repucci, S. (2020). *A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy.* Freedom House.

Rubin, B. (1991). Pan-Arab Nationalism: The Ideological Dream as Compelling Force. Journal of Contemporary History, 26(3/4), 535-551.

Saich, T. (2012). *The Quality of Governance in China: The citizen's view.* Harvard Kennedy School.

Saich, T. (2015). Governance and Politics of China. Palgrave, 4th edition fully revised and updated.

Shambaugh, D. (2007). China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy. The China Journal, (57), 25-58. doi:10.2307/20066240

Schak, D. C. (2011). Protestantism in China: Dilemma for the Party-State. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 40(2), 71-106.

Slater, D., & Fenner, S. (2011). State Power and Staying Power: Infrastructural Mechanisms and Authoritarian Durability. *Journal of International Affairs*, 65(1), 15-29.

Smith, D. (2007). "The Foundations of Legitimacy" in Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: An International Perspective, edited by Tyler Tom R., 30-58. *New York: Russell Sage Foundation*.

Statista (2019). Number of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members from 2009-2019, by gender.

Steiner, H. (1951). The Role of the Chinese Communist Party. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 277, 56-66.

Stellmacher, J., & Petzel, T. (2005). Authoritarianism as a group phenomenon. *Political Psychology*, *26*(2), 245-274.

Svolik, M. W. (2012). The Politics of Authoritarian Rule. *Cambridge University Press*.

Todd, P. & J. Bloch (2003). Global Intelligence: the World's Secret Services Today. *Blooms Academic,* Print.

Turner, Bryan S. (1992). Max Weber: From History to Modernity. *Routledge*.

Teti, A., Xypolia, I., Sarnelli, V., Tsourapas, G., Lomazzi, V., & Abbott, P. (2017). Political and Social Transformations in Egypt (pp. 21-27, Rep.). Arab Transformations Project.

Transparency International (2010). Corruption Perceptions Index. *Transparency International.* Web.

United Nations (1990). Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners. *United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner,* Web.

Wang, D., & Mark, G. (2015). Internet censorship in China: Examining user awareness and attitudes. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)*, *22*(6), 1-22.

Weber, M. (1905;2002). The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and Other Writings. *Penguin Classics*.

Wei, C. G. (2011). Mao's Legacy Revisited: Its Lasting Impact on China and Post-Mao Era Reform. *Asian Politics & Policy*, *3*(1), 3-27.

Weiss, J. C. (2019). How hawkish is the Chinese public? Another look at "rising nationalism" and Chinese foreign policy. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *28*(119), 679-695.

Wong, A. (2019). China's economic statecraft under Xi Jinping. *Brookings Institute.* Web.

World Prison Brief (2020). *World Prison Brief Data: China.* Web.

The World Bank (2020). *China Data.* The World Bank IBRD, IBA. https://data.worldbank.org/country/china

Xiaolin, D. (2017). Unanswered questions: Why we may be wrong about Chinese nationalism and its foreign policy implications. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *26*(108), 886-900.

Xie, Y., & Zhou, X. (2014). Income inequality in today's China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* 111(19), 6928-6933.

Xinhua (2013). CPC Leadership Decides to Keep China's Economic Growth Stable. *Xinhua News Agency.* Web.

Xu, X., Mao, Z. M., & Halderman, J. A. (2011). Internet censorship in China: Where does the filtering occur?. In *International Conference on Passive and Active Network Measurement* (pp. 133-142). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

Yong, G. (2012). *The Evolvement of the Chinese Communist Party Discipline Inspection Commission in the Reform Era.* China Review, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1–23.

Zeng, J. (2016). Changing Manners of Displaying Loyalties through Ideological Campaign in Post-Deng China. *Journal of Contemporary China,* 25(100)

Zenz, A. (2019). 'Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude': China's political re-education campaign in Xinjiang. *Central Asian Survey*, *38*(1), 102-128.

Zhao, S. (2016). The Ideological Campaign in Xi's China: Rebuilding Regime Legitimacy. Asian Survey, 56(6), 1168-1193. doi:10.2307/26364408

Zhao, S. (2016). Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival. *Journal of Democracy,* 27(3), 83-97.

Zheng, Y. (2013). China in 2012: Troubled Elite, Frustrated Society. Asian Survey, 53(1), 162-175. doi:10.1525/as.2013.53.1.162

Zheng, Y., & Chen, G. (2009). Xi Jinping's rise and political implications. *China: An International Journal*, *7*(01), 1-30.

Zhiyue, B. (2012). Xi Jinping and His Military Ties. *EAI Background Brief: East Asia Institute,* 702

Zhong, Y. & Chen, Y. (2013). Regime Support in Urban China. *Asian Survey,* 53(2), p. 369-392.

Zhu, Y. (2011). Performance legitimacy and China's political adaption strategy. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 16(2), 123-140.

Zisser, E. (2003). Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria? *Middle East Quarterly,* Winter.

Zisser, E. (2004). Bashar al-Assad and his Regime: Between Continuity and Change. *Orient,* 45(2), 239-256.

Zisser, E. (2006). Who's Afraid of Syrian Nationalism? National and State Identity in Syria. *Middle Eastern Studies, 42*(2), 179-198.

Zisser, E. (2007). The Syrian Phoenix: The Revival of the Syrian Social National Party in Syria.