⦿ ČLANKI / ARTICLES

Jeroen J.J. Van den BOSCH*

TIME FOR A NEW POLITICAL REGIME TYPOLOGY? A VECTORAL CLASSIFICATION TO ADDRESS INTRA-REGIME SHIFTS AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS**

Abstract. *This article proposes a novel typology for classifying political regimes, addressing the limitations of previous models by incorporating three organisational nexuses (party-organisations, militaries, tutelary bodies) and three vectoral dimensions (tyranny, ideology, multipartyism). This approach allows for a dynamic understanding of regime behaviour, capturing intra-regime shifts without requiring reclassification. The typology innovatively distinguishes between personalist regimes, ideocracies, and hybrid forms, providing a nuanced framework for analysing contemporary and historical political systems. By integrating ideology back into the analysis and offering a comprehensive measure of tyranny, this classification enhances our ability to study regime resilience, autocratisation, and democratisation, as well as how political regimes collaborate and learn in the international system.*
Keywords. *Dictatorship, Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, Personalism, Tyranny, Ideology, Pluralism.*

INTRODUCTION

No categorical, explanatory typology is currently able to account for intra-regime changes. As political regimes innovate, learn, adapt their institutions, curate international relations or even experience leadership transfers, most

typologies remain static when pigeonholing regimes over time. Continuous measures (like Polity, Freedom House or V-Dem) can, of course, map such shifts, but do not theoretically explain them – nor do they include ideology. I argue that innovation in the field of comparative authoritarianism is presently locked in comparative case studies and that the existing typologies have shown their analytical limits when it comes to mapping intra-regime changes or their international behaviour.

In this article, I propose a prototype for a next generation of political regime typologies and its coding criteria. Since it is not democracy-biased, it can also count for autocratisation patterns, and holds great potential to be extended to historical cases. By accounting for intra-regime shifts, this typology can be used to track regime behaviour in the international arena, i.e., to witness how regimes react to regional shocks (e.g., colour revolutions, the 'Arab' Spring), wars, economic crises, autocratic alliances facilitating learning and collaboration.

This article is structured as follows: below, I explain the shortcomings of previous classifications, before introducing this 'Generation 4.0' prototype and related coding criteria. Next, I describe what this typology can(not) explain; how it relates to other classifications and engages with theoretical debates (e.g., how it classifies liberal democracy, how it relates to legitimacy). I then list the innovations of this prototype and its added value for theory: how it compares various forms of personalism; can distinguish monarchies; welcomes ideology back to the theoretical bosom; and accounts for intra-regime shifts, but also benefits research on autocratic learning and collaboration. I conclude with some suggestions on how to extend the classification to pre-modern cases.

A brief note on nomenclature: I consider political regimes[1] the umbrella term for all ruling networks in (de facto independent) states. Autocracies equal non-democracies and are synonymously referred to as dictatorships for stylistic reasons. Regarding their subtypes: totalitarianism is juxtaposed with authoritarianism (in the Linzean understanding), but by way of shorthand I may refer to authoritarian regimes as autocracies in contexts where totalitarianism is not the particular focus. Unlike Linz, yet following common practice, I consider monarchies and (neo-)sultanistic regimes or personalist regimes as subtypes of authoritarianism (like B. Geddes). There is not enough space to expand upon the conceptual dissection of their nuanced differences or the variation in subtype-relational hierarchies across regime classifications.

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[1] I define political regimes as networks with an institutionalised set of fundamental formal and informal rules identifying the political power holders (character of the possessor(s) of ultimate decisional sovereignty) and regulating the appointments to the main political posts (extension and character of political rights) as well as the vertical limitations (extension and character of civil liberties) and horizontal limitations on the exercise of political power (extension and character of division of powers – control and autonomy); adapted from Skaaning (2006).

SHORTCOMINGS OF PREVIOUS CLASSIFICATIONS

Foregoing historical distinctions, the classification of contemporary political regimes has been driven by the need to distinguish different forms of governance today, where some have now become rare, and others have proliferated only in the last 30 years. Many scholars identify different generations of scholars in the field of comparative authoritarianism (cf., Gerschewski 2023). In this brief overview, I follow this custom and quickly outline their most significant contributions to political regime classifications. Other innovations, debates, conceptual revolutions etc. lie beyond the scope of this article.

The *first generation* of theorists, starting in the 1940s, was particularly concerned with totalitarianism and the role of ideology to explain, among others, phenomena like mass mobilisation, state terror and repression. Early seminal works (Arendt 1968; Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956) focused on these ideological systems, clearly delineating totalitarianism and setting it apart from other regime types.

Soon after, a *second generation* emerged with famous scholars like Dahl and Sartori, poised to label and investigate the growing grey zone between totalitarianism and democracy. Besides the increased study of military rule and party systems, a key work of this generation is the typology developed by Juan J.J. Linz and his colleagues (Linz [1975] 2000; Linz and Stepan 1996; Chehabi and Linz 1998) who conceptualised authoritarianism as a distinct category of non-democratic, non-totalitarian regimes.

Linz aimed to refine the previously clear-cut separation between democracies and the then-common view of non-democracies as totalitarian states. The latter were characterised by three main features: (i) centralised power in a single entity (monism), with (ii) civic mobilisation requested, encouraged and rewarded by (iii) the ruling single party. Linz's typology, grounded in Max Weber's thinking, primarily categorised regimes into ideal types, including monarchies with traditional rule and (neo-)sultanistic regimes. Linz ([1975] 2000, 159) introduced and elaborated on the concept of authoritarianism, providing a theoretical framework that better described the more commonly observed forms of non-democratic governance that fell between democracy and totalitarianism (but were neither traditional nor (neo-)sultanistic).

However, Linz's reliance on ideal types was hard to quantify, and his classification of authoritarian sub-types quickly became outdated after 1975 as global political landscapes evolved and totalitarian regimes devolved into vaguely defined post-totalitarianism. His criteria for neo-sultanism were very idiosyncratic and few cases could be pigeonholed into this category uncontested.

Amongst the diffusion of other influential yet troubled concepts like neo-patrimonialism, cronyism, clientelism etc. since the mid-1970s and the stubborn Western refusal to admit that the previously transitioning Cold War dictatorships were reversing once more toward autocracy by the mid-1990s (while retaining their electoral features), a *third generation* of theorists arose to capture this new reality.

Most visibly, this generation saw the spectacular rise of continuous classifications (e.g., Polity, Freedom House – and much later – V-Dem) to track progress toward or away from democracy. The first pioneers started as early as the 1970s with small datasets, but rose to prominence in the late 1990s as their geographical coverage expanded. Their (initial) methodological shortcomings (or biases) aside (cf., Munck and Verkuilen 2002), these quantitative resources paved the path for identifying Large-N quantified trends and comparing performance. Regrettably, these continuous measures were too often applied as categorical typologies, tainting research results.

Introduced in 1999, Barbara Geddes' typology aimed to provide a more conceptual distinction for autocratic regimes by isolating military, civilian and personalist regimes and later incorporating monarchies. Geddes (1999) concentrated on the leadership's background and ruling style and provided clear coding criteria that opened the door for Large-N global comparative research with categorical regime data, sprawling into almost every conceivable aspect of regimes' domestic behaviour and international performance.

Although she breathed new life into this study field, her typology was criticised for failing to account for the level of multi-party pluralism within regimes, which had become ever more important due to the rise of autocratic regimes with democratic *façades* – so-called 'democracies with adjectives', hybrid regimes (Diamond 2000) or electoral regimes (Schedler 2006), amongst other labels. Conceptual works diverted considerate attention to how to untangle real democracies from these authoritarian imposters and gauge the quality and function of elections (cf., Collier and Levitsky 1997; Mainwaring et al. 2001; Bogaards 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010; Møller and Skaaning 2010, Morgenbesser 2014).

The typology proposed by Hadenius and Teorell (2006/2007) attempted to address these shortcomings by emphasising pluralism and the organisational nexus of regimes, dragging institutions into comparative focus for non-democratic regimes. Yet, at the same time they dialled down the importance of personalism, which had emerged as a significant and distinct factor under Linz (neo-sultanism) and Geddes (personalist rule).

While the field was preoccupied with conceptually separating democracy from their defective counterparts and tracking democratisation patterns, the issue of political ideology, a major focus since the 1940s, remained neglected in mainstream thinking and the political classifications of the third generation. Several authors called for a reappreciation and reintegration of ideology into regime classifications (Backes 2013; Kailitz 2015; Nisnevich and Ryabov 2017; Maynard 2022; Gerschewski 2023).

Around the same time, an important shift came in the understanding of personalism (Gandhi et al. 2014; Van den Bosch 2015; Gandhi and Sumner 2020), which was soon reintegrated into the dataset of Geddes and her colleagues (Geddes et al. 2018) as the "latent measure of personalism." M. Svolik's insights to extrapolate personalism as an abstract scale in his continuous classification

of autocracies (Svolik 2009; 2012) was instrumental for revisiting this process, sprouting spin-off research on the exact dynamics of this process (i.e., personalisation) within regimes (e.g., Escribà-Folch and Timoneda 2024).

Personalism thus comprises the relation between the main power holder and other members of the inner circle. The initial collegial power relationship is strained because the former always has incentives to increase personal power vis-à-vis the latter that are able to oust him with a coup. The inner circle hence experiences increased incentives to carry out a coup before the power relationship becomes so uneven, and they become unable to credibly threaten a dictator with an ouster, and thereby lose their veto power over the ruler and policymaking. This precise moment is a threshold point, after which political regimes can be considered as established personalist regimes. This similarly reduces the power of the organisational institution the regime is rooted in and overturns the given hierarchy by replacing military rank or party nomenklatura with personal ties, rendering military or party-based regimes as one-man rule (i.e., personalist rule). This regime type is now among the most prevalent in global politics.

While it certainly could be contested that it is premature to declare an end to our third generation of theorists and herald in a new one, this article takes stock of what we know thus far and which answers we are still looking for within the field of comparative authoritarianism as concerns regime classifications and their abilities, but also their behaviour in international relations. I am hopeful the theoretical insights set out below (combined with some pointers for operationalisation) will recalibrate our understanding of the present regime classifications and pave the way for new, operational typologies.

A NEW PROTOTYPE FOR A POLITICAL REGIME CLASSIFICATION

In Figure 1, I present a new classification that identifies three possible (static) organisational nexuses in political regimes (*organisational dimension*): party-organisations, militaries, or tutelary bodies and adds three vectoral dimensions (with varying intensity) that can evolve over time: a *relational dimension* (the level of tyranny), a *pluralist dimension* (multipartyism) and a *normative dimension* (ideology). It is argued that the interrelationship of these systemic dimensions structurally places regime types along a three-dimensional spectrum that explains regime behaviour. These three (abstract) behavioural dimensions: *gatekeeping constraints* (G), a *coercive repression bias* (R) and *societal penetration* (S) are argued to determine how regimes perceive (domestic) threats, respond to crises and challenges, and collaborate internationally. This new typology solves certain aspects of previous typologies: addressing intra-regime shifts, distinguishing between totalitarian regimes and other ideocracies, and accounts for regimes' varying behaviour on the international level. Unlike earlier categorical typologies, this approach recognises the dynamic nature of political regimes, allowing for nuanced intra-regime shifts to be identified without needing a complete reclassification.

The Organisational Dimension of Political Regimes

Classifications of the second and third generations distinguish civilian from military rule to subcategorise authoritarian regimes. However, such classifications were ambivalent when it came to classifying monarchies – as civilian or as a distinct category? My approach is to expand the group of tutelary bodies to merge monarchies, religious councils (theocracies) and other tutelary institutions (ideological councils, privy councils, oligarchic bodies).

Party-based regimes are denoted by governance through a structured political party, association or movement. Some parties aim to represent the public, others intend to lead them. They can operate on various levels: local, regional, national and international. Their shared characteristic is that such regimes are united by membership within a single organisation, where a combination of meritocracy and loyalty facilitates entry and advancement within its hierarchical structure. Party-based regimes typically have a clear programme or mission to influence public policy, although they can contain factions or be constituted by a coalition. Under electoral rule, parties are the prescribed structures for participating in elections and aim to win legislative seats. They can make coalitions with other political parties or merge with them, and are thus primed to co-opt other political actors and extend patronage. Their internal organisational structure is at the discretion of the leadership and founders, even in democracies. The legitimacy of these regimes often stems from electoral processes and the popular vote, but they can also gather support through their welfare politics, advocacy for change and ideological orientation, or their historical legacy.

Military Regimes – In contrast, military rule is characterised by governance through the institutions of the armed forces. Most membership in these regimes is exclusive, and conditional on recruitment, training and promotion, with a strict internal hierarchy and rules. The central mission of military regimes is national defence, and their skillset focuses on military and logistical challenges rather than public administrative governance. This predisposes them to coercive violence. Military regimes may intervene in politics, often justifying their rule as essential for national security or a country's stability; at times, they implement ideological projects. In any case, their organisation is not optimised to solicit popular support and tensions remain between the rank-and-file and lower officers on one hand, and the top brass on the other, over the distribution of rents.

Tutelary Bodies – This category encompasses a diverse range of regimes, including monarchies and theocratic councils. These regimes derive their legitimacy from traditional rules, customs, or belief systems that grant authority to a ruling family or selected pool of elites (clergy, oligarchs, heads of clans etc.). Monarchies, for example, tend to have a royal court and are often supported by other consultative (non-elective) bodies that tie the ruling dynasty to their traditional followers and upholds the regime's legitimacy. Theocratic councils, such as those in Iran or the Taliban in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, base their

legitimacy on religious authority. Like with military regimes, these core regime institutions are exclusive and structured according to an internal logic. Unlike the former, however, these forms of tutelary bodies are primed for consolidating the leadership's power and doling out patronage.

With this organisational dimension, the typology recognises the importance of intra-regime institutional structures (cf., Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005) in shaping the distribution of power, such as the size and background of the inner circle and wider *selectorate*, connecting with outside actors, and the related mechanisms of governance within regimes (information-gathering, consultation, decision-making, extending patronage, self-legitimation). Note that the typology allows for amalgams. Examples are provided below.

The organisational dimension of political regimes offers a comprehensive framework for classifying and analysing political systems. These institutional bases predetermine some of the exit options for the regimes: Tutelary bodies are usually disbanded. Militaries can return to the barracks; party-regimes can subject themselves to free and fair electoral rules if they are not dissolved. Their 'distance' to the people also varies: tutelary bodies are most elitist and exclusive, followed by militaries, and then parties. For this reason, pressured regimes routinely expand their institutional outlook by creating parties and opening electoral arenas.

This typology is expanded with three vectoral dimensions – tyranny, ideology and pluralism – each of which can be scaled from 0 to 4. Each requires a detailed exploration to fully underline the nuances and implications of each level within these dimensions.

The Relational Dimension – The Level of Tyranny

For this dimension, I adopt a revised measure of similar categories proposed by other scholars to gauge the power relations between the supreme power holder and the rest of the inner circle. I combine certain insights from "personalism" as established by Geddes and her colleagues (2013; 2018), and previous notions of "(neo-)sultanism" as developed by Linz, Stepan and Chehabi, and "neo-patrimonialism" (Roth 1968; Eisenstadt 1973; Erdmann and Engel 2007; Bach and Gazebo 2012; Von Soest 2022).

Geddes et al. initially identified personalism as a distinct regime type and later reframed it as a characteristic that can manifest across various regime types. This shift was noted around 2015 (Gandhi et al. 2014; Van den Bosch 2015; Gandhi and Sumner 2020) and this redefinition posits personalism as a latent trait that can theoretically evolve into a fully-fledged regime type once a certain threshold is surpassed (cf., Svolik 2009; 2012).

For the purposes of this classification, I diverge from the interpretation of personalism provided by Geddes et al. This deviation is justified by several considerations. First, personalism as they conceptualise pertains to an intra-regime process, specifically the personalisation of power within the regime's inner

sanctum. This process involves the relationship between a ruler and their inner circle, which undergoes considerable transformation during personalisation. By analogy with Zygmunt Bauman's nomenclature, this inner circle's transformation can be described as a shift from a "proletariat" to a "precariat" status (Van den Bosch 2015, 16) where members of this group lose their agency to collaborate (and pressure the ruler), and thus end up politically weakened and divided, competing amongst themselves.

Prior to the apex of personalism, the inner circle retains a collective identity and the potential to act together to check a dictator's authority and policies and, in extreme circumstances, to remove a ruler through mechanisms such as voting procedures or a palace coup. The means of removal may vary between procedural and non-procedural methods. Nonetheless, post-personalisation, rulers apply divide-and-rule tactics to replace key inner circle members with individuals loyal to themselves. These replacements are often selected from the same ethnic group, clan, or those with familial or personal ties, chosen not for their competence but mainly based on their loyalty. This strategy dilutes the unity and group identity of the inner circle, fostering competition for the ruler's favour, which translates into rents, wealth and influence, and often the ability to set up one's own patronal networks (cf., Hale 2014).

The interpretation of personalism by Geddes and her colleagues also implies a hollowing out of regime and state institutions, especially those that can check the ruler, resulting in the dictator's personal control over the military apparatus and, where applicable, the ruling party, whose top levels are by then staffed with loyalists. In many cases, dictators establish their own party to circumvent factionalism and extend patronage to regime loyalists.

While this personalism measure is crucial for assessing intra-regime dynamics, it is not the sole factor influencing regime behaviour, and not a complete picture of all the constraints that leaders may face. This makes it imperative to consider the broader process of neo-sultanism. Despite acknowledging Linz's pathbreaking contributions to the study of comparative authoritarianism, I contend that their concept of (neo-)sultanism has too often been conflated and misapplied (see also: Guliyev 2011). Therefore, I refrain from building on these cracked theoretical foundations to avoid further confusion and conceptual stretching. This is why I refer to the level of tyranny, and not "neo-sultanisation."

Earlier studies on tyranny and despotism emphasise the absence of constraints on the ruler and the perils of unbound power concentrated in a single individual or a select few, and the concept remained remarkably constant over time until the 19th century (Stewart 2021; Richter 1990; 2005). I resuscitate the concept back to its original meaning – to denote the lack of restraint and arbitrary power.

Incorporating insights from Weber's ([1921] 2019) sultanism and Linzean (neo-)sultanism, three additional elements are introduced to my proposed measure of tyranny. First, I include the limits imposed by bureaucratic-legal (or

traditional) rule, specifically legal and constitutional constraints like term and age limits for the top offices. Second, I address the monopolisation and predatory behaviour of the ruling elite concerning state assets, aligning with neo-patrimonialism and (neo-)sultanism's blending of formal and informal governance and the illicit appropriation of critical economic sectors. Third, drawing on Weber's original interpretations of sultanism (as an extreme form of patrimonialism, hence within the realm of traditional rulership), I stress the ruler's direct, personal control over key branches of armed forces, often through the establishment of a private army. In Weber's ([1921] 2019) conceptualisation, the ruler's private army was instrumental in countering traditional rule by nobility, dismantling pre-existing hierarchies, and installing loyalists within the state apparatus, thereby ensuring the intimidation of and control over traditional elites.

As demonstrated, the personalisation process described by Geddes and subsequent scholars in this tradition largely focuses on intra-regime dynamics and does not sufficiently account for external legal-bureaucratic restraints or traditional customs that may, in certain contexts, constrain a personalised ruler. For this purpose, I propose a revised set of coding criteria (cf., Table 1) and a new measure of Tyranny.

Note that the intra-regime dynamic of personalisation comprises an inherent tension between ruler and inner circle present in all regime types operating without formal rules (cf., Svolik 2009; 2012). It is argued that the stage of "emerging tyranny" (level 2, i.e., the personalisation of power vis-à-vis the inner circle) takes place *before* external (legal-bureaucratic or traditional) constraints can be eroded (cf., level 3) because rival regime insiders are likely to uphold the latter to rein in a ruler. However, in rare cases when a ruler attains power in a polity without external restraints – for instance, in the context of regime formation during a revolution where old institutions are destroyed – the actualisation of tyranny on the intra-regime level (level 2) is still required before such an unbridled one-man rule can have meaning on level 3, even in an institutional vacuum or when the regime is already in the control of key state assets.

Measuring the Level of Tyranny

- Level 0: *Constrained rule* – On this foundational level, the ruler principally serves as a ceremonial figurehead, with limited actual power over governance. The political system is characterised by a high degree of checks and balances, ensuring that no single entity or individual can consolidate power without impediment. The inner circle of power is capable of influencing or even vetoing the ruler's decisions, maintaining a balance of power within the regime.
- Level 1: *Primus inter pares* – Here, the ruler enjoys more substantial, discretionary power within the polity, yet remains bound by constitutional limits, such as term and age restrictions (or tradition and precedent, in historical examples). Despite having a dominant position within the inner circle, the ruler must navigate a complex web of checks and balances, requiring cooperation

from other branches of government and the military to implement policies. This level reflects a system where power is more centralised, albeit still subject to legal and institutional constraints.

- Level 2: *Emerging Tyranny* – In this stage, rulers have significantly consolidated power, eroding the checks and balances that previously restrained their authority within the regime. A ruler now dominates the inner circle, and while other members may retain some influence, their ability to challenge the ruler is limited. The regime begins to exhibit clear signs of personalism, with the ruler's network extending its control over state sectors and the military.
- Level 3: *Consolidated Tyranny* – The ruler has achieved near-total control, with elections (if they occur) being mere formalities. The inner circle is completely subservient to the ruler who has established a personalist regime denoted by a lack of institutional constraints and the creation of parallel military organisations to cement power. The regime's institutions are reshaped to align with the ruler's interests and state institutions are hollowed out, effectively eliminating any meaningful opposition and preventing it from emerging.
- Level 4: *Absolute Tyranny* – The pinnacle of tyranny, this level sees the ruler as an unchallenged autocrat, potentially ruling for life. The regime is characterised by the complete monopolisation of power, with all significant state sectors under the leadership's control. A personality cult often surrounds the ruler, who has established a private army to maintain dominance. Legal and institutional constraints are non-existent, and the ruler's authority is absolute.

Operationalisation – The "latent measure of personalism" by Geddes et al. (2018) contains all the criteria for intra-regime dynamics, but should be supplemented with indicators to benchmark the external (legal-bureaucratic or traditional) constraints such as term limits, the level of coup-proofing measures, and creation of a single patronal pyramid (Hale 2014) enabling de facto personal control over a 'private' army.

Figure 1: A VECTORAL TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL REGIMES
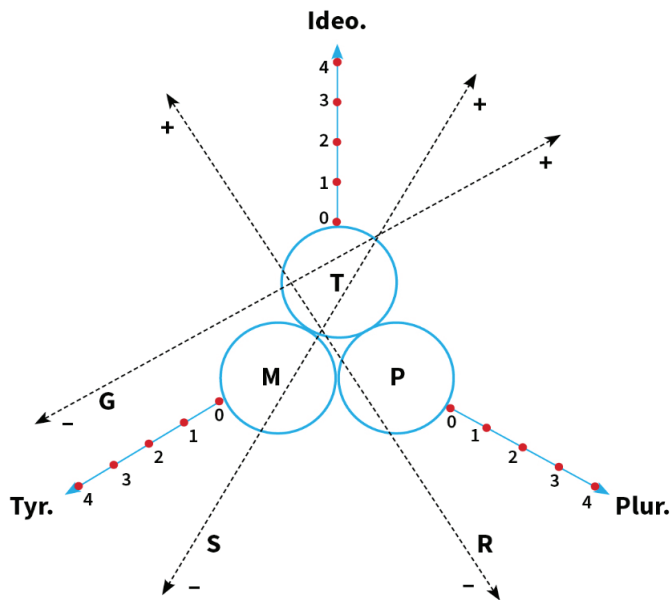
Organisational dimension:
   T = Tutelary bodies
   M = Military organisation
   P = Party-based organisation

Vectoral dimensions:
   Tyr. = Level of Tyranny *(relational dimension)*
   Plur. = Level of Multipartyism *(pluralist dimension)*
   Ideo. = Salience of the Ideology *(normative dimension)*

Regime behaviour:
   G = Gatekeeping constraints: low (-), high (+)
   S = Societal penetration: low (-), high (+)
   R = Coercive repression bias: low (-), high (+)

Source: Author's own work, designed by Typeface nv.

Table 1: CODING CRITERIA FOR THE RELATIONAL, NORMATIVE AND PLURALIST DIMENSIONS

	Level of Tyranny	**Level of Ideology**	**Level of Pluralism**
Level 0	– The ruler is a figurehead and does not have an independent power base.	No ideology is promulgated by the regime.	– The legislature is closed and all parties are banned
Level 1	– Non-monarchical incumbents are bound by term and age limits. A ruler enjoys some (normal) light incumbency-advantages (e.g., during election campaigns). – A ruler is the 'primus inter pares' with other members of the inner circle able to veto decisions and contribute to policymaking – Checks-and-balances exist and a leader requires cooperation from other branches to implement policies	Ideology is of low strength • low on the state level • not present on the society level • not present on the individual level *(See additional coding criteria in Table 2)*	– No organised, legal opposition exists domestically – There is a single party, either *de facto* (because other alternatives are repressed) or de jure (because others are outlawed)
Level 2	– Non-monarchical incumbents are bound by term and age limits – A ruler dominates the inner circle, but (some) other members retain regional control and in certain spheres of government they can veto some decisions – The ruler's network co-exists with other networks of their inner circle members – A ruler must be careful to maintain the loyalty of the military and security services, whose support is required to rule. (The latter can successfully threaten coups or mutinies to influence policy) – Checks and balances are eroded, but other branches of government can still delay or overturn the policies of a ruler (against the ruler's wishes) – the ruler must consult and convince stakeholders	Ideology is of medium strength • medium on the state level • low on the society level • not present on the individual level *(See additional coding criteria in Table 2)*	– Some (permitted) organised opposition remains, but elections are neither free nor fair. The regime criminalises parties and candidates they consider a threat, prevent them from registering, and only allow elections on a very uneven playing field – Through their domination of courts and the judiciary, they have an undue influence on the electoral process and its outcome (cf., electoral authoritarianism – Schedler, 2006)

	Level of Tyranny	Level of Ideology	Level of Pluralism
Level 3	– There are no (strict) term or age limits for the ruler. Elections (if any) are a sham (neither free nor fair) (cf., closed regimes) – A ruler has obtained personalist power (in line with some criteria of B. Geddes' et al. (2018) – Inner circle members are fully dependent on the ruler and can no longer veto executive decisions or credibly threaten a coup – A ruler's network dominates most state sectors. A few inner circle members control their own economic support bases at their own discretion. – A ruler fully controls the military and security services (either directly or through trusted kin) by making them dependent on his network, and has created his own (parallel) personal (para-) military organisation(s) – Checks and balances are eroded and while other branches of government still have some autonomy, they are led by regime-sympathisers	Ideology is of high strength • high on the state level • medium on the society level • low on the individual level (See additional coding criteria in Table 2)	– Organised opposition is allowed but is often divided. – Elections are free but not fair, but outcomes are still uncertain for the regime (cf., competitive authoritarianism – Levitsky and Way, 2010) – Courts are hindered in their efforts to ensure a fair playing field and the incumbency advantages of the ruler are disproportionate
Level 4	– The ruler is in power for life (cf., closed regimes) – The ruler has obtained personalist power (in line with almost all of B. Geddes et al.'s (2018) criteria) – the regime is extensively coup-proofed, rivals have been purged, the inner circle is made up by sycophants, (often) a personality cult has been established, and the ruler is able to choose a successor – The ruler's network controls all relevant state sectors. No opposing fraction has an autonomous economic support base. – The ruler controls some of the military and security services and can keep the others in check by playing them against each other – One branch of government dominates (almost always the executive one) and there are no checks and balances	Ideology is of high strength: high on the state level high on the society level high on the individual level (*See additional coding criteria in Table 2*)	– There are no (political) restrictions on creating political parties – Despite small irregularities, elections are free and fair (cf., the minimalist definition of electoral democracy) – Courts and constitutional provisions regulate the electoral process and monitor fairness

Source: Author's own work.

Table 2: ADDITIONAL CODING CRITERIA FOR THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION

Specific coding criteria for Ideology
(Nature/Salience – State-level – Society-level – Individual-level)

Nature / Salience: high (6–8), medium (3–5), low (1–2)*
• The ideology is transformative (reactionary or progressive) – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The ideology has an international (3), regional (2) or national (1) scope of application
• There is a coherent canon of works that support the ideology (in its many aspects of application) – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Leading ideologues can adapt, reinterpret and expand the ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The ideology is militant, promulgating violence to obtain its goals – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Given the current socio-economic context, the ideology is appealing to the majority of the population – Yes (1) / No (0)

State-level: strength: high (8–11), medium (4–7), low (1–3)*
• The ideology is an official state ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The ideology identifies the power holders – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The ideology is the only and/or predominant official state ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Efforts have been made to subordinate and merge alternative worldviews under the ruling ideology/ies – Yes (1) / No (0)
• State symbols reflect the ruling ideology and these are omnipresent – Yes (1) / No (0)
• All levels of government are state-managed in line with the ruling ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
• All branches of government are state-managed in line with the ruling ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The military is reorganised along ideological lines, politically controlled on all levels, and indoctrinated – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Economic policy is formulated in ideological terms – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The economy is restructured based on ideological prescriptions – Yes (1) / No (0)
• The economy is almost fully state-run or state-controlled – Yes (1) / No (0)

Society-level: strength: high (A 3–4; B 3–4; C 1–2), medium (A 1–2; B 1–2), low (B 1)*
• A – Level of indoctrination in Education:
  – The ruling ideology is taught in schools (as a subject) – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – The curriculum is dominated by the ruling ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – Most of the curriculum is replaced by the ruling ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – The education sector is fully under ideological state control – Yes (1) / No (0)
• B – Level of indoctrination of Media:
  – The ruling ideology is present in state media – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – The media landscape is dominated by the ruling ideology – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – All permitted media espouse the ruling ideology – others are actively blocked – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – The state (indirectly) controls all media and censors the Internet – Yes (1) / No (0)
• C – Level of indoctrination of Youth
  – Citizens can express loyalty to the regime by enrolling their children in state-run, ideological youth organisations – Yes (1) / No (0)
  – These youth organisations are obligatory and omnipresent – Yes (1) / No (0)

Individual-level: strength: high (3–5), low (1–2)*
• Self-censorship out of fear of political repercussions is common – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Citizens are pressured to behave and/or dress in a particular fashion on certain occasions to express loyalty – Yes (1) / No (0)
• All citizens are ranked in a hierarchical loyalty system (class, caste, membership etc.) linked to socio-economic or political consequences – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Self-censorship out of fear of political repercussions is routine – Yes (1) / No (0)
• Citizens are pressured to behave and/or dress in a particular fashion all the time, and take part in ideological rituals on an (almost) daily basis to express loyalty – Yes (1) / No (0)

*Criteria are cumulative and the sum of their points denotes their total strength for a given category

Source: Author's own work.

The Normative Dimension: The Level of Ideology

Political ideologies are worldviews and mindsets that structure and order the world, attribute value, morality and prescribe political action. These ideas, beliefs and arguments inform ritual, *ergo* practices and institutions – the external materiality of ideology or "Ideological State Apparatuses" (cf., L. Althusser) that reproduce power relations – and thus shape states and societies (Žižek 1994, 7–10). They can differ in strength, coherence and salience and they are not automatically shared equally by rulers, elites, citizens, minorities etc. Since the Anthropocene is subject to rapid change and ideologies exist everywhere to make sense of the world, the latter are time-bound. They can be politicised or de-politicised by political actors who accept, reject or modify such worldviews. For ideologies to spread and become transformative, they rely on expanding networks of believers and new converts. Capturing the political centre in polities is a necessary step for ideologues who aim to transform society. Charismatic leadership and hierarchical structures facilitate their promulgation and catalyse their routinisation and formalisation over time. Once a critical mass is present, the establishment of communities of practice or socialisation by ideologically designed institutions can expand the pool of followers.

Scholars of the third generation have reappraised the importance of ideology for comparative politics (Kailitz 2015; Nisnevich and Ryabov 2017; Gerschewski 2023). For those partial to Linzean totalitarianism, they have come up with new labels (Kneuer 2017) to account for the continued presence and salience of ideology in contemporary autocracies. Important case studies illustrate that today's equivalents of Linzean (neo-)sultanism also possess ideology and that this constitutes a key pillar of these regimes, e.g., S. Horák (2005) on Turkmenistan. Many authors – and I agree – have argued their case for the use of "ideocracies" (Kailitz 2015; Backes and Kailitz 2015) in order to broaden the scope of cases with authoritarian regimes and close the gap with totalitarianism. As a working definition, I consider ideocracies those regimes that have a transformative (level 3) or totalitarian (level 4) guiding ideology, but of course, all political regimes are ideological in the sense that they all use ideas, beliefs and arguments to legitimise their rule and motivate policy choices.

Ideologies can mobilise people, and with them come the resources to realise specific goals and transform political systems, but since they prescribe 'correct' behaviour they also simultaneously constrain it. They offer moral maps and sort people into 'us' and 'them' and in turn legitimise the repression of undesired groups, while delineating the pool of potential allies, both domestically and internationally.

For political regimes, adhering to a single, dominant ideology or integrating several compatible worldviews into a cohesive and coherent ideational outlook can bring several benefits. Such an approach offers a mission to the ruling elite and strengthens elite cohesion and loyalty. A convincing ideology can mobilise followers for 'the greater good', lure in new coverts and facilitate the mustering

of resources. A militant ideology can boost the recruitment of fighters and justify the imposition of political control on armed forces, tailoring the training and indoctrination of new recruits to the regime's purposes. In conditions of high socio-economic inequality, a radical, transformative ideology with an attractive end goal can compete with more moderate ones by offering purpose and identity to excluded societal groups.

Not all ideologies are suitable for such purposes, and those that are currently prevalent might not be in the future as the world continues to transform. This typology is not after categorising types of ideologies, their strengths and weaknesses, or their political orientation (left vs. right); it merely captures to what degree ideology is instrumentalised by regimes to coherently design political institutions, and to what degree the latter reproduce and enforce this ideology, thus indoctrinating society at home and structuring international relations. The indicator therefore captures the coherence, strength, reach and dominance of a guiding political ideology that shapes the regime and upholds its power relations.

To this end, I propose a set of coding criteria to measure selected aspects of the main ideology adhered to by a ruling regime (see Table 1). One aspect measures a political ideology's "nature/salience" while the other three are stacked upon this dimension, and progressively benchmark how an ideology is implemented on the state, society and individual level. Due to the variety of political ideologies, spanning religions, scientific constructs, ethnic or classist worldviews etc., I suggest a threshold measure, allowing for different combinations. Coding details for each level can be found in Table 2.

Measuring the Level of Ideology

- Level 0: *Ideological Vacuum* – On this level, the state lacks a single, coherent ideology, with the regime's pronouncements being largely superficial and lacking a substantive impact on policy or society. The regime is riddled by factions, their common ideological stance is weak, ambiguous, and primarily serves as international posturing without influencing the state's structure or societal norms. Various alternative worldviews challenge the state narrative, and while these are ignored or repressed, the policymakers have no coherent ideological framework to counter these.
- Level 1: *Weak Ideology* – The regime promotes a coherent ideology, although its influence is chiefly limited to the state level, with barely an impact on society and virtually none on the individual. The ideology serves to legitimise the regime's rule but does not dictate policy options or significantly alter societal norms. Alternative worldviews exist and might be more coherent.
- Level 2: *Dominant Ideology* – The regime's ideology advocates societal transformation, influencing economic systems, customs, and habits. While the ideology is present in the narratives of society, it lacks the cohesiveness and coherency to fully mobilise society according to the regime's vision. This level represents a more entrenched ideological stance that seeks to reshape society, yet it lacks the ideational tools and means to achieve dominance.

- Level 3: *Transformative Ideology* – The regime is militant and its ideology is deeply ingrained in society, dictating economic, social and individual behaviours. The ideology is enforced via a combination of indoctrination and coercion, aiming to transform society to align with the regime's ideological vision. This level reflects a regime that actively seeks to mould society according to its ideological principles, employing various means to ensure compliance. The label "transformative" not only refers to the potential of such ideologies to bring about such deep changes, but also that they remain the roadmap (or reference point) to formulate and execute future adaptations and innovations. Alternatively, the same level can be reached from the other direction through the *ideational erosion* of a totalitarian ideology. In this case, a totalitarian ideocracy (level 4) is facing a structural crisis and becoming less all-encompassing: after years, usually decades, the world around has changed so much that the basic tenets of the regime's ideology are more easily empirically rejected and its end goal seems elusive or misguided. While the ideology still informs daily life in the form of everyday performativity in rituals, social hierarchies, declarative public statements, there is a growing gap between the ideological *façade* and the everyday behaviour of citizens and elites. The regime is unable to meet these mismatch problems without ideological radicalisation, but does not have the resources or the required authoritative ideologues to adapt the guiding worldview to the current realities (or both). The exact mechanism is that the ideology has lost its strength (ideologues, militancy, conviction) or is effectively weakened by a competing ideology, and as a result its impact is diminished.
- Level 4: *Totalitarian Ideology* – On this level, the regime's ideology is all-encompassing (monistic), dictating every aspect of state policy, societal norms, and individual behaviour. The regime employs extensive coercion to ensure adherence to its ideology, with dissent being ruthlessly suppressed. This represents the extreme end of ideological control, where the regime's vision permeates every facet of life, leaving no room for alternative viewpoints or resistance. To obtain such a state-of-affairs, all political activities of a regime must be guided by ideological blueprints, and the controlled society is very likely to be isolated, functioning as a separate, alternative reality compared to different surrounding polities. In this stage, individuals living in such totalitarian societies, especially those with no memory of previous times, uncritically accept this state-of-affairs. And they might question their own sanity when confronted with dissident empirical evidence.

Operationalisation – The Varieties of Indoctrination (V-Indoc) dataset (Neundorf et al. 2024) is a great resource to measure the level of ideology. It covers 160 countries from 1945–2021 and presents a wide array of unique indices and indicators on indoctrination efforts in education and the media. Especially the focus on education and class curricula is crucial since this dimension is

considered to have the greatest and a lasting impact on young, impressionable citizens (Neundorf et al. 2023). More research is required to determine if these results transfer to other cultures that are less reliant on schools for socialisation.

The Pluralist Dimension: The Level of Multipartyism

This dimension should be overly familiar given that it is one of the main contributions by political theorists of the third generation. I designed the scale of pluralism between two extremes – fully closed (0) and unrestrained (4) – and subdivided the space in-between into single party rule (competition within one ruling organisation), hegemonic (elections not free and not fair), and dominant (elections are free but not fair).[2] Keen observers will notice that this logic follows the models of important classifications of the third generation seeking to make sense of hybrid regimes (Hadenius and Teorell [2006] 2007; Gilbert and Mohseni 2011), and incorporates the insights of "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 2010) and "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler 2013) – as shown in Figure 2.

As previous scholars have shown, this dimension is essential for understanding how regimes use institutions to gather information and support. In part, their own organisational dimension predetermines whether regimes can adequately collect feedback from regime insiders and distribute patronage (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). The pluralist dimension, however, extends such options to non-regime actors: even limited multipartyism offers regime outsiders a menu of choice; how closely they want to be affiliated and associated with the ruling clique (e.g., when establishing party coalitions, or when voting on policy). Legislatures that allow some debate can solicit feedback and preferences for the rulers in a channelled way, and the institution as a whole is a useful platform to meet with opposition members, work out deals, or bribe, intimidate, or co-opt their members as needed, instrumentalising the spoils of office as patronage.

Regarding elections, the ritual of elections itself offers (limited) domestic and international legitimacy in the post-Cold War era. Even under single-party rule, elections (on various levels) solicit proof of loyalty to the ruler and (some) competence on behalf of the candidates. All of the coding criteria are shown in Table 1.

Measuring the Level of Pluralism

Level 0: *Closed system rule* – The political landscape is completely closed to non-regime actors, with all parties banned or suspended, and the legislature either suspended or non-existent. The regime maintains absolute control over the political arena, allowing no space for political competition or dissent, and thus reduces the number of (legal) ways to voice and channel grievances.

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2   I am aware that dominant and hegemonic parties are often used interchangeably.

Level 1: *Single-party rule* – A single party dominates the political scene, either *de facto* or *de jure*, with other parties either repressed or outlawed. While some form of political competition may exist, it is limited to the scope of the ruling party, assuring that the regime maintains control over the electoral process and its outcomes. In rare cases, no-party elections (cf., Hadenius and Teorell [2006] 2007) are possible, fielding individual candidates (signalling no affiliation with any party).

Level 2: *Hegemonic party rule* – The regime allows for a limited multiparty system, although elections are neither free nor fair. Some opposition parties are permitted, or independent candidates, but only those approved by the regime, creating an impossible playing field controlled by the ruling party. This level reflects a system where the appearance of pluralism masks a fundamentally autocratic structure and the regime is pulling the levers.

Level 3: *Dominant party rule* – Elections are free but not fair, with the regime employing various means to influence the outcome in its favour. While opposition parties are allowed to participate, the electoral process is rigged through legal and extra-legal measures, ensuring that the incumbent regime retains power despite the veneer of fair competition. Nevertheless, elections are a cyclical period of uncertainty for the ruling regime – like in the understanding of Levitsky and Way's "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Level 4: *Unrestrained Pluralism* – The political system is characterised by free and fair elections, with an independent judiciary and electoral commissions assuring the integrity of the electoral process. This level represents a (minimal) democratic system where political competition is genuine, and the outcome of elections is not predetermined by the regime.

Operationalisation – Wahman et al. (2013) and their updated dataset, based on the original concept of Hadenius and Teorell ([2006] 2007), identify single, limited and multiparty electoral rule (and even no-party rule). It can be combined with criteria to distinguish "free and fair" from "free but not fair" elections to, respectively, differentiate between "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 2010) and isolate it from the wider interpretation of "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler 2006; Gilbert and Mohseni 2011).
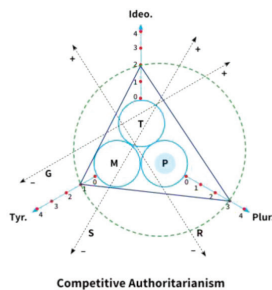
Figure 2: POLITICAL REGIME ARCHETYPES COMPARED

Single-Party Rule

**Hegemonic Party Rule**

Competitive Authoritarianism
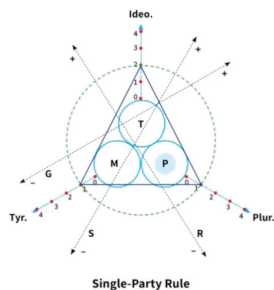
Examples: Angola and Mozambique before introducing multiparty elections in 1992 and 1994, respectively.
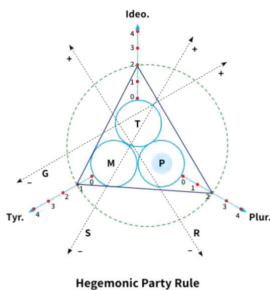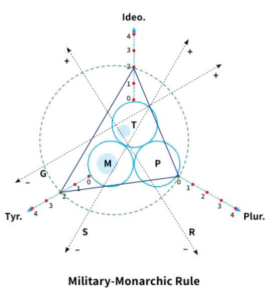
*Examples:* The PRI in Mexico before 1990; Tanzania's CCM (after 1992)

Cf. Levitsky and Way (2010)
Examples: Hungary under Viktor Orbán, Montenegro under Milo Đukanović.

Military Rule

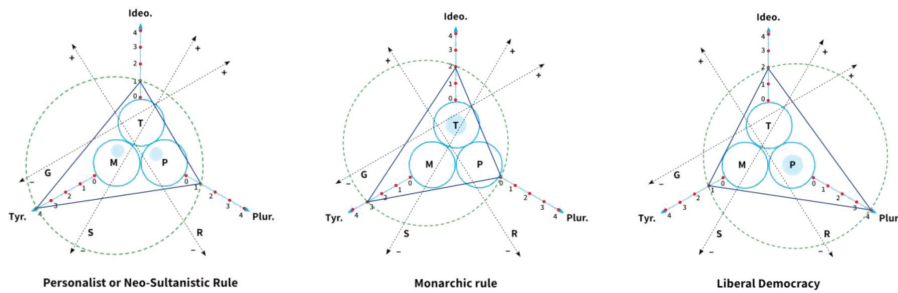**Military-Monarchic Rule**

Military-Multiparty Rule
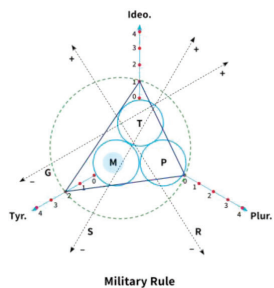
Examples: Honduras (1972–1981); Nigeria (1966–1979)

Examples: The Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868) in Japan; Thailand under King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X) (2014–2019)
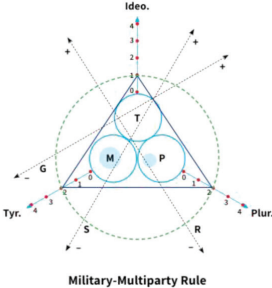
Examples: Uruguay (1973–1985); Peru (1968–1980)

Personalist or Neo-Sultanistic Rule

Cf. Geddes et al. (2018) and Linz (2000)
Examples: Libya under Muammar Gaddafi (1969–2011); Central African Republic under Jean-Bédel Bokassa (1966–1979); Uganda under Idi Amin (1971–1979)

Monarchic rule

Examples: Oman, Brunei Darussalam. Most monarchies have introduced a legislature. Others are more ideological, e.g., Saudi Arabia.

Liberal Democracy

Examples: Austria, Germany. Constitutional monarchies like Belgium, the Netherlands or Sweden etc. will have an additional tutelary body.

All nine presented figures are archetypes, and the provided examples refer to (at times rare) cases that match these the closest. Most political regimes, however, diverge from these archetypes in several dimensions, and can evolve along the four dimensions throughout their life cycles.

The circle spanning each triangle linking the scales of tyranny, ideology and multipartyism is an indicator of that regime's structural, behavioural predisposition along the axes of gatekeeping (G), coercive repression (R) or their ability to deeply affect, engage or control society (S). The size of a circle is a rough measure of a regime's resilience as posited by the theory. To pinpoint these theoretical points for G, R and S for a regime, calculate the exact middle between the two points where the circle interacts with the behavioural axis. Source: Author's own work, designed by Typeface nv.

WHAT DOES THIS TYPOLOGY EXPLAIN?

The proposed classification is an explanatory typology (cf., Elman 2005) and aims, in the words of S.-E. Skaaning and J. Møller (2012), "for parsimony and boldness". Elman (2005, 296) states that:

> *Explanatory typologies invoke both the descriptive and classificatory roles of typologies albeit (…) in a way that incorporates their theoretical focus. (…)*
> *In an explanatory typology, the descriptive function follows the conventional usage, but in a way that is heavily modified by its theoretical purposes. The constituent attributes are extracted from the variables of a preexisting theory. The dimensions of the property space (its rows and columns) reflect alternative values of the theory's independent variables, so each cell in the space is associated with predicted values of the theory's intervening or dependent variables.*

This vectoral, categorical classification was designed for this purpose. All possible types and their amalgams on the organisational dimensions correspond to meaningful insights for political theory. Each level for each vectoral scale is mutually exclusive and theoretically salient. Further, these three vectors do not automatically constitute communicating vessels[3] – although some combinations

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[3]   Otherwise, these vectoral scales should have been transmuted into compressed typological spaces (cf., Elman 2005, 300).

seem impossible, e.g., a totalitarian ideology (level 4) is very unlikely to coexist with unrestrained multipartyism (level 4).

As shown in Figure 1, this typology explains regime behaviour along three dimensions: their ability for unconstrained gatekeeping (G), their coercive repression bias (R), and their capacity to penetrate society (S). Figure 2 indicates how nine political regimes archetypes differ along these three axes. Below, I explain how these three dimensions are grounded in theory and why they matter.

Unconstrained gatekeeping (G) relates directly to high levels of tyranny but is countered by high levels of ideology and high levels of multipartyism. These observations resonate with the works on audience costs in authoritarian regimes (Weeks 2008), threat perception (Boudreau 2005), veto-players (Singh and Dunn 2013) that all, in their own ways, tackle aspects of the relational dimension (tyranny) and pluralist dimension (multipartyism). Still, this is not the whole picture. Norms also restrain, and when regimes strongly adhere to a (transformative) ideology, the latter prescribes their actions and limits their options. This is known to steer patterns of (forcible) regime promotion and matters for alliance formation in the international arena (Owen IV 2005; 2010; 2022; Van den Bosch 2020). More importantly, the level of regime restraint can be directly linked to theories of linkages, leverage and gatekeeping (Levitsky and Way 2010; Tolstrup 2013; 2014; Van den Bosch 2021). The ability of a ruler to act unopposed by other actors and unhindered by ideological considerations matters greatly for a regime's ability to initiate a conflict (Weeks 2012) or respond quickly to crises and/or change sides, even if there is a significant trade-off by wielding such power without reliable information.

Coercive repression bias (R) is more prevalent in regimes with exclusive selectorates (tutelary bodies and militaries), and is congruent with high levels of tyranny and high levels of ideology, and countered by high levels of pluralism. Military regimes, by virtue of their training and socialisation, are biased to resort to coercive means. Increased levels of tyranny influence threat perception (Huntington 1991; Boudreau 2005; Carey 2010) and unrestrained rule is more prone to resort to repression (Davenport 2007a/b; Escribà-Folch 2012). This typology can register a regime's capacity for mass state terror that was previously only attributed to totalitarian regimes by accounting for that normative dimension (ideology) to justify and solicit such large-scale repression (Linz [1975] 2000). Finally, the higher the level of pluralism, the more societal grievances are channelled via peaceful means, although this does not preclude limited multiparty regimes from also resorting to repression when threatened (Fein 1995; Regan and Henderson 2002).

Penetration of society (S) is deeper in regimes with inclusive selectorates (party-based), in regimes either on a mission to transform society (high levels of ideology) or those that allow open competition in the electoral arena (high levels of pluralism) (Luo and Rozenas 2022). It is countered by higher levels of tyranny, which weaken institutions and alienate regime followers. While this

behavioural dimension is still relatively underexplored in comparative polit-ics, it is associated with resilience and information-gathering (Dimitrov 2023; Chen and Xu 2017). With the onslaught of new technologies, the new subfield of "digital authoritarianism" studies new surveillance and censorship techniques, and probes their innovative forms of self-legitimation through propaganda and indoctrination (Kalathil and Boas 2010). Once again, ideological control is not the whole picture, and a high pluralist dimension can, in contrast, attract wider segments (on local levels) of society to engage in politics, socialising the latter and tying them to the regime. Besides the study of regime resilience, I posit that the dimension of societal penetration is important for assessing democratic and non-democratic legacies, as well as the bureaucratic and ideological norms that linger over time.

HOW DOES THIS TYPOLOGY RELATE TO OTHER CLASSIFICATIONS?

Above, I have explained how this typology builds upon many other known categorical typologies and concepts that, in turn, have channelled the main-stream works into their understanding and sorting criteria (Geddes et al. 2018; Hadenius and Teorell [2006] 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013; Kailitz 2015). To recap, this proposed typology accounts for the organisational basis of regimes; walks the paths trodden by predecessors who have unquestion-ably proven the importance of elections and multipartyism in all regime types Moreover, it takes the accepted conceptualisations of personalism and broadens them to a new measure of tyranny and, finally, it brings ideology back into the fold. This typology is designed to study regimes of the present and the past, and was not designed to fit democracy as such.

Many categorical political regime typologies (but not all!) have an inherent democratic bias while formulating sorting categories. Many others accept the dichotomy between democracy and non-democracy, and only aim to subdivide the latter into coherent authoritarian regime types. Continuous measures (Polity, Freedom House, V-Dem) are also mainly designed to separate democracies from non-democracies. Notwithstanding the number of measured variables and their overall complexity, any small shift on their multidimensional spectra does not dir-ectly translate into categorically different regime behaviour. For Freedom House, for example, there are myriad ways for regimes to evolve from "not free" to "partially free" to "free" – and without the explanatory power of categorical benchmarks, such observed shifts have quite haphazardly contributed to our theoretical refinement of political regimes (Bollen 1990; Bogaards 2012; Boese 2019; Kasuya and Mori 2022). Of course, such continuous measures serve other functions as well and have been indispensable for tracking regime behaviour and performance over time.

Accordingly, the assumption that all political regimes can (and should) be classified on one integrated spectrum in terms of their level of pluralism (or liberties), accounting for all the variation witnessed since the end of the Cold War, has expired. Together with this assumption, I am also leaving behind the

heated debates concerned with how to untangle hybrid regimes. (Which ones can still be considered democratic and which are authoritarian? Which definition of democracy applies: minimalist vs. maximalist?)

In the interpretation of this typology, a "liberal democracy" is a party-based ruling coalition in an electoral setting – at times, traces of a tutelar body remain (e.g., symbolic constitutional monarchies). The regime has no or low levels of tyranny (level 0–1), adheres to a dominant worldview (level 2), which of course is a maximalist, inclusive, liberal, democratic ideology, which subscribes to a formalised, political order with unrestrained pluralism (level 4). The values of democratic rule encompass equality before the law and equal (but indirect) representation in free and fair elections, with the rule of law upholding individual, economic, political freedoms, checks and balances, universal suffrage, freedom of speech and religion, incorporating protections for minorities and vulnerable groups etc. – these are the aspects that make democratic regimes democratic. Different accents in the interpretation and implementation of liberal democracy account for the empirical variation of North American and European models for instance. Note Vrečko Ilc (2017) and his treatise of the ongoing tension between representation and structural racism, or the clash between the "normative" and the "actual" in the US democratic system.

Due to the nature of democracy, it is a "dominant ideology" (level 2 in Table 1) with its nature/salience on a medium level (5 points in Table 2), with medium levels of state and society indoctrination[4] but not prescribing direct control over individual behaviour. As an ideology, liberal democracy promotes moderation and restraint, mandated by popular support through to the specifically prescribed ritual of cyclical elections. Therefore, on the typology's scale of ideology – it is pinned on level 2. If it drops lower, non-democratic values will compete and erode core tenets; if the ideology becomes stronger and more transformative, it will encroach on the individual freedoms which it espouses to protect, and will hence cease to be democratic.[5] By itself, the maximum level of multipartyism (level 4) solely overlaps with a "minimalist" interpretation of democracy.

To recap, for (emerging or established) democratic regimes, the absence, erosion or removal of one or more core tenets of its dominant guiding ideology will result in democratic deficits. In this regard, the proposed typology is not 'designed' to capture democracy. During the Anthropocene, I argue, various eras have experienced different understandings of which regime type was 'just' or 'legitimate' – and so, crafting a typology benchmarked on our current understanding of what a 'just' rule is, closes the door to understanding earlier

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[4] Liberal Democracy is a party-based regime (with an optional tutelar residue for its constitutional monarchical variant), with low tyranny (level 0–1), a dominant ideology (level 2: salience – 7 points, state-level – 7, society-level – 1, individual-level N/A) and unrestrained pluralism (level 4).

[5] Arguable, a slight uptick in these levels can be expected during ongoing (successful) democratic revolutions that need to transform pre-democratic state institutions, but since such a revolutionary regime would not be 'elected' itself in most cases, it should best be labelled as a transitional regime.

pre-modern polities and their regime types. See, for instance, Vodovnik (2017) and his theoretical demarcation of democracy and republicanism, and these ideologies' radical different conclusions despite their common roots.

The level of ideology is therefore key to understanding democratic backsliding. Take the example of Poland under the Law and Justice Party (PiS). After (once again) winning democratic elections in 2015, the PiS-led coalition swiftly replaced the democratic ideology with an exclusive, patriarchal nationalist narrative, polarising society further with respect to refugees and sexual minorities, pursuing populist campaigns to snuff out imagined foreign agents, and former communist networks justifying purges. Once power was consolidated, media and educational indoctrination followed, together with their orchestrated moves to erode the checks and balances to tilt the electoral playing field in the incumbents' favour (dominant party rule – level 3). Despite earlier unsuccessful attempts, a united opposition ousted the regime at the October 2023 elections.

In contrast, while in office Donald Trump pushed the boundaries of the US democratic system by effectively increasing its level of tyranny from 1 to 2, polarising society (even further) in a concerted effort to erode the democratic ideology (from level 2 to 1), and abusing his presidential prerogative to reduce pluralism from level 4 to 3 (unsuccessfully). The regime remained party-based throughout his presidency.

As a historical example: Apartheid South Africa would be classified as a party-based electoral regime, with relatively low-to-medium levels of tyranny (level 1–2, e.g., medium under rulers like Henrik Verwoerd or P.W. Botha), with a transformative (ethnic supremacist) ideology (level 3) steering state and society, combined with hegemonic party rule (level 2) under the *Nasionale Party*.

On a related note – this typology moves away from using legitimacy as a regime feature, going against the theorisations of many of my (German) colleagues. While I agree that both democracies and non-democracies can have legitimacy (Gerschewski 2018) and ideological self-legitimation is not restricted to authoritarian regimes (Kailitz and Backes 2015), I cannot help but observe the "perfume of bias"[6] that the legitimacy in democracies smells better than in their counterparts, and that autocrats must work harder (to self-legitimise). This begs the question: what was the situation before absolute monarchies were challenged by republics and compelled to self-legitimise? How long before liberal democracy itself is to lose out in the face of a more attractive and legitimate alternative (maybe an ecologically sustainable democratic model)? Namely: while our understanding of what is legitimate might not be ephemeral, it does evolve over time. And without falling into cultural relativism, structural capacity and security gaps in states raise different regional expectations of leadership than those merely framed through a legitimacy gap (cf., Call 2011). To conclude

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[6] Adapted from *'un parfum de crise'* from a Belgian Christian-Democratic party member, Francis Delpérée, commenting on the deadlock of the Belgian coalition talks in August 2007.

this thought, while I acknowledge the enormous contributions of legitimacy to comparative politics, the concept is practically unmeasurable and comes and goes like the tide throughout regime life cycles. In the same way, we do not know what goes on inside the head of a ruler, and likewise we cannot tell objectively what the people really think of their rulers.

WHAT IS THE INNOVATIVE VALUE OF THIS CLASSIFICATION?

This typology holds the potential to overcome many shortcomings of existing regime classifications (see above) and below I briefly look at several areas where it could contribute the most.

To Compare Personalist Regimes

Just like Linz invented authoritarian regimes (and their subtypes) to make sense of a growing group of regimes, this typology will be able to meaningfully distinguish between personalist ideocracies, neo-sultanistic cases with ideological vacuums, personalist rule emerging from a military or party organisation, and account for their institutional changes over time. No longer will North Korea under the Kim family, Putin's Russia, Turkey under Erdoğan, or Rwanda under Kagame fall under one label. Since personalist regimes have become the prevalent regime type globally, one must break open the 'black box' of personalism and assess how their level of tyranny, as well as their organisational, ideological and pluralist settings influence behaviour.

The Return of the Prodigal Ideocracies

Unite the family of ideocracies – Totalitarianism "was dead and is alive again, [it] was lost but has been found" – to use a biblical allegory.[7] I agree with the replacement of "totalitarianism" with "ideocracy" to broaden this category for all those regimes with transformative or totalitarian ideologies. As shown above, I am not the first to argue for the need to rehabilitate ideology, although I assert that pouring all highly ideological regimes into just one sorting category would diminish our understanding of their complexity. The proposed normative dimension with four levels is my solution to link the salience and strength of a (transformative) ideology to different dynamics of regime behaviour.

To distinguish between ideocracies – For the first time, a typology can neatly distinguish between ideocracies, as shown in Figure 3. Hitler's tyrannical, fascist military-party hybrid was less constrained by ideology than Stalin's (archetypical) party-based communist regime, yet differs from North Korea's blend where the ideology has merged with the leaders' personality cult. For the first time, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has a place in regime classifications, as a medium-tyrannical, high-ideological, closed tutelary regime governed by a religious council (Rahimi 2023; Watkins 2022).

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[7]   *The Bible*, Luke 15, 32.

To account for post-totalitarianism – This Linzean concept (Linz [1975] 2000; Thompson 1998), left hanging between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, finally has a conceptual home since this typology can account for a devaluation of ideology (from level 4 to 3) over time. This would allow us to account for cases like post-Maoist China, the USSR under Brezhnev, or Cuba after Castro.

To Juxtapose Monarchies

Similarly, the typology permits for a more nuanced classification of monarchies. For instance, Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchic theocracy is a closed (pluralism – 0) tutelary regime (there is a consultative council, the *Majlis Al-Shura*), with a transformative ideology (ideology – 3) and an increasing tyrannical tendency (tyranny moving from 2 to 3) that began under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who is now the prime minister and de facto power holder. In contrast, Eswatini (Swaziland) is a monarchical-electoral hybrid that does allow for the cyclical election of individual candidates. Still, the majority of seats in the senate and a minority of the House of Assembly are selected by the ruler (pluralism – 1). The regime today features high levels of tyranny (3): yet in previous times it was characterised by co-rulership, with an important

Figure 3: COMPARING IDEOCRACIES

A. Hitler's Fascist Regime (1933-1945)
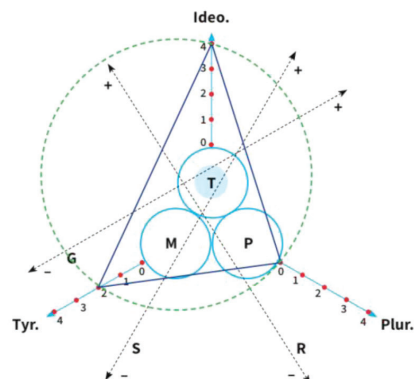
The USSR under J.V. Stalin (1928-1953)
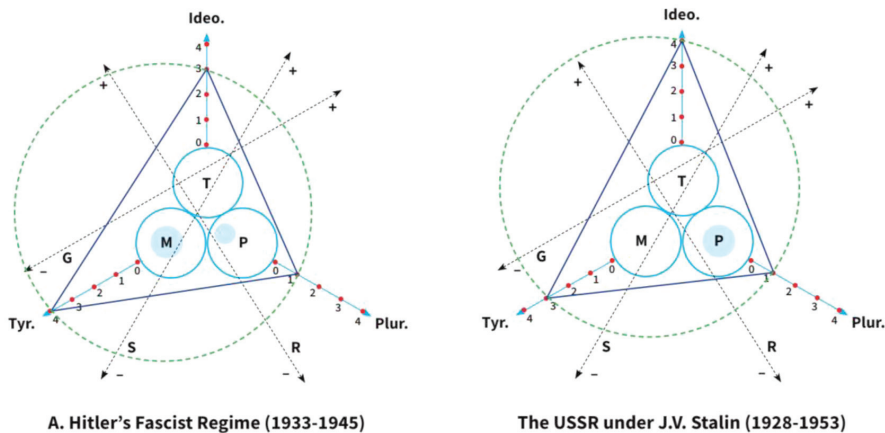
Hitler's regime was much more military in nature than its communist totalitarian counterparts, with military oaths demanding unconditional loyalty to the *Fürher* himself, the Supreme Commander-in-chief. Unlike communist leaders, Hitler was able to reform and change the institutional outlook of his regime on a whim, and was less bound by ideology, since he himself was the main ideologue of Nazism.

Stalin did not create the Communist Party which legitimised his position, and despite obtaining very high levels of tyranny he would have been unable to replace the party with his own creation since it was a key pillar of the totalitarian ideology. Stalin did alter the ideology, entering into unlikely alliances, changing the international outlook of USSR socialist policy and providing an operating space for the Orthodox Church (for mobilisation purposes during WWII), but overall, the regime was bound by the socialist tenets.
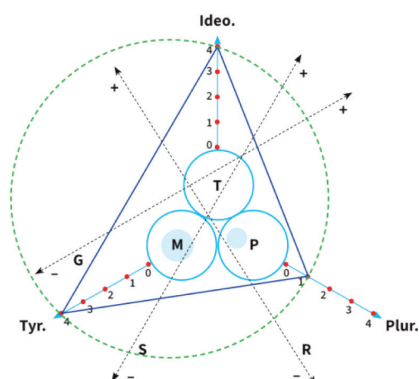
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the Kim-family (1995-2011)

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban) (2021-)

North Korea merged its Stalinist communist model with ultra-nationalism and its own leader-oriented ideology of *Juche* after 1956 (destalinisation in the USSR). The absolute tyranny of Kim Il-Sung allowed for such ideological reinterpretation and improvisation, blending state-ideology with a cult of personality. With the planned takeover of Kim Jong-Il, the ideology was adapted again to implement Songun or the 'military-first' policy in 1995, rearranging the regime's structure to military domination, propelling the new leader's military allies into the inner circle alongside his deceased father's party stalwarts. Under Kim Jong-Un, who took over in 2011 and does not have a military background, the party was reinstituted to its central position to balance the military peers of his father.

After the Taliban's second takeover in 2021, Afghanistan is ruled according to an extreme version of Sharia Islamic law (in line with Hanafi jurisprudence). The regime is currently led by Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada who took over leadership of the movement in 2016, and is beholden to a religious council of conservative elders in Kandahar that can veto some decisions. While the regime is considering to set up more effective state structures (foremost taxation), so far all political parties are banned and the legislature remains closed.

Source: Author's own work, designed by Typeface nv.

(balancing) position for the mother of the king *(Ndlovukati).* The regime has low levels of ideology (1) promulgating traditional culture and customs. These categorical nuances can also be extended to historical cases (see below). Western, democratic monarchies have the same indicators as a liberal democracy, but are supplemented with a residual tutelary body.

To Account for Intra-regime Dynamics

This typology is able to account for changes along four dimensions within the lifespan of a regime, thereby making it possible for the first time to track patterns resulting from the impact of intra-regime successions, external shocks, outside pressure to liberalise, the effects of military defeat, ideological radicalisation, reforms through charismatic leadership etc. This would be the first typology to actually account for autocratisation and democratisation using categorical thresholds. (Arguably, unlike continuous measures, this model is less 'sensitive' to small changes, although it does formulate theoretical expectations accompanying the observed shifts.)

Examples of organisational shifts are: (i) monarchies opening up a legislature to channel and diffuse organised dissent into a controlled multi-party system;

(ii) coup leaders who seek international legitimacy by holding elections, adding a party to their regime's institutional design; and (iii) an increasingly tyrannical regime establishing a dominant patronal pyramid (cf., Hale 2014), hollowing out a military and pre-established party in the process.

In the other three dimensions, one can observe changes like: (iv) a charismatic ideologue transforms a state, making it more tyrannical and ideological, like Khomeini's takeover in Iran; (v) an established tyrant dies suddenly, and the successive leadership becomes more collegial (for a while), e.g., Egypt following the assassination of Sadat (1981); and (vi) a democratic ideology is replaced by a hyper-nationalist one, which becomes dominant and results in democratic backsliding since elections are no longer fair, e.g., Orbán's Hungary.

Autocratic learning and collaboration

While autocrats tend to learn from similar regimes (cf., Hall and Ambrosio 2017; Olar 2019; Hall 2023), I argue that likeness in the organisational and normative dimensions in this typology will matter the most while exploring patterns of such 'bounded' learning. Especially with ideology back in the purview, regime dyads of collaboration and learning can be explored and mapped, and the institutional shifts they bring about within their respective regimes, can likewise be observed.

To Extend the Historical Scope

Since this typology does not implicitly use modern liberal democracy as its conceptual baseline, the classification has potential to be extended to proto-democratic times (when modified accordingly). While this endeavour is ongoing, I want to provide some brief pointers:

- The *organisational* dimension is able to distinguish between the institutions of monarchies, republics (oligarchies or assembly-based polities) and predominantly military states (or their hybrids, e.g., the Mongols).
- The *relational* dimension (tyranny) corresponds well with elder (classical and medieval) conceptualisations of tyrannical rule (Stewart 2021) and different types of monarchy (absolutist vs. electoral). (The distinction between classical tyranny, despotism and royal absolutism would be marked on the relational *and* normative dimensions, meaning higher levels of ideology for absolutism and despotism, i.e., traditional legitimacy and its corresponding restraints; while true tyranny dissolves the organisational dimension as well since it hollows out institutions, unlike absolutism.)
- The *normative* dimension (ideology) could account for various forms of traditional rule, ranging from theocracy, caesaropapism, tribalism etc. to later ideological frames like republicanism or nationalism, and the level of grasp they had on society as a whole through modernisation processes.
- In the *pluralist* dimension, single-party rule (level 1) would correspond to proto-democratic polities that adapted competitive legislatures or assemblies,

where (tribal or political) fractions would directly and openly compete for power within one sole institution or main assembly, albeit suffrage remained exclusive, elitist and limited, e.g., the city-states of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor: Athens, Argos, Syracuse, Rhodes and Erythraea. Hegemonic party rule (level 2) could perhaps find its pre-modern equivalent in more federal or feudal structures where much more consultation was required by the ruler, but not all elites were part of the inner circle. Maybe, some early modern republican and constitutional monarchies (with parliaments) qualify for dominant party rule (level 3) – like England in the 18th century with its class-based political factions?

Note that extending the typology's scope to classical, medieval and pre-modern cases does not mean that one can directly compare these with contemporary counterparts. The historical context in which forms of rule were accepted, tolerated or rejected precludes simply equating regimes with similar vectoral and organisational features across time. Still, extending datasets would allow for synchronic comparisons using the same lens, and to discern major diachronic trends, which can either be empirically linked to domestic innovations and/or larger international structural changes.

CONCLUSION

This article introduces a novel typology for classifying political regimes that addresses the limitations of previous models by incorporating an *organisational* dimension (party-organisations, militaries, tutelary bodies) and three vectoral dimensions: *relational* (tyranny), *normative* (ideology) and *pluralist* (multipartyism). This approach permits a dynamic understanding of regime behaviour, capturing intra-regime shifts without requiring reclassification. The typology innovatively incorporates established, meaningful classifications like personalist regimes, ideocracies, totalitarianism, democracy and hybrid forms, providing a nuanced framework for analysing contemporary and historical political systems. By integrating ideology back into the analysis and offering a comprehensive measure of tyranny, this classification enhances our ability to study regime resilience, autocratisation, and democratisation, as well as their behaviour in international relations.

This typology (prototype 4.0) categorically cracks open the black box of regime archetypes, integrating the most insightful theoretical contributions from previous generations. It is my sincere hope that this typology can shape the oncoming generation of scholarship that is now preoccupied with untangling the exact dynamics of personalisation (and how to halt such processes), reappraising 'the international' – how regimes collaborate, integrate and learn from one another, and how this affects their diffusion in the international system – and pondering the pillars of autocratic stability, resilience and robustness, especially during times of succession.

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JE ČAS ZA NOVO TIPOLOGIJO KLASIFIKACIJE POLITIČNIH REŽIMOV? VEKTORSKA KLASIFIKACIJA ZA NASLAVLJANJE ZNOTRAJ-REŽIMSKIH PREMIKOV IN MEDNARODNE DINAMIKE

Povzetek. *Ta članek predlaga novo tipologijo za klasifikacijo političnih režimov, upoštevajoč omejitve prejšnjih modelov, z vključitvijo treh organizacijskih povezav (strankarske organizacije, vojske, tutelarne/skrbniške institucije) in treh vektorskih dimenzij (tiranija, ideologija, večstrankarstvo). Ta pristop omogoča dinamično razumevanje obnašanja režimov, zajemajoč znotrajrežimske premike, brez potrebe po reklasifikaciji. Tipologija inovativno razlikuje med personalističnimi režimi, ideokracijami in hibridnimi režimi, kar zagotavlja niansiran okvir za analizo sodobnih in zgodovinskih političnih sistemov. Z integracijo ideologije nazaj v analizo in ponujanjem celovitega razumevanja tiranije ta klasifikacija izboljšuje našo sposobnost preučevanja odpornosti režimov, avtokratizacije in demokratizacije ter tudi tega, kako politični režimi sodelujejo in se učijo v mednarodnem sistemu.*

Ključni pojmi: *diktatura, avtoritatizem, totalitaririzem, personalizem, tiranija, ideologija, pluralizem.*