



## The modern manual of authoritarian leadership

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of modern authoritarianism is distinguished by its increasing sophistication in the techniques of authoritarian rule. Is it possible to comprehend these modern authoritarian techniques within a larger framework that accounts for their theoretical provenance, interrelationship and efficacy? This article argues that the nature and structure of the modern state has shaped the form and expression of authoritarian rule. More specifically, it shows how Thomas Hobbes, the influential theoretical founder of the modern state, can account for the modern "manual" of authoritarian leadership, with its distinctive use of rule of law and constitutions, voting and elections, and a free marketplace as means to enhance power and consolidate rule. Understanding the theoretical foundations of this modern manual is valuable for providing new insights into the efficacy of these techniques and thereby the dangers posed by modern authoritarians and the means to counter their threat.

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Authoritarianism is once more challenging democracy and democratization.<sup>1</sup> Authoritarianism has been the subject of three waves of scholarship, with the first wave distinguishing between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and the second exploring the rise of authoritarianism, especially in its bureaucratic, military and regional diversity.<sup>2</sup> The third, contemporary wave has been dominated by rational choice approaches and the use of sophisticated datasets to evaluate the origins, consolidation and breakdown of dictatorships. It has distinguished between types of authoritarianism as well as hybrid regimes that combine both democratic and authoritarian aspects.<sup>3</sup> What is evident from this recent scholarship is a new-found sophistication in techniques of contemporary authoritarian rule.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the familiar repertoire of fear, appropriation of property, public discord and censorship, the modern manual for smart authoritarianism is distinctive in its manipulation of democratic principles and institutions for authoritarian purposes.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary authoritarians therefore take pride in their use of rule of law and constitutions, voting and elections, and a free marketplace as means to enhance their power and consolidate their rule. The range and diversity of these techniques suggest ad hoc or opportunistic innovations copied and borrowed as needed, to marshal and amalgamate domestic power and counter international influence. But is it possible that they can also be comprehended within a

larger philosophical architecture that shows their mutual relations so that taken as a whole they represent a new manual for authoritarian leadership.<sup>6</sup> If there is such a new “manual” or template for modern authoritarianism, what vision of authoritarianism does it articulate, justify and defend? These are important questions because if there is such a new manual grounded in a comprehensive theoretical formulation then understanding its nature is a valuable starting point for confronting and engaging with modern authoritarianism. It provides new insights into the theoretical coherence and efficacy of these techniques and thereby the dangers posed by modern authoritarians and the means to counter their threat.

In this article, I argue that it is possible to comprehend modern authoritarian techniques within a larger framework that accounts for their theoretical provenance, inter-relationship and efficacy. At the core of the article is the claim that the nature and structure of the modern state has shaped the form and expression of authoritarian rule. Accordingly, modern theorists of the state provide valuable theoretical insights into the nature of such a rule. More specifically, I will show how Thomas Hobbes, the influential theoretical founder of the modern state, can account for the distinctive and significant techniques of modern authoritarians, from their use of the law, to their use of democratic institutions, to finally, their endorsement of a commercial state. Thus modern authoritarians employ a Hobbesian manual because they have chosen to adopt his insights, or more generally are compelled by the form of the modern state to resort to his techniques once they choose to abandon the alternative of liberal constitutionalism.<sup>7</sup>

In the discussion that follows I outline Hobbes’s political thought, especially its innovations of power, rights, sovereignty and the state to show how it was intended to counter Aristotle’s *Politics*, with its influential “manual” for tyrants on how to preserve tyranny. I then examine three specific aspects of Hobbesian thought to show how it provides theoretical justification as well as the major forms and techniques of governance for modern authoritarians. The first shows how the modern authoritarian recourse to constitutionalism takes up in all important respects Hobbes notion of sovereignty and rule by law. The second shows how Hobbes’s concept of authorization as representation accords with and justifies the modern authoritarian conception of the “people”, including the specific use of elections and political parties to garner information and seek authority. In the final example, I explore the extent to which Hobbes’s distinction between political and commercial liberty provides the foundations for the modern authoritarian version of “state capitalism”. In my concluding comments I explore the merits of this new understanding of the manual of modern authoritarianism, including its new insights into its strengths, as well as its limitations, both in theory and in practice.

## Advising tyrants

One of the earliest, most famous and influential manuals for tyrants can be found in Aristotle’s *Politics* where in the course of examining the foundation and preservation of various regimes he discusses how to preserve tyrannies.<sup>8</sup> The *politeia* or regime is for Aristotle the authoritative arrangement of offices that accounted for not only the organization or structure of institutions, but more fundamentally revealed the aspirations or goals of each political community. A regime, according to Aristotle, was united by justice and friendship and therefore aimed not only at the necessary aspects of all

political organizations, such as material prosperity and security, but also the good life. A regime was therefore more than a mere alliance for security from injustice or exchange.<sup>9</sup> Regimes were also distinguished by how many ruled – one, few, many – and the character of that rule, so that Aristotle distinguished between just and unjust regimes based whether the rule was for the benefit of the ruled, as in monarchy, aristocracy or polity, or of the rulers, such as tyranny, oligarchy and democracy.<sup>10</sup> The aim of tyranny was wealth, necessary for the tyrant's luxury and his security, so that he treated the regime as an economic alliance characterized by the relationship of master and slave. Because it looked to the welfare only of the tyrant and in doing so disenfranchised everyone else it was the most corrupt, unstable and unnatural regime.

This assessment of tyranny suggests Aristotle would have advocated its overthrow yet in the *Politics* he counsels present and future tyrants on how to preserve their rule.<sup>11</sup> How can we explain Aristotle's puzzling treatment of tyranny?<sup>12</sup> One obvious answer is the prudential assessment that however pernicious a tyranny was to be tolerated as the least bad alternative to the *stasis* and war that were the inevitable consequences of any attempt to overturn tyranny. But a closer examination of his discussion reveals how his counsel on preserving tyranny evinces a greater ambition to moderate and transform it. Aristotle states that tyrannies are preserved in two modes that are opposed to each other. The first mode is the one familiar to tyrants and which are all too familiar to us.<sup>13</sup> Having examined them in detail he summarizes them under three headings:

For tyranny aims at three things: one, that the ruled have only modest thoughts (for a small-souled person will not conspire against anyone); second, that they distrust one another (for a tyranny will not be overthrown before some persons are able to trust each other – hence they make war on the respectable as being harmful to their rule not merely because they claim not to merit being ruled in the fashion of a master, but also because they are trustworthy, both among themselves and with respect to others, and will not denounce one another or others); and third, an incapacity for activity, for no one will undertake something on behalf of those who are incapable, so that not even tyranny will be overthrown where the capacity is lacking.<sup>14</sup>

Having detailed these techniques, Aristotle proposes another mode, one that involves "a sort of superintendence that is practically the opposite of what has been spoken of".<sup>15</sup> What follows are eleven detailed recommendations, which he summarizes in these terms:

The aim is evident: he should appear to the ruled not as a tyrannical sort but as a manager and a kingly sort, not as an appropriator [for the things of others] but as a steward. He should pursue moderateness in life, not the extremes; further, he should seek the company of the notables, but seek popularity with the many. As a result of these things, not only will his rule necessarily be noble and more enviable by the fact that he rules over persons who are better and have not been humbled and does so without being hated and feared, but his rule will also be longer lasting; further, in terms of character he will either be in a state that is fine in relations to virtue or he will be half-decent – not vicious but half-vicious.<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle's counsel is that tyranny is less vicious and longer lasting if it comes to resemble, if not become, a monarchy. Thus he admits that in this new mode the tyrant may have to act like a king, in effect deceiving the public. In doing so, however, he suggests that such deception may allow the tyrant to rule over consenting subjects, ensuring longevity.<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle's "manual for tyrants", chronicling the conventional tyrannical techniques and counselling on new methods of deception, seemed to confirm him as an especially

pernicious flatterer of tyrants. Yet his approach revealed the unique challenges of stabilizing and reforming tyrannies. Tyrants do not need Aristotle to educate them in brutality and deceit and would have been familiar with the conventional repertoire of tyranny detailed by him in the first mode. Nor do they take readily to hortatory speeches and sermonizing. But they are acutely sensitive to their self-interest and therefore would have appreciated Aristotle's lesson in deception that educated them about the limitations of brute techniques they knew firsthand. But what of the practice of this deceit? Aristotle would suggest that though it may have led to stability, it also moderated the tyranny, which in the given circumstances was not an inconsiderable achievement. There was also a more subtle aspect to this education, where someone acting as king would perhaps in time become a king, enjoying its pleasures and benefits. So the most hard-headed tyrant would, in pursuing his self-interest, choose to do what others may counsel without success and in the process become the king by playing one, rewarded with the pleasures of virtuous rule.

This understanding of tyranny was subsequently influential for Cicero and Tacitus, adopted by Medieval and Renaissance political theorists, and informed the thought of moderns such as Montesquieu. Its force can still be discerned in the contemporary focus on "regime" for understanding modern authoritarianism.<sup>18</sup> It was also attacked and rejected by moderns who sought to replace its insights with a radically new understanding of human nature and therefore politics. At the forefront of this assault was Thomas Hobbes, who was influential as the innovative theorist of the modern conceptions of power, social contract and sovereignty and theoretical architect of the modern state. Though widely interpreted as a thinker whose reflections were shaped by his personal experience of the English Civil Wars, Hobbes's writings reveal him to be more ambitious. As he claims in his most famous work the *Leviathan*, he is the first philosopher to have solved the problem of government and secured the basis for "peace everlasting".<sup>19</sup>

Hobbes's innovation of the state that dominates contemporary politics is founded upon comprehensive repudiation of Aristotle's political thought, and especially his conception of the regime.<sup>20</sup> Hobbes rejects Aristotle's claim that we are *zoon politikon* or naturally sociable.<sup>21</sup> As individuals, we are all constituted to pursue our own pleasure (and avoid pain), constantly seeking power understood as the present means to satisfy future desires, so that humans have "a perpetuall and restlesse Desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death".<sup>22</sup> It is therefore futile to castigate individuals for being tyrannical or for seeking power: "Desires, and other Passions of man", according to Hobbes, "are in themselves no sin".<sup>23</sup> The core problem, according to Hobbes, is that our pursuit of power is complicated by the fact that we disagree on what is good and bad because "there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers".<sup>24</sup> Politics therefore does not aim at the good or noble life so that the names of regimes, such as tyranny, are merely used to describe forms of government people dislike:

And when the same men shall be displeased with those that have the administration of Democracy, or Aristocracy, they are not to seek for disgraceful names to expresse their anger in; but call readily the one Anarchy, and the other, Oligarchy, or the Tyranny of the a Few.<sup>25</sup>

Classical political philosophy therefore stands charged as encouraging the overthrow of civil authority.

Having rejected foundational elements of Aristotelian political thought, Hobbes uses his political science to develop his new political solution to peace and commodious life. Our unending desire for power and contests over the meaning of justice is exacerbated, according to Hobbes, by nature that provides us with few of the necessities of life. Consequently our natural condition is that of *bellum omnium contra omnes* or war of all against all, characterized by the absence of arts and sciences and all those things that lead to our commodious life and above all the insecurity of violent death. This unpromising origin provides the well-known foundations for Hobbes's new politics of the modern state. Individuals in the state of nature may not agree on what is good, but they can agree on *summum malum* or the greatest evil – fear of violent death. It is on the basis of this core insight that humans can rely on their own means to secure peace and prosperity. The mutual agreement by individuals authorizes a sovereign composed of one, few or many to enforce the mutual contract to ensure peace. In this way, Hobbes reinterprets and relegates the concept of the regime to a form of the executive.<sup>26</sup> The new Leviathan state, a human artefact superior in strength to any one individual, is devised with the sole aim of *salus populi* or peoples' safety.<sup>27</sup> In providing for peace, the sovereign would also encourage the arts and science and general prosperity, while avoiding international warfare. Hobbes's creation of the modern state is therefore premised on a lowering of our political hopes and expectations – the neutral state replaces the diversity of regimes; politics is only about comfort and security, and any contrary claims to the good life are the siren calls of the glorious few who seek to rule and dominate. Hobbes's political thought is therefore unique in combining seemingly disparate elements – a powerful sovereign and egalitarianism, legal positivism and individual rights, political stability and commercial innovation. The complex features of his thought explain why Hobbes has been interpreted variously as a materialist and pious, a monarchist and constitutionalist, an early liberal and a foundational theorist of the absolutist state.

This general overview of Hobbes's thought shows the broad contours of his new political science. But what were the implications of these innovations for the tyrant and tyranny? Did Hobbes in repudiating Aristotle also fashion a new manual for tyrants? A comprehensive account of Hobbes's new manual is beyond the scope of this article, but in the discussion below we will focus on three important aspects of his thought to show how they account for the major techniques deployed by contemporary authoritarians. We start with the contemporary authoritarian use of rule by law, tracing its theoretical provenance and justification to Hobbes's jurisprudence. Next, we will see how contemporary authoritarian manipulation of elections, parties and ostensibly democratic forms can be justified in terms of Hobbes's concept of authorization. Finally, we will see how the increasingly lucrative authoritarian reliance on the freedom of markets receives its theoretical justification in Hobbes's counsel to the sovereign to permit liberty of subjects to pursue trade, commerce and innovation for the welfare of the sovereign and the state. The overall argument is that contemporary authoritarian regimes use to various degrees all three techniques to secure and augment their rule.

## Legalizing the tyrant

The classic tyrant was notorious for ruling by personal fiat and therefore lawlessness. It is for this reason that rule of law is considered an essential feature of modern

democracies. But a distinguishing feature of modern authoritarianism has been its adherence to law, or as Russia's President Putin put it, "dictatorship of the law".<sup>28</sup> How do authoritarians rely on the august authority of the law to enhance their lawlessness? This puzzle is at the heart of Hobbes's jurisprudence. What is distinctive about Hobbes's conception of the state is its foundation in the law. In a sense he wants to legalize politics to overcome the perpetual struggles between different conceptions of the good life, and in doing so ensure its stability and safety. As we have seen, the solution he proposes is the artificial state, founded on the contractual agreement of individuals who want to leave the danger and penury of the state of nature. Indeed, in the *Leviathan* Hobbes amusingly becomes an attorney, drafting the terms of the original contract. Hobbes therefore appears to be a great defender of the rule of law. Upon closer inspection, however, a different, more complex picture emerges. The logic of the foundational contract authorizing the sovereign to defend and enforce its terms means that the sovereign is necessarily not subject to the contract and therefore remains in the state of nature. Thus Hobbes's constitution combines a state founded on law with a sovereign who is beyond the law, with important implications for the nature of rule of law in the state. In "Of Civill Lawes", Chapter 26 of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that civil laws are rules of right and wrong commanded by the sovereign. Since laws derive from the will of the sovereign and right and wrong is determined by the laws, there can be no unjust laws. Consequently, judges are nothing more than servants of the sovereign, interpreting and administering the sovereign's laws; in adjudicating cases they cannot appeal to principles beyond the law or the will of the sovereign, such as immemorial rights, the "artificial reason" of the common law or Natural Law.

Such a conception of sovereignty and legal positivism has frequently been described as rule by law, instead of rule of law. In this form it has readily been adopted and deployed by authoritarians, shaping their use of constitutions and laws in general. Constitutions are especially important for authoritarians because they represent the foremost obstacle they confront when assuming office and are a valuable instrument for securing and enhancing their power.<sup>29</sup> The natural temptation of authoritarian leaders is to directly attack constitutions, overturning or suspending them by declaring variously a state of emergency or a crisis to justify their actions, as in the 1 February 2021 declaration by Myanmar's Tatmadaw of a one year state of emergency. But others understand the usefulness of constitutions and alter or amend rather than overturn them, employing them as the Hobbesian means of concentrating power in the hands of the sovereign. Authoritarians will therefore rewrite constitutions to entrench and legitimise their power. In 1999 Venezuela's Hugo Chávez convened a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution that substantially expanded presidential power by extending the term of office, permitting re-election to a second term and abolishing the legislature's upper house. This was the starting point for his transformation of Venezuelan democracy.<sup>30</sup> More recent examples are the removal of presidential term limits in China in 2018 and their amendment in Russia in 2020 giving incumbent presidents another two terms. Other initiatives include undermining all other institutions that limit or fragment power. The most serious or egregious of these are attempts to manipulate the interpreters of the laws and the constitution by hollowing out of judicial review, not by abolishing the judiciary or ignoring judicial judgments but by changing the judiciary as an institution – altering or introducing judicial term limits, reappointing judges favourable to the sovereign, limiting jurisdiction of the courts.<sup>31</sup> For

example, the 2012 New Fundamental Law enacted by Hungary's Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz government allowed it to undermine the Constitutional Court by changing the procedure for appointing judges to allow appointments without consulting the opposition, expanded the membership of the Constitutional Court to appoint loyal judges, and lowered the retirement age of judges from 70 to 62 years to remove government critics and fill it with Fidesz supporters.<sup>32</sup>

The authoritarian replacement of rule of law with rule by law extends beyond the strategic use of the constitution to the use of laws and regulations to manifest the will of the sovereign. This repertoire of instrumental use of laws is extensive and subtle; its spirit was captured in the recent statement by Chinese President Xi Jinping that the Communist Party of China must ensure that “the handle of the knife is firmly in the hands of the party and the people”.<sup>33</sup> The law as knife has its sharpest edge in criminal law. Legislation on *lèse-majesté*, treason, public order and security, combined with perfunctory trials and limited avenues for appeal means that the law is a powerful new tool for modern authoritarians. Disparaging the Thai King, for example, is considered a serious criminal offence, attracting a prison term.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, 2019 Russian legislation fining “indecent” online posts against officials provide significant fines for individuals who have insulted Putin or Constitutional Court judges.<sup>35</sup> Vaguely worded provisions on disturbing public order or gathering without permit are the basis for controlling public assembly and political dissent as can be seen in the recent arrest of citizens in Hong Kong.<sup>36</sup> But authoritarians have also been creative with other forms of law. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew employed defamation laws against opposition leaders, bankrupting them and thereby making them ineligible to run for office.<sup>37</sup>

Modern authoritarians have been astute in their reconciliation with law. In their embrace of law and constitutionalism they have realized how much more powerful they can be in using, rather than resisting, the law. In doing so they have confirmed the insights of Hobbes, who has shown the value of law and legality in controlling the volatility and instability of modern politics.

## Authorizing the tyrant

The traditional tyrant represented the complete repudiation of democracy, concentrating power in the hands of one or few and thereby denying the authority of the many. Modern authoritarians seem to have transformed this relationship – there now seems a strange compact between authoritarians and the people, where authoritarians claim democratic legitimacy while the people benefit from authoritarian stability and efficiency. Can authoritarianism be democratic? Hobbes provides a theoretical account of how to reconcile authoritarianism and egalitarianism. The focus on the sovereign in Hobbes's thought tends to neglect the other half of the equation, the essential role of the people in founding the state.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, Hobbes's distinctive contribution was to upturn the classical conception of the regime by tracing the origin, justification and ends of the state to the rights of the individual in the state of nature. But how does he reconcile rights of subjects with the unavailable authority of the sovereign? The answer lies in his distinctive concept of representation.<sup>39</sup> Representation is a complex and ambiguous concept, inherently democratic in acknowledging the importance of each individual, yet in having one person “represent” many it also reveals its undemocratic aspect.<sup>40</sup> Hobbes's concept of representation is “authorisation”:

Which is as much to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himself to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concerne the Common Peace and Saftie; and therein to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgments, to his Judgment.<sup>41</sup>

The theoretical justification of authorization can be traced to Hobbes's observation that since there is no natural hierarchy of human ends, there is no natural basis for rule. The fearful realization that we are equal in the most important respect drives individuals to jointly agree to leave the state of war that characterizes the state of nature by mutually agreeing to abdicate their natural right to all things. In doing so they create that artificial or fictional public body called the state and authorize the sovereign to represent each individual's judgment and will. Individuals cannot therefore resist the sovereign's exercise of such rights, and since it entails the right to bodies and powers of others, they owe the sovereign active obedience. The only way authorization is revoked is when it is clear that the sovereign can no longer enforce contracts – when safety can no longer be secured by the state.<sup>42</sup>

Modern liberal democracies are founded on consent as representation. Consequently, most attempts by modern authoritarian regimes to engage with the public through elections, political parties, and public communication, are assessed as patently flawed and can be seen to be cynical attempts to mimic genuine democratic representation as consent.<sup>43</sup> But certain forms of representation adopted by authoritarian regimes are consistent with the Hobbesian concept of authorization and can explain why they are useful devices for them.<sup>44</sup> Elections where there are one or few political parties with nominated candidates seem to be the most egregious examples of manufacturing democratic legitimacy. Yet authoritarians claim they are meaningful and relevant. Is there any basis to their claim? Arguably these elections are consistent with a Hobbesian conception of authorization, and indeed, in their frequency they represent an advance on the Hobbesian representation that took place only at the founding. From this perspective they are acts of regular endorsement of the original authorization rather than renewed consent and their actions are genuinely important for justifying the authority of the state.<sup>45</sup> A comparable argument can be made regarding the use of political parties by authoritarian regimes. Modern political parties are seen variously as conduits, institutions for representation and as pressure points where consent-based representation mandates multiple parties.<sup>46</sup> To the contrary, Hobbes's conception of authorization views parties as a potential danger to the sovereign since they are prone to be used by popular men for their personal advancement. The sovereign must therefore be vigilant in dissolving such groups as associations precisely because they have the potential to be oligarchic in character.<sup>47</sup> Parties in "electoral autocracies" such as Singapore's *People's Action Party* (PAP), one of the longest ruling parties in the world, represent a compromise in the spirit of Hobbes, allowing communication of information from the public while its status as a dominant institution undermines the ambitions of the glory-seekers who want to disrupt the peace of the community by appealing to principles beyond the state.<sup>48</sup> Finally, censorship of public opinion seems to be a quintessentially modern technique, whether it means removing parodies of Xi Jinping as Winnie the Pooh or silencing critiques of the state leaders or institutions, made even more effective by advances in modern technology that have made such surveillance and censorship extensive, effective and intrusive. Yet even here Hobbes's authorization justifies the management of public

discourse to ensure state stability. That liberty of the subject consists in the “silence of the law” means authoritarians can encourage the use of “red lines” and self-censorship, allowing free communication where it does not directly question and challenge the state. It is on this basis that modern authoritarianism can deploy targeted and efficient censorship in the political sphere and in doing so avoid the charge of totalitarianism.

### The new business of tyranny

The tyrant was notorious for his greed, exploiting and impoverishing his subjects for his personal luxury and extravagant projects. Personalist, patrimonial and “sultanistic” rule can still be found around the world whose regimes, variously called plutocracy, kleptocracy and crony capitalism institutionalize corruption, treating the public purse as their own property.<sup>49</sup> Yet these tyrants seem incompetently old-fashioned compared to the more sophisticated modern authoritarian leaders who have discovered that they can become much wealthier and more powerful if they permit their subjects and citizens greater economic freedom, while retaining complete political control. Known as illiberal capitalism, capitalist authoritarianism, or bureaucratic authoritarianism, these new approaches challenge the conventional view that capitalism is founded on both economic and political freedom.

The combination of a powerful sovereign with economic freedom was anticipated and indeed promoted by Hobbes.<sup>50</sup> That “Mony is the Bloud of the Commonwealth” indicates the centrality of commerce for Hobbes’s new conception of the state.<sup>51</sup> The new state is founded on the promise of peace, but peace for Hobbes is valuable as the necessary foundation for human innovation in the arts and sciences that lead to commodious life. Hobbes therefore encourages commerce, trade and manufacturing. This support has a number of aspects, including rules and laws by which property is defined and distributed, prescribing dominion over things to the exclusion of others. Such a legal architecture allows subjects the liberty “to buy and sell, and otherwise contract with one another; to choose their own abode, their own diet, their own trade of life”.<sup>52</sup> But this liberty is not derived from the prescriptions of nature but depends on what the “sovereign hath praetermitted”. The range of the sovereign’s authority is therefore not theoretically pre-determined, and the subject’s liberty “is in some places more, and in some less”.<sup>53</sup> Hobbes is aware of the danger wealth may pose to the sovereign, especially in the hands of powerful subjects. Accordingly, none of these laws exclude or foreclose interference by the sovereign. Hobbes thus argues that the political primacy of the sovereign can be combined and indeed bolstered by encouraging commerce, trade and manufacturing where a free market in goods and labour fosters individual prosperity and thereby the wealth and power of the commonwealth. It is this model that has been taken up by modern authoritarian leaders.

All modern states intervene in markets, domestically and internationally. Most countries are arranged along a spectrum of state capitalism in which the state dominates markets primarily for political gain and where the intent and extent of state intervention in the economy vary.<sup>54</sup> Authoritarian capitalism is distinctive from these other forms of state intervention to the extent that it combines authoritarianism and capitalism, where economic liberty coexists with limits on the rule of law and individual liberty.<sup>55</sup> The “Singapore Model” is perhaps the best known example of authoritarian capitalism. Unlike regional democracies such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan, Singapore

pursued economic success without abandoning a dominant one party state with strict controls on individual rights and freedoms.<sup>56</sup> It was the success of this model that attracted the attention of the Chinese government, which wanted to avoid the post-communist fate of Russia and Eastern European states but was reluctant to embrace completely liberalism as it would lead to the dissolution of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The “Beijing Consensus”, “Communism with Chinese Characteristics” or more recently the “Chinese Dream”, all represent versions of authoritarian capitalism that combine strict political controls with the advantages of the free market, all in the name of protecting the authority of the CPC.<sup>57</sup>

The advantages of this approach are evident. The adoption of capitalist market model has resulted in a significant rise in the prosperity of citizens, bolstering the “performance legitimacy” of the state.<sup>58</sup> This new wealth has in turn endowed the state with unprecedented opportunity to fund increasingly intrusive domestic control and surveillance, ranging from the censorship of the web to monitoring of movement and use of face recognition technology. Internationally, these resources have been deployed to reassert economic and territorial ambitions, from the creation of the new Asian Development Bank to the Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time, however, authoritarian capitalism has required specific measures to sustain it. One has been the need to demonstrate the integrity of the institutions by rooting out bureaucratic corruption. It is not accidental that this initiative has been popular with the public which engages daily in a competitive market. The other notable feature has been the disparity between the efficiency and wealth of State-Owned Enterprises and private companies and the increasing power this accords to individuals. Jack Ma, the billionaire founder of the web service Alibaba, was celebrated by the Chinese government as the innovator of the digital economy. Yet the world’s biggest initial public offering on the Shanghai stock exchange for his Ant Group that dominated the digital payment market in China through its Alipay mobile finance app was halted in October 2020, resulting in a major drop in the company’s valuation. Part of the problem had been Ma’s previous critique of the lack of innovation in the banking and regulatory systems in China. The larger context was a reassessment of the way tech giants such as Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu presented a challenge to the authority of the Party.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Modern authoritarianism is distinguished by a sophisticated repertoire of techniques for retaining and augmenting power and legitimacy. These techniques vary in their scope, nature and extent, a product of experimentation, adoption and innovation. In this article, we have examined three of these techniques – the rule by law, adoption of democratic forms and institutions and authoritarian capitalism – to show how these disparate techniques were anticipated and indeed formed a part of a comprehensive conception of the modern Leviathan state. What implications does this insight have for the theory and practice of contemporary authoritarianism? That modern authoritarian techniques in all their diversity may not be simply opportunistic or accidental permits us to approach them more systematically and analytically, tracing their range, scope and interrelations. The theoretical insight into the nature of these techniques allows us to understand why they may be practically efficacious and in addition provide the means for anticipating others in the repertoire, for example, how authoritarians may use religion to consolidate their rule.<sup>60</sup> The overarching theoretical

framework also reveals the potential limitations of these techniques. They show, for example, the core contradiction in the concept of the state founded on techniques of fear. As John Locke succinctly put it,

As if when Men quitting the State of Nature entered into Society, they agreed that all of them but one, should be under the restraint of Laws, but that he should still retain all the Liberty of the State of Nature, increased with Power, and made licentious by Impunity. This is to think that Men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what Mischiefs may be done them by *Pole-Cats*, or *Foxes*, but are content, nay think it Safety, to be devoured by *Lions*.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, the foundational claim for legitimacy by authoritarians that security and wealth require the sacrifice of political freedoms is revealed by the framework as a claim that remains unresolved. The cases of Singapore and China therefore present intriguing experiments in what has been called the “modernisation trap” – whether capitalism will in due course undermine or overthrow authoritarianism, or whether economic freedom may not lead to political competition but will instead aid the consolidation and international influence of authoritarian regimes.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the framework reveals a tension between the techniques themselves and their ultimate goal and purpose. The Hobbesian conception of the state, with its distinctive techniques rejects “glorious gladiators”, war and imperialism in favour of peace and commercial wealth. Yet tyrants and modern authoritarians have always been tempted to wage wars as a means to foment domestic divisions or out of imperial ambitions. Our examination of the modern manual of authoritarian leadership therefore explains the strength, potency and sophistication of these techniques, and in doing so it also reveals their core and persistent theoretical and practical limitations and weaknesses.

## Notes

1. On democratic backsliding see generally Waldner and Lust, “Unwelcome Change”. On autocratization and the recent debates regarding the concept of “waves” see Lührmann and Lindberg, “A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here?” and the critiques by Tomini, “Don’t Think of a Wave!”, and Sinkkonen, “Dynamic Dictators”.
2. For the three waves of scholarship see Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars of Stability”.
3. See, for example, the focus on personalist, party, military and monarchic regimes in Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*, and Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work*. On “hybrid” regimes, such as “electoral authoritarianism” and “competitive authoritarianism” see, for example, Schedler, “Elections Without Democracy”, Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.
4. For modern “smart” authoritarianism see Morgenbesser, *The Rise of Sophisticated Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia*.
5. On modern techniques see Morgenbesser, “The Menu of Autocratic Innovation”; Schedler, “Elections Without Democracy”.
6. For authoritarian “manuals” or “toolkits” see generally see Dikötter, *How to Be a Dictator*; Schatz, “The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit”; Hellmeier, “The Dictator’s Digital Toolkit”.
7. On the direct engagement with Hobbesian thought in contemporary China consider Patapan and Wang, “The Hidden Ruler”; Kane, “Hobbes in China” and Lin and Trevaskes, “Creating a Virtuous Leviathan”.
8. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1313a 34–1314a 30. For the scholarship on Aristotle’s examination of tyranny see generally Buekenhout, “Aristotle on the Preservation of Tyranny”; Boesche, “Aristotle’s ‘Science’ of Tyranny”; Richter, “Aristotle and the Classical Greek Concept of Despotism”.
9. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258a38–1258b2.
10. Ibid., 1279a23–b10.
11. Ibid., 1313a18–1315b10.

12. For an overview see Buekenhout “Aristotle on the Preservation of Tyranny,” 102.
13. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1313a38–1314a13.
14. *Ibid.*, 1314a 13–24.
15. *Ibid.*, 1314a31–2.
16. *Ibid.*, 1315a40–1315b10.
17. *Ibid.*, 1314a38.
18. For the historical influence see Boesche, “Aristotle’s ‘Science’ of Tyranny”.
19. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 30, page 378.
20. For Hobbes’s critique of the classical approach see Stauffer, “Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy”.
21. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 17, page 225.
22. *Ibid.*, chapter 11, page 161.
23. *Ibid.*, chapter 13, page 187.
24. *Ibid.*, chapter 11, page 160.
25. *Ibid.*, chapter 46, page 699.
26. *Ibid.*, chapter 19, page 239–40.
27. *Ibid.*, Introduction, page 81.
28. Putin frequently referred to the “dictatorship of law” during his 2000 presidential campaign: see Kahn, “Vladimir Putin and the Rule of Law in Russia”. For an overview of Putin’s “new authoritarianism” see Lewis, *Russia’s New Authoritarianism*.
29. On the unique features of “authoritarian constitutionalism” see Tushnet, “Authoritarian Constitutionalism”; Ginsberg and Simpser, *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*; Rajah, *Authoritarian Rule of Law*.
30. On the subsequent erosion of rule of law in Venezuela see Brewer-Carias, “The Collapse of the Rule of Law in Venezuela 1999–2019”.
31. As Ginsburg and Tamir, *Rule by Law*, 4, observe, Courts in authoritarian regimes are used to (1) establish social control and sideline political opponents, (2) bolster a regime’s claim to “legal” legitimacy, (3) strengthen administrative compliance within the state’s own bureaucratic machinery and solve coordination problems among competing factions within the regime, (4) facilitate trade and investment, and (5) implement controversial policies so as to allow political distance from core elements of the regime
32. For an overview of changes in Hungary and Poland see Sata and Karolewski, “Caesarean politics in Hungary and Poland”.
33. On Xi’s recovery of Maoist image of the knife see: <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2015/02/xis-sharp-words-ominous-legal-reform/>; as well as <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2015/02/xis-sharp-words-ominous-legal-reform/>.
34. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2053471/87-years-in-jail-for-lese-majeste-sets-new-record>.
35. *The Australian* “Putin to get immunity for Life” Nov 7–8, 2020, p. 13.
36. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55555299>.
37. See in particular Morgenbesser, “The Menu of Autocratic Innovation,” 1056, who also focuses on anti-civil society measures, fake news laws and Interpol Red Notices.
38. See, for example, Tuck’s *The Sleeping Sovereign* and Field, *Potentia*, 150, who notes the changing place of the “multitude” in Hobbes’s thought.
39. On Hobbes’s concept of representation and authorization see, for example, Martinich, “Authorization and Representation in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*”; Pitkin, “Hobbes” Concept of Representation”; Mansfield, “Hobbes and the Science of Indirect Government”; Orwin, “On the Sovereign Authorization”.
40. On the nature of representation see Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*.
41. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 17, page 227.
42. Because the sovereign is authorized by the subjects, they cannot accuse him of injustice, the sole exception being iniquity concerning God. The major innovation of authorization according to Orwin, “On the Sovereign Authorization”, concerns its theological implications.
43. On the nature of consent in liberal thought see Frohock, “Liberal Maps of Consent”.
44. For an overview see Schedler, “Elections Without Democracy”; Marquez, *Non-Democratic Politic*; Gandhi and Heller, “Electoral Systems in Authoritarian States”. For the strategic use

of elections see Mietzner, “Authoritarian Elections, State Capacity, and Performance Legitimacy”.

45. This may explain why, as Sozen, “Populist Peril to Democracy,” 275–8, demonstrates, populists and authoritarians have consistently linked the “sacred” concept of the popular will with elections, even if as Urbini, “Democracy and Populism,” 119, shows, the concept of the will of the people would favour their unmediated expression in the form of acclamation or public investiture rather than by institutions, such as elections. Note that it is arguable that both elections and acclamation may be combined to express the popular will, so that periods between elections may be interpreted as regular though informal acts of public endorsement or acclamation.
46. See Muirhead and Rosenblum, “The Political Theory of Parties and Partisanship”.
47. As Field, *Potentia*, notes, Hobbes fears faction and sedition, facilitated by oligarchic groups that challenge the power of the sovereign.
48. On the legitimacy of the PAP see Wong and Huang, “Political Legitimacy in Singapore”; Tan, “Minimal Factionalism in Singapore’s People’s Action Party”.
49. On the theory of personalist regimes see Guliyev, “Personal Rule, Neopatrimonialism, and Regime Typologies”.
50. See Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.
51. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 24, page 300.
52. Ibid., chapter 21, page 264.
53. Ibid., chapter 21, page 271.
54. Wright et al. “State Capitalism in International Context,” 10160, define state capitalism as “an economic system in which the state uses various tools for proactive intervention in economic production and the functioning of markets”. Musacchio and Lazzarini, “Leviathan in Business” distinguish between liberal and state capitalism, which has two modes, with the “Leviathan” state as majority and minority investor.
55. Thus Sallai and Schnyder, “What is ‘Authoritarian’ About Authoritarian Capitalism?”, define “authoritarian state intervention” as state action that infringes on key principles of the “Rule of Law”, identifying four mechanisms that shift the boundaries of public and private: the creation of state dependence of economic actors, reducing economic pluralism to align the economic elite’s interests with the governing elite’s interests, the state being used for the pursuit of the governing elite’s interests, and authoritarian shareholding.
56. As Ortman and Thompson, “Introduction: The ‘Singapore Model’ and China’s Neo-Authoritarian Dream”, observe, at the core of the “Singapore model” is the ability of a small political elite to maintain hierarchical power while using a calibrated approach to coercion and co-optation.
57. See, for example, Ambrosio, “The Rise of the ‘China Model’ and ‘Beijing Consensus’”; Witt and Redding, “China: Authoritarian Capitalism”; and Hofman, Moon, and Wu, “Corporate Social Responsibility Under Authoritarian Capitalism”.
58. For an assessment of the legitimacy of illiberal states see Gilley, *The Right to Rule*.
59. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56448688>; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/iese/2020/11/23/why-the-chinese-regulators-were-right-to-cancel-ant-financials-ipo/?sh=6b78dd83218d>.
60. For the techniques Hobbes advocates to counter both domestic and international challenges from religion see Patapan, “Politics of Immortality”.
61. Locke, *Two Treatises*, §93. See the discussion in Kisner, “Lions, Foxes, and Polecats”.
62. See Snyder, “The Modernization Trap”; Foa, “Modernization and Authoritarianism”.

## Disclosure statement

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