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## Authoritarianism as a “Wicked Problem” in Contemporary International Relations

### Abstract

This study aims to explore the concept of authoritarianism, which - presented in terms of the “wicked problem” of the contemporary world – seems to be a severe challenge to present-day International Relations (IR), both in theoretical and practical dimensions. The concept of authoritarianism is defined in the article as a form of political system in which the power and material resources of the state have been centralized, appropriated, and put at the disposal of either an individual or an elitist group “in power.” In this way, the possibilities of integrating the authoritarian state - both in the political and economic dimension – with the global system of international relations are limited, and the vital administrative institutions of the state have been manipulated and appropriated. The research method applied allows for the interpretation of the discussed issues in a complex – albeit specific – systemic form, characteristic not only for politically fragile or declining countries and regions but also for those which are politically stable and economically developed. The author’s analysis allows for the presentation and reinterpretation of the issue of contemporary authoritarian regimes concerning international relations in terms that not only define but often legitimize – and repeatedly even validate – some of the most despotic, autocratic, and hegemonist forms of the political systems in modern times.

**Key words:** authoritarianism, democracy, wicked problem, political regime, dictatorship, the rule of law

### Introduction

Almost three decades after the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall, heralding the collapse of the bilateral balance of power in the world, the international political scene has witnessed the emergence of many, often

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permanent and diverse authoritarian political regimes. Moreover, such trends are illustrated by the majority of modern political power systems functioning not only in the reality of unstable and fragile states, but practically across the world. Of course, the trajectory of political processes taking place both regionally and globally is highly diverse. Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes appear to be consistently determined to maintain – above all – their political power at almost any cost. Additionally, the challenging experiences of the international community with authoritarian states are characterized by multidimensional, complex - and consequently – challenging issues concerning contemporary global politics, which can be described as the “wicked problems” of the present-day globalized world.

In any case, the issue of authoritarianism as a “wicked problem” in contemporary International Relations (IR) is quite controversial because of its complex nature and the difficulty of precise definition. Nevertheless, these issues are of significant importance in political practice, especially regarding International Relations (IR). Consequently, actions by the international community concerning authoritarian regimes based on erroneous assumptions, goals, and values can have serious consequences (e.g., in the resolution of armed conflicts and complex crises in regional politics). In a sufficiently blunt manner, the lack of stabilization and often anarchization of state administration structures, as well as the “causing conflicts” aspect in the areas of international politics display the ambiguities of the conceptualization, i.e., exposing the essence of present-day authoritarian regimes.

The proposed concepts concerning policy-building and peace-building processes are widely recognized, and the terminology is still in common usage. In any case, the proper presentation of the problem of contemporary authoritarianism, taking into account its complex specificity, is of great importance for the international discourse on political instability in many corners of the modern world, and the mutual relations between authoritarian countries and the international community in the context of a political economy that allocates significant forces and resources – both material and human – to resolve crises and build a constructive level of mutual understanding and cooperation.

Unfortunately, the term “wicked problems” regarding authoritarian states cannot be clearly defined. The *diferencia specifica* of the problem differs in accordance to a wide variety of factors, leading to different concepts and is associated with a pluralistic debate about the nature of particular issues and their potentially constructive solutions. In other words, (1) the “wicked problems” associated with authoritarian regimes

consist of many interdependent factors and cause-effect relationships. These factors are challenging to identify in advance and often become apparent only in the context of a specific socio-political situation and particular solutions. The proposed resolutions usually have many – often even contradictory – goals that require making “reasonable” compromises. As a result, misunderstandings about the causality and objectives of the actions taken contribute to difficulties in defining the problem and developing constructive solutions. In this sense, (2) there are severe difficulties in finding clear and unambiguous answers to the many complex issues surrounding the problem of authoritarian regimes. Moreover, even in the case of the applied solutions, the specificity of “wicked problems” concerning authoritarian regimes seem to go beyond the moral uniqueness and distinctiveness of good and evil. In other words, the solutions proposed in these cases are often “sufficiently good” factors, politically determined or conditioned by limited information or material resources.

Referring to the research by Horst Rittel and Melvin W. Webber, who first introduced the term “wicked problem”, the perception of success or failure varies according to stakeholder positions and perspectives. In this sense, every wicked problem is essentially unique (Rittel & Webber 1973). Therefore, due to the complex interaction of a variety of factors, connections between different aspects of the problem, the specific socio-political context, and pre-imposed knowledge limitations, the impact of the international community on authoritarian regimes often requires non-standard solutions and the adaptation of appropriate methods taking into account the specific socio-political situational context. Moreover, rarely are all the relevant aspects of a given problem visible before an attempt is made to solve it. It requires acquiring appropriate knowledge, the possibility of its practical application, and the ability to adapt to a dynamically changing political environment.

## Regional and Global Trends

After World War II, virtually all countries of the former “Soviet bloc”, namely Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern and Southeast Europe, as well as the Soviet Union itself and a certain number – at least nominally – of socialist republics in Central, Eastern, and Southeast Asia, functioned based on a one-party system of local government with a communist or socialist province. Among them, there are countries such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and Yugoslavia in Europe, along with Vietnam, Cambodia, and

Laos. However, the most intriguing member of this group seems to be China, where the Communist Party managed to make an ideological transformation and survive the decline of communism as the ruling party (Liu 2018: 71–76). In fact, communist countries constituted the largest single group of authoritarian one-party regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet, with the collapse of the Soviet system and the accompanying socio-political delegitimization, and revolutionary collectivist ideologies, the situation in the world changed radically. After the fall of the “Iron Curtain” in Europe, some CEE countries – several of them such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia regaining independence – democratized and became members of the European Union. As a result of the end of the bloody Balkan wars that led to the fall of Yugoslavia, new states appeared on the map of Southeast Europe. Some, such as Croatia and Slovenia, joined the EU (Schumacher 2001: 81–102; id. 2005: 281–290, Roter 2005: 447–454). As a result of the systemic transformation, some countries of Central and Eastern Europe took the form of government which is referred to as “regime hybrids” with authoritarian tendencies. These include countries such as Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Moldova and Belarus adopted authoritarian systems of power under presidents who chose to maintain close ties with Russia. During the independence transformation, Ukraine was balanced between democratic and autocratic tendencies (Wilson 2014: 99–143). A similar situation developed in Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia, which were associated with the phase of bloody armed conflicts (Bruder 2020: 69–97; Zagorski 2002).

In Africa, with the end of the colonial era in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many newly independent states quickly found themselves under authoritarian rule. It was only during the last wave of systemic transformation that many of them transformed towards the democratization of state structures (including Tanzania, Ghana, Botswana, Mali, South Africa, and Tunisia) (Cheeseman Fisher 2021: 82–86). In practice, many of the post-independence African political regimes were ruled by single parties with socialist provinces (Angola, Algeria, Ethiopia, Benin, Mozambique, Somalia, or in the former People’s Republic of Congo) or parties with typically provincial conservative-right wing (e.g., Malawi or the former Rhodesia), as well as by nationalist one-party systems (e.g., in Burundi, Cameroon or Chad). These parties often arose during the liberation struggles against the former colonial powers. Nevertheless, after regaining independence, African states – more or less from the 60s/70s. until 1990/91 – constitute one of the most important and thought-provoking resources of various – sometimes quite bizarre – cases useful for the analysis of authoritarian and one-party systems of government

power, as well as the most extensive array of political parties with a Marxist-Leninist province outside the former “Soviet bloc” (ibid., 88–104).

In practice, formal one-party governments were only a weakly veiled form of the so-called “personal government” based on the clan or tribe. In other words, they were a typical example of a neo-patrimonial rule, where the possibility of participating in the structures of power and its profits was associated with belonging to the “proper”, and being loyal to, the patrimonial government of the tribal community. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the specificity and type of authoritarianism, where – theoretically – one-party governments overlap in practice with personal governments (highly distorted power structure). North Korea is the extreme case of this kind of “formal” one-party government – and, in fact, an utterly malformed power structure based on personal control. In this context, the formal one-party rule has taken on the bizarre character of an absolutist personal monarchy that is “owned” by the Kim dynasty and its henchmen (Lankov 2013). Similar problems are displayed in the political situation in the Middle East and North Africa region. In this case, the systemic specificity of the Middle East and North African states may become a rich source of inspiration, especially for research on authoritarian issues of a military nature, as well as for analyses of complex civil-military relations. Both in the 1950s/60s, and especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the countries of the region were generally characterized by a one-party system of political authority and, to a large extent, with a robust socialist approach, which - additionally - was coupled with Arab nationalist ideology (e.g., Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, or South Yemen). However, with time, various forms of systemic transformation developed political systems of power specific to this world region, characterized by very centralized state administration structures. Their specificity resembled centres of political power typical of the monarchical system of such countries as Morocco, Jordan, or countries located in the Persian Gulf region (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, or Qatar). Moreover, these Middle Eastern states were not only characterized by highly militarized one-party governments but also exhibited features typical of neo-patrimonial regimes – and generally to a much greater extent than in the case of sub-Saharan African countries (Yom 2020: 39–77).

Practically from the very moment of their independence at the turn of the 1990s, similar features were displayed by the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. Most of the countries in the region were characterized by a patrimonial system of power based on personal rule. Many local

political leaders had previously held critical political positions during the Soviet era. They took office shortly after their countries regained independence (Aydin 2000: 1–12). The few exceptions deviating from the regional pattern were Georgia (Congressional Research Service 2014: 39–42) and Armenia (*ibid.*: 34–37), located in the South Caucasus. After years of personnel rule, Kyrgyzstan also returned to the multi-party system (International Crisis Group, 2004; Congressional Research Service, 2020). Nevertheless, ultimately, the dominant trend in the region was authoritarian personalist dictatorships.

However, the above regimes differed from the authoritarian military dictatorial systems typical of Latin America. In fact, the only Latin American country that did not experience long authoritarian rule by military juntas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Costa Rica (Meyer 2010). An essential characteristic of such governments was the fact that they were based on personalist rule. Good examples of this were the governments of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua (Diederich 2007: 300–309), Juan Perón in Argentina (Wulffen 2018), the political regime of the Duvaliers in Haiti, as well as the government administration led by Alberto Fujimori in Peru (Burt 2011: 267–396). Nevertheless, the dominant form of government for this region was military dictatorships.

In this context, a significant Latin American experience with various types of authoritarianism is the direct political involvement of the United States, which, in pursuit of the Truman Doctrine of containment of communism, supported many military-civilian dictatorships, mainly in the right-wing regions. These included the governments of Castillo Armas in Guatemala (LaFeber 1993: 76–79), Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay (Miranda 1990), Humberto Castelo Branco in Brazil (Skidmore 1988: 18–65), Hugo Banzer Suárez in Bolivia (LaFeber 1993: 13–16), Augusto Pinochet in Chile (Kornbluh 2013: 161–174), the military-civil junta under the leadership of Juan María Bordaberry in Uruguay (LaFeber 1993: 109–111), and the military rule of the junta led by General Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina (Scatizza 2020: 47–66).

In other words, the end of the 1970s was a period of autocratic rule by military juntas for practically most Latin American countries. Admittedly, in the 1980s and 1990s, the political landscape of the continent changed, and most of the regimes of the time underwent a process of democratization. Nevertheless, in a few cases, mixed types of military juntas, as well as civilian-military bureaucratic political regimes, still existed. The above points indicate the need for a scientific reworking of authoritarian governments and systems typology. After all, the Latin American experience has contributed to the development of significant

academic analyses of the mechanisms of operation and specificity of modern authoritarian political systems, both in their bureaucratic and military form (LaFeber 1993: 87–148).

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Latin America there has been a tendency to seize power by authoritarian left-wing governments that have incorporated into their political strategy elements of populist rhetoric and efforts to restore the existing political order (a new form of class struggle, the issue of redistribution of national wealth, etc.) (Auyero, Lapegna, Page Poma 2009: 3–22). An excellent example of this leftist regime is Venezuela, under President Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro (Peñaloza 2014: 379–392; Oner 2021: 5–7). Although their presidencies exhaust the features of personalist in-style governments, the dominant aspect of their régimes is strongly exposed populism.

In this century, however, there is a renewed trend towards the return of authoritarian populist rule, this time with a provincial left-wing, which – in combination with anti-American populist rhetoric – can be seen in many Latin American countries. The best example of this case is the already mentioned Venezuela (Oner 2021: 7–19). Although the above governments present a typical personalist style of their power, the defining feature of their rule is the heavy emphasis on populism. Although not all populist leaders in Latin America promote a clearly authoritarian political strategy in their governments, populism or neo-populism can now be seen as a significant inspiration for global trends emphasizing populism as a critical legitimizing tool that is often unstable and affected by factional political struggles in fragile states (Morales & Barros 2018: 119–144). Moreover, apart from authoritarian concepts emphasizing the deliberate dismantling of democratic state structures, therefore, enabling the transition to authoritarian rule and the personalization of hegemonic powers, populism has become one of the most important, as well as intriguing, issues in research on the problem of authoritarianism also concerning the politics of fragile states, both in local as well as global dimension.

In other words, in fragile states the operation of most political regimes can be characterized as a sort of “authoritarian arrangement” whereby citizens relinquish their political rights in favour of stability and socio-economic security. However, the possibility of using authoritarian decision-making mechanisms in non-democratic countries has not been thoroughly investigated. Thus, the popularity of authoritarian regimes is a severe analytical challenge for contemporary political scientists and experts on international issues. As the above mentioned systems are ex-

amples of 'by design' rather than 'by default' authoritarianism, the theories of democratization of state structures focusing on obstacles and pre-conditions determining the formation of a constructive democratization process cannot accurately explain this trend.

## Authoritarianism in Its Diversity and Multidimensionality

Based on political pragmatics, authoritarianism concerning fragile states can be defined as a specific type of political deal – a repetitive game between the citizen and the authoritarian power that seeks to legitimize political actions, and in which economic benefits and political rights are determined by the costs that the regime bears it in order to provide the citizen with suitable goods and services. However, the above "contract" ceases to function in the face of a persistent armed conflict, a military coup, or highly repressive dictatorships. The fact that authoritarian regimes, especially in the context of fragile states, enjoy considerable public support suggests that their governments do not remain in power solely through repression or other forms of – more or less – bitter or disguised persuasion. So what are the sources of the persistence of authoritarian regimes in fragile states? The argument analyzed in this paper is that authoritarian regimes survive thanks to effective authoritarian legitimation measured by the degree of compliance of their governments' presented and implemented political strategy. It is a process inscribed and justified in a broader spectrum of attitudes, aspirations, beliefs, values, and social expectations. However, authoritarian regimes are defined as a whole array of internally diverse political systems that, despite all their differences, have one thing in common: their undemocratic nature. In other words, "authoritarianism" means anything that conflicts with the requirements and standards of a democratic system. Nevertheless, understanding authoritarianism as a negation of democracy is neither satisfactory or methodologically correct, as it is typically *a contrario* procedure. Therefore, a set of features constituting the concept of authoritarianism should be given in order to answer not only the question of what authoritarianism is not but – above all – what it is.

According to Juan J. Linz, authoritarian regimes: (1) adopt a limited, non-responsible form of political pluralism, as opposed to the political monism of totalitarian regimes and the essentially unlimited pluralism of democratic systems; (2) they do not have an extensive ideology - unlike totalitarian regimes – but instead exhibit distinct mentalities; (3) they also do not use extensive or intensive political mobilization of the civil



society, unlike totalitarian regimes - except at some points in their development - but are characterized by civic "political apathy," unlike in democratic systems where citizens are expected to engage politically and participate in public debates (Linz 1964: 297–298); (4) they are characterized by political governance exercised either by a single leader or by a small leadership group, where power is exercised within formally ill-defined limits (as opposed to democracy, where power is exercised officially within a limited arrangement of guaranteed rights and freedoms, and system of checks and balances), but which are, in fact, somewhat predictable (as opposed to the unpredictability and arbitrariness of state terror used by totalitarian regimes) (Linz 2000: 263–265).

As can be seen from the above considerations, authoritarianism is fundamentally different from totalitarianism, which is also an undemocratic order. In the authoritarian system, the rulers control only state structures without exercising absolute omnipotence over society. In this sense, authoritarian power is usually satisfied with power itself, and the object of its aspiration is exclusively political government. In authoritarianism, therefore, only politics is a restricted area, and there is relative freedom beyond. The rulers seem to be saying: leave us political power and, this aside, do what you want. Authoritarianism is, in effect, a somewhat defensive system. It rigorously controls politics, while other areas of public life are not the subject of the rulers' aspirations. Authoritarian governments tell citizens what they are not allowed to do, and that which is not forbidden becomes, by default, permitted. Authoritarianism must not be motivated by a totalitarian ideology, and the authoritarian state does not try to disseminate a specific system of political ideas deemed exclusively right and proper.

Authoritarianism takes different appearances depending on the time and place, chosen assumptions, and pursued goals but retains its essential features. It is the nature of the fact that, in authoritarian systemic conditions, political power is not chosen in free elections, nor is it derived from the consent of the ruled and – as such – is not subject to social control. This kind of systemic invariability of authoritarianism distinguishes it from democracy, which is multi-faceted and functions not only at the systemic level but also at the level of sources and natural foundations. In other words, democracy is dynamic, while despotism is static and, in its essence, always unchanging. The most primitive power systems that appeared at the dawn of humankind were authoritarian, and modern totalitarianism represented the same face in the field of the mechanism of power. The common denominator here was always the same: the fact that there was an imposed

power based on force and was not subject to the control of the members of the community within which it operated.

Authoritarian regimes are based on institutions that ensure the permanence and irrefutability of the power authority. There is limited political pluralism in countries controlled by an authoritarian regime, provided that the entire society is not opposed to the holders of power. Ideology, displaced here by the features of the authoritarian personality, does not play a significant role, nor does the formal and legal definition of the scopes and methods of exercising power by a leader or an oligarchic group exercising power. The efficiency of the government apparatus capable of neutralizing the opposition is highly appreciated, as is the political passivity of a society controlled by censorship and – *de facto* – deprived of the possibility of choosing power.

### Explicitness, Particularity, and Dissimilarities

The classifications of authoritarianism are many and varied, as it is easy to identify an array of differentiating criteria. Due to the main political goal of the regime, one can speak of (1) reactionary, (2) conservative, and (3) revolutionary authoritarianism. Reactionary authoritarianism is rare. It is represented by a system that is inconsistent with the existing reality and wants to restore older political and social solutions, which are already widely regarded as an anachronism (Ficek 2007: 199–208). Conservative authoritarianism is a system referring to the unity of the nation, proclaiming the value of the state and often manifesting a deep attachment to tradition and religion. This authoritarianism regards itself as a guardian of order and traditional values, which it intends to defend against various innovations and social experiments. In contrast, Revolutionary authoritarianism aims to destroy the old lawfulness and build a new radical order. As a rule of thumb, it always has solid left-wing political fractions. Notably, revolutionary authoritarianism was the reality of many Third World countries in the postcolonial era (Kiernan 2004).

In its intensity of coercion and restrictions on civil liberty, authoritarianism is gradual. Its diversity presents various forms: from authoritarian democracy through multiple forms of dictatorship to totalitarianism. Thus, there are numerous arrangements of authoritarian political regimes: always authoritarian (despots, dictatorships), almost always authoritarian (theocracies, absolute monarchies, military autocracies), often authoritarian (fascist states, socialist states), and only sometimes

authoritarian (authoritarian democracies). However, the concept of authoritarianism, which is too broad and imprecise in its content, blurs the possibility of a clear division of authorities into democratic and authoritarian systems (Linz 2000: 159–261). This kind of imprecision, however, results primarily from the fairly common belief that all power can – and should – pretend to be an authority. The concept of authoritarianism distinguishes between the positive sense of authoritarianism – consistent with the idea of a democratic system – and the negative and anti-democratic meaning of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, tied closely to democratic standards, genuine freedom accepts authority just as proper authority recognizes the need for freedom. In other words, an authority that does not develop freedom and independence becomes authoritarian (Sartori 1994: 238).

Authoritarianism, as a rule, does not recognize political diversity, which appears abnormal and threatening to the status of those in power. A feature of this type of regime is, therefore, its eternal struggle with the real enemy or – if no such enemy exists – the imaginary foe. Usually, such systems also exist mainly through violence, but not exclusively so. By establishing governments that are unaccountable to society and by permanently guaranteeing power and privileges to a few, authoritarianism is constantly under threat, and rulers are inevitably accompanied by the fear of the termination of their power and control. This fear becomes a special kind of energy that continually increases the use of violence in government practice. As a result, an authoritarian system exists as long as the legitimizing force that supports it persists. When it breaks down, this system is doomed to collapse. The above regularity also fully applies to totalitarianism.

## Forms and Assets of Authoritarian Socio-Political Control

Maintaining social control is not only a fundamental issue of authoritarian systems of power, but is likewise an essential issue for any political system, the network of international relations, and the entire socio-political life. A particular requirement of public order is a prerequisite for social integration and the realisation of critical political goals in each country. Nevertheless, attempts to create socio-political stabilization, as well as internal order, are associated with imposing a single value system on the entire diverse community of the state, which may become a source of severe conflict and violence. This is because all power systems use rules that regulate and govern the behavior of the whole variety

of actors on the political scene. These include multiple types of laws, directives, or standards that differ not only in the degree of respect and value but also the reasons for their observance. Therefore, coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy are classic forms of social control. Each of these forms generates compliance – or non-compliance – with the rules of functioning of the state community through a different – alternative – control mechanism. While each of these forms can be analytically separated from the others, in practice, they are rarely found in pure form. In fact, in an authoritarian state, they function at various levels, as well as in specific conditions – depending on particular situations and socio-political strategies – both in terms of form and content.

One of the primary forms of maintaining power and social control is a coercive strategy based on the threat of the use of force – including the military – to influence decision-making by political opponents. Coercion refers to the relationship of asymmetric physical power between actors in the political scene. However, this asymmetry is used as a persuasion aimed at changing the behavior of the weaker party. The operational mechanism of oppression is fear, or “coercion.” In this sense, fear breeds consent. An actor on the political scene who obeys the rule because of coercion is motivated by the fear of punishment from the stronger side of the political dispute. The specificity of the application of the above principle is irrelevant. Unless as a signal to show what behavior will – and what will not – be associated with punishment. Suppose a socio-political system relies on coercion to motivate adherence to its rules. In that case, it must commit enormous resources to enforce submission to the authority and oversight of opposition circles, which is not easy for most fragile states (Tretyakov 2017: 35–37).

The importance of the issue of coercion for the entire model of maintaining power and control of society by authoritarian systems is related to marking a clear pole (extremum) on the whole triad of social control mechanisms (coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy). The emphasis on various threats (internal as well as external) and the effectiveness of the state in generating this measure of social compliance control takes place at the expense of paying attention either to the normative content of the rules or to more complicated calculations of self-interest by individual actors on the political scene. Coercion is a relatively simple form of social control and, as such, appears to be ineffective from the point of view of the central government. It generally does not result in a voluntary submission. Moreover, coercion and repression tend to generate various kinds of trauma and strengthen the attitude of resistance. Even if, in the short term, they cause submission, such behavior is di-

rected against the normative premises inspiring the actions of citizens or social groups subordinate to the state (Hechter 1987: 40–48).

As a result, any use of coercion entails a disproportionate burden on valuable – albeit limited – social capital and reduces the likelihood of an individual or community complying with it without referring again to the use of coercion in the future. For this reason, few authoritarian systems rely primarily on coercive measures. However, in some situations, all political systems must consider the possible need to use force. Nevertheless, coercion and repression are costly mechanisms of control of the state community. Additionally, they are entirely unfit to regulate activities requiring citizens to display any form of creativity or enthusiasm. In other words, political stabilization and social orders based on coercion have a strong tendency over time, either to collapse because of their own instability or to drastically limit the use of coercive measures by seeking to legitimize their political strategies and create predictable and constructive expectations among the civil society (Tretyakov 2017: 44–45).

The second possible form of controlling a civic community is to convince said society that submission to an authoritarian state is conducive to its own interests. It is often assumed in social sciences that such calculations of self-interest are the basis for the functioning of most social institutions. This view suggests that any rule followed by individuals is the result of an instrumental and calculated appraisal of the practical benefits of following – or not following – politically correct rules. However, it is connected with a highly instrumental approach to social structures and other people. Therefore, the task of the authoritarian state apparatus is to develop and compile coherent elements of the political strategy in such a way that citizens themselves consider it the most rational and attractive option in the process of shaping effective state administration structures. Suppose the authoritarian power properly shapes and manages the stimuli intensifying the control of the civil society in terms of its own benefit. In that case, self-interest should allow for a stable coexistence of even very different socio-political structures. In the context of an authoritarian state, socio-political interaction is shaped as a form of exchange – and the resulting obligations as – a kind of – contract. Individual decisions are calculated to maximize profits, and administrative organizations are the pillars of the cumulative principal-agent contractual relationship. Therefore, the fundamental political act is consenting to a contract (Sears & Funk 1991: 26–39).

However, self-interest must be clearly defined as a valuable and functional category encompassing a wide range of state-civil society relations. Boundaries covering self-interest issues need to be clearly de-

lineated so as not to cover all other types relevant to the point of civil society scrutiny. In this sense, self-interest is related to coercion because both categories are forms of utilitarianism. When an actor is presented with a situation of choice that involves threats of retaliation or where others have manipulated the available options, the models of self-interest and coercion will follow the same logic and predict the same outcome: a risk-neutral political actor should compare the benefits that can be obtained, with the cost of the penalty multiplied by the probability of criminal sanctions. In other words, the above two types of solutions are expressed in the fact that the basis of the obligation to comply with standards is prudence (Ellis 1971: 695). The reverse of this thesis is the so-called logic of deterrence. In other words, self-interest involves self-restraint on the actor's part, while coercion works through the application of external restraint. It expresses a significant difference in understanding the complex structure of incentives on government and the resulting acceptance of the required civil society. In other words, the model of coercion is only interested in the threat and use of physical violence. In contrast, the self-interest model can be generalized to several essential factors of social and psychological nature, physical stimuli, and many other factors that discourage the acceptance of the proposed solutions (Sears & Funk 1991: 67–82).

On the other hand, the distinction between self-interest and legitimacy can be seen through the difference between interest understood as "*bonum commune*" and *strictly* self-interest. All three models (coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy) assume that the actors of the political scene are "interested" in pursuing their welfare, and, therefore, self-interest must add something more. The actors are concerned about acting rationally when they pursue their goals, but it is not known *a priori* what the plans are and whether they serve the national *raison d'état* in the long run. In this context, what matters is what is included in the calculus of interests and in the situation in which the actor defines it. Does the actor take for granted the existing structure of relations and institutions and try to improve their position within, or does the actor imagine their situation as unique at every point of the decision and try to make it as favorable as possible? The first is status quo orientation, in which at least some rules or relationships are accepted and generally unquestioned. The realization of interests occurs within a structure that the actor takes for granted. Here we can say that the actor is "interested." The latter is "self-interest" in the strict sense of the word, which means a continual reassessment of each principle and relationship from an instrumental point of view.

Nothing is taken for granted or cherished for oneself, just for its benefit in and of itself. This position is fixed, not fickle. Self-interest is necessarily amoral to obligations to others; others are mere objects to be used instrumentally. It does not exclude cooperative behavior, even if performed for instrumental reasons (Jencks 1990: 54–67).

A society where adherence to the rules is primarily based on members' self-interest will exhibit several distinctive features. First, any loyalty of the actors to the system or its rules will be determined by whether the political system provides a positive stream of benefits. Actors continually calculate the expected profit from staying in the structure and are ready to abandon it immediately if any alternative promises more excellent utility. Such a system may be stable when the arrangement of "profitability" guarantees the appropriate profits. In this way, "selfish" actors on the political scene will be more prone to revisionism than to shaping the political *status quo*. Second, long-term relationships between stakeholders are difficult to maintain because actors do not value the relationship itself, only the benefits it brings (Beetham 1991: 27). Consequently, a socio-political system based mainly on narrow self-interest will be unstable and politically less integrated.

Another form of control of civil society is the belief in the normative legitimacy of the principles and rules shaped by the legitimate organs of state power - in this case, the structure of the authoritarian state. Thus, legitimacy contributes to the political coherence and credibility of power structures, thus providing a fundamental reason for why citizens should follow established rules. When a citizen is convinced that the rules are legitimate, the question of compliance is no longer motivated by the mere fear of retribution or the calculation of self-interest but rather by an inner sense of moral duty. In this context, legitimacy can be defined as a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman 1995: 574).

An essential dimension of the legitimation process is the internalization by citizens of external content and standards presented by power structures. In other words, the internalization of the legitimation process is characterized by the fact that the outer sphere constitutes the sense of one's own particular interests in the civil society – existing at the inter-subjective level – defining the set of laws, norms, and rules present and functioning in the community. The above set of standards and regulations will be legitimate in the dimension of civil society if particular citizens internalize its content and realize the importance and specificity

of their specific interests in the context of superior and objectively functioning political principles and rules.

Certainly, legitimacy as a tool of social control is much more effective. It has a definite advantage over coercion, especially in reducing execution costs and creating citizens' apparent "freedom" – although it seems to be more expensive in the short term. Moreover, legitimacy is not essential to maintaining social control. Nevertheless, the lack of legitimacy imposes high costs on the administration of the authoritarian state. Legality facilitates the operation of socio-political organizations that require enthusiasm, faithfulness, loyalty, discretion, organizational dispersion, as well as sound judgment. Because it is so problematic, societies will seek to subject it to justifiable rules. The powerful will aim to secure consent to their power from at least the most important among their subordinates (Beetham 1991: 3). In other words, "the maintenance of social order depends on the existence of a set of overarching rules of the game, rules that are to some degree internalized, or considered to be legitimate, by most actors. Not only do these rules set goals, or preferences, for each member of society, but they also specify the appropriate means by which these goals can be pursued" (Hechter 1987: 13).

Indeed, the coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy relationships are undoubtedly complex and rarely exist in their pure, idealized form. Historically, they are often interrelated in a model and distinctive way because most social structures first emerged from a relationship of coercion or individual self-interest. Nevertheless, once established, they can evaluate and shape the development of various forms of legitimacy. It is sometimes suggested that legitimacy is a derivative of coercion because the social consensus on which legitimation rests can also be created by force and coercion. Many legitimate power relationships widely accepted today began in their genesis as coercive relationships (this applies to virtually all modern liberal-democratic states).

Nevertheless, the functioning of the authoritarian authority in order to legitimize its actions seems to be one of the most motivating forms of legitimizing the regimes. It does not mean, however, that legitimacy and coercion are the same phenomena. Even if legitimizing power began as coercion, the legitimacy itself – as a product of internalization – works differently from the power relationship from which it emerged. Regardless of its origin, the composition of legitimate power relations functions in a peculiarly different nature than structures of coercion or self-interest.



## Conclusions

At present, the international community is faced with many demanding, multidimensional, and often daunting challenges both in the dimension of foreign policy and the global security strategy. It is primarily based on several threats posed by authoritarian regimes, including the issue of trade wars, international terrorism, nuclear weapons proliferation, uncontrolled arms race, illegal arms trade, the possible spread of various types of pandemics, peculiarly understood “ecology,” or also multiple kinds of political and economic pressure aimed at, in particular, fragile and politically unstable states. While the above aspects of confronting authoritarian regimes are essential, Western liberal democracies are also faced with a much more severe and overriding problem that – in the long run – may hamper the realm of fundamental issues defining liberal-democratic doctrine and the systemic specificity of Western states.

Even today, contemporary scientific centers analyzing the current trends in international politics emphasize the strategic importance of many significant challenges posed by the confrontation with the political doctrine of authoritative regimes. It is about both a direct threat to the functioning of liberal democracies (e.g., military interventions, economic pressure, propaganda war, various forms of political pressure, etc.), but also attempts to depreciate, discredit, question, and – as a consequence – replace democratically-liberal norms (e.g., promoting regulations, authoritarian, models, standards, and ideas), as well as activities aimed at destabilizing and slowly deconstructing the current international order based on the liberal-democratic vision of the rule of law.

The promotion of authoritarian ideas by contemporary autocratic regimes is carried out, highlighting the current military conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Therefore, there is a danger that authoritarian forces will become much stronger and more assertive, and Western countries may become weaker, politically less effective, and isolated. In this way, international politics may also become an environment less friendly to liberal-democratic ideas shaping the current *status quo* in the dimension of global politics. In such a situation, the democratic states of the West will be forced to give up their spheres of influence, or they will have to take the risk of a military confrontation. In the face of competition with the populist ideas of authoritarian states and an intensified propaganda war, liberal-democratic values may be compromised, and – as a consequence – the authority of the Western world basing its foreign policy on the paradigm of democratic-liberal values could be undermined.

Moreover, the threat of a confrontation with authoritarian states threatens the ideological coherence and integrated cooperation between Western states, which – despite everything – will be afraid to accept the growing costs of “excluding” themselves from the influence of authoritarian states (e.g., dependence on natural resources), or taking risks in military confrontation. Thus, intensified efforts to separate Western powers from each other will negatively impact mutual international cooperation. It may pose a real threat to the breakdown of strategic alliances, both Europe-wide and transatlantic, in the vital spheres of foreign and security policy. It will force a paradigm shift in virtually all dimensions of the functioning of the state. The entire sphere of economic activity will have to undergo intensified efforts to forge mutual divisions – and thus to separate the Western powers from one another, breaking down historic alliances. Western organizations and companies will be forced – one way or another – to adopt appropriate procedures, norms, rules, and expectations, which will be increasingly influenced by the economic concepts of authoritarian states, which will inevitably impact the global specificity of international relations.

Individual authoritarian states, as well as their decision-makers – in one way or another – will be able to build sufficiently strong structures of mutual acceptance and support, both economically and politically. Analyzing the current international scene, as these pressures develop, the multipolar political order now taking shape seems to be less and less based on liberal-democratic principles. The answer to the despotic tendencies of authoritarian regimes should therefore be multidimensional.

In consequence, democratic liberal states should develop appropriate action strategies. As a result, it is necessary to focus on cooperation that profiles the determination and constructive approach of action among civil society – both in the ideological, political, and economic dimensions – strengthening internal stability and determination in implementing its development initiatives. Fragility, stagnation, and internal divisions in liberal democracies enable authoritarian states to shape alternative – undemocratic – norms and procedures in international politics, thus negatively affecting their Western rivals. Solving the political disputes and economic problems underlying these misunderstandings and conflicts seems to be the most effective way of defending against the authoritarian tendencies of political opponents. However, more radical measures are required in the short and medium-term.

In the interests of democratic liberal political systems, renewal, restructuring, and improvement of historically strategic alliances are required. Western democracies are combined into an integrated system of

institutions operating internationally. Therefore, the challenge posed by authoritarian political systems calls for the effective use of the ties between the countries of the West, even in situations of differences and issues of dispute (e.g., the diverse nature and complexity of international trade). In other words, liberal-democratic states need to go beyond crises and focus on lasting historical alliances that condition effective economic development and political stabilization both locally and internationally.

In today’s globalized world, liberal democracies are forced to compete on all levels of political and economic life. International rules, principles, and norms play an essential role here. The danger to the liberal order is directed not only concerning countries with established liberal-democratic political systems but also affects other regions of the world, as well as international institutions operating on a global scale. In this sense, liberal democracies need a positive and effective program capable of engaging in the global competition for new spheres of influence. In other words, liberal democratic systems must work out an appropriate development strategy that is also attractive to countries devoid of a democratic state of law. It would be an excellent alternative to authoritarian regimes’ demanding and expansive policies. A vital expression of this is the political initiative and commitment to the global sphere of international relations, increasing expenditure on the promotion and support of the concept of a democratic state of law, as well as human rights, and – above all – effective administrative structures of the rule of law, both locally and internationally.

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## Autorytaryzm jako „niegodziwy problem” we współczesnych stosunkach międzynarodowych

### Streszczenie

Opracowanie ma na celu przedstawienie koncepcji autorytaryzmu, który – przedstawiony w kategoriach tzw. niegodziwego problemu współczesnego świata – wydaje się poważnym wyzwaniem dla współczesnych stosunków międzynarodowych (IR), i to zarówno w wymiarze teoretycznym, jak i praktycznym. Autor artykułu definiuje pojęcie autorytaryzmu jako formę ustroju politycznego, w którym władza i zasoby materiałowo-ludzkie państwa zostały scentralizowane, zawłaszczone i oddane do dyspozycji jednostki lub elitarnej grupy „trzymającej władzę”. W ten sposób możliwości integracji państwa autorytarnego – zarówno w wymiarze politycznym, jak i gospodarczym – z globalnym systemem stosunków międzynarodowych pozostają ograniczone, a istotne instytucje administracyjne państwa zmanipulowane i zawłaszczone. Zastosowana metoda badawcza umożliwia reinterpretację omawianych zagadnień w odniesieniu do złożonej – choć specyficznej – systemowej formy, charakterystycznej nie tylko dla państw i regionów politycznie niestabilnych i upadających, ale także struktur stabilnych politycznie i rozwiniętych gospodarczo. Niniejsza analiza pozwala na ukazanie problemu współczesnych autorytarnych reżimów politycznych w kategoriach, które nie tylko definiują, ale także legitymizują – a niejednokrotnie nawet uprawomocniają – nawet jedne z najbardziej despotycznych, autokratycznych i hegemonistycznych form ustrojowych funkcjonujących we współczesnym świecie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** autorytaryzm, demokracja, „niegodziwy problem”, reżim polityczny, dyktatura, rządy prawa