

Chapter 2

Authoritarian Landscapes

The first basic assumption of this project is that the autocrat is foremost concerned with his personal well-being and the preservation of his power and position. These concerns are closely linked to his personal safety and that of his close allies. Additionally, by holding onto power, the autocrat is guaranteed the long-term pay-offs in wealth and prestige associated with the control of a national leadership. While the autocrat appears to be in a position of uncontested power and confidence, his/her position is never permanent or assured and can be preserved only through constant vigilance and action. For this reason, scholars have long sought to identify the methods and maneuvers autocrats can and must take to maintain their tenuous grip on power to ensure their personal well-being. Machiavelli (1515/2007), for example, famously remarked that a dictator must act as a half-man, half-beast, “centaur,” carefully blending tolerance and coercion in order to win both the love and fear of the populace (72). While fear is the critical tool for sustaining authoritarian rule, it alone is insufficient. The autocrat must also win a measure of consent in order to maintain his rule.

This suggestion leads to a second assumption: long-lasting regimes are effective at identifying potential internal and external challenges and preempting or responding to them. These activities are essential because even the most powerful of autocratic leaders faces recurrent threats approaching from many directions. These challenges come from both within the ruling regime and from the general population. The first kind of threats, those from inside the regime, can be labeled as “horizontal threats” (Schedler 2009a, 4). According to Geddes (1999), “As virtually all close observers of authoritarian governments have noted, politics in such regimes, as in all others, involves factionalism, competition, and struggle” (121). Dictators and ruling factions are always threatened to some degree by a minority faction that could improve its position and better achieve its interests by seizing the top leadership. Moreover, as noted by Klay Kieh (2004), despite the spontaneity and drama associated with them, *coups d'état* are historically a fairly common phenomenon. In Africa alone, 85 coups took place from the 1950s to the 1990s (44). Autocratic leaderships, therefore, must always be cognizant of the possibility

that their erstwhile allies might attempt to seize power through force or political maneuvering if given the opportunity and act proactively to prevent such an outcome.

Additionally, authoritarian regimes face the threat of popular challenges posed by the general population. Schedler (2009a) labels these “vertical” threats—those presented by popular contestation from below (4). As noted by Schock (2005), social groups in a non-democratic state may perceive their situations as unjust based on any number of grievances and respond through three particular forms of action. These include “exit[ing] the situation” or attempting to emigrate from the country in question (14). Secondly, they can engage in what Scott (1985) identifies as “everyday forms of resistance.” By this, he means citizens carry out daily social acts, such as gossiping or avoiding tax payments, in a kind of symbolic struggle in which they seek to frame community-wide social relations in a manner congruent with their material self-interests (Scott 1985, 310). Citizens have thus not been driven to a state of total acquiescence but challenge the status quo in less explicit forms of resistance. While these first two actions may in aggregate terms have an eroding effect on a non-democratic regime, they are largely manageable in the short term. A third variant of grassroots political activity represents a more significant vertical threat to the regime. Particularly in authoritarian contexts, where institutionalized political access is severely curtailed, individuals often participate in “non-institutional political action” (Schock 2005, 15). This involves contentious acts “not prescribed by any... [established] procedure, practice or norm” that gain power and influence through their “indeterminateness and disruptiveness” (15). Such collective actions, which can take violent or non-violent forms, have often culminated in revolutionary situations in which authoritarian regimes have collapsed, as in Iran in 1979 or throughout much of Eastern Europe in 1989. Autocrats have also been pressured into opening institutionalized forms of political access, as in Taiwan during the 1980s.

To complicate the situation even further, horizontal and vertical threats often interact with one another to weaken an autocrat’s grip on power. As noted by Tilly and Tarrow (2007), when there is a serious degree of factional division within a ruling regime, political alignments become unstable. This provides challenging groups from below with potential allies within the regime (56–57). If challengers can capitalize on these divisions and form coalitions with segments of the ruling regime, the ruler’s position is weakened while his rivals’ are improved. Moreover, in such situations, the incumbent’s movement becomes constricted, and the regime must rely on more limited, time-tested courses of action. Simultaneously, the opposition has greater flexibility and can invent or adapt effective repertoires of contention (58). Thus, when elite-level fragmentation occurs, vertical and horizontal threats can combine, creating a situation where the ruler’s position erodes and the regime reaches a point of collapse. At this point, the incumbent may explore exit options, such as fleeing the country. An autocrat may also come to the bargaining table to meet with popular opponents and agree to major, unprecedented political reforms, possibly initiating elections that enable a safe, institutionalized exit from power. This latter option represents a gamble aimed at preserving the

existing regime but may also inadvertently open a window of opportunity for the political opposition to seize power or make genuine multiparty electoral competition into a reality. An autocrat can also fall back on coercive means, which in a situation of high social mobilization, may only inflame the public's ire and bring about a revolutionary situation.

As noted by Schedler (2009a), these horizontal, vertical, and combined threats require that the overarching prerogative of the autocrat is the "task of multilateral threat management" (4). In carrying out this responsibility, authoritarian rulers have great latitude in creating or transforming political institutions in order to stack the odds in their favor vis-à-vis potential challengers. Schedler labels this activity "institutional landscaping" (6). This project enables a ruler to create mechanisms for sustaining the loyalty of supporters or co-opting emerging opponents. Through institutional landscaping, a ruler can also create institutional roadblocks that inhibit the initial efforts of potential opponents to mount serious challenges even before they appear as serious threats to the regime. As discussed above, scholars have identified nominally democratic institutions, such as elections and legislatures (Schmitter 1978; Linz 1978; Way 2006; Gandhi 2008; Lust 2009) or improved legal systems (Pan 2003; Peerenboom 2007), as sources of political stability under autocratic regimes. In addition, students of authoritarianism have found highly institutionalized ruling parties to serve a wide range of functions that bolster the durability of non-democratic states (Nathan 2003; Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2008; Way 2008). As discussed in the following section, autocrats can refashion their regimes by delegating greater authority to subnational territorial units or concentrate state power at the political center by reasserting their control over local agents and constricting their movement.

2.1 Defining Decentralization

Altering the division of power and resources between the center and subnational territorial units within authoritarian regimes is the central strategy of institutional landscaping explored in this book. This process can be encompassed in the concepts of "centralization" and "decentralization. As Tocqueville once lamented in *Democracy in America* (1840/2003), "Centralization is a word endlessly repeated nowadays whose meaning no one, in general, seeks to define" (103). Sharing this sentiment, scholars (Conyers 1984; Hutchcroft 2001; Triesman 2002; Work 2002) have written a growing number of reviews of the literature, aimed at bringing order to an expansive body of research featuring highly interrelated terms such as decentralization, deconcentration, delegation, devolution, and federalism. The problem of determining a common understanding for these concepts has been further highlighted by the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) 1999 publication of a 40-page working paper focusing on the term "decentralization." It features an extensive "sampling of definitions" used to describe decentralization in a range of publications released by the UNDP as well as other international

agencies. In spite of the wide array of scholarly research on the subject, scholarship has long struggled to place the ideas of centralization and decentralization into a conceptually meaningful and commonly adopted terminology.

To restate the definition applied in this work, which effectively captures the essence of the concept, Work (2002) describes decentralization as “the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to the lower levels of government” (5). In practice, this transfer results in the diffusion of state power and resources from national to subnational authorities. Alternatively, centralization involves the opposite—the transfer of state authority and resources from subnational governments to the national level. The concepts of centralization and decentralization should also be clearly differentiated from a number of similar, sometimes overlapping terms. Fessha and Kirkby (2008) identify “deconcentration, delegation, and devolution” as forms of decentralization. The first, deconcentration, refers to “the mere physical relocation of executing agencies and offices to regions outside the center, with decision-making power remaining at the center” (249). The second, delegation, is “more extensive” and involves “the central government delegate[ing] subnational jurisdictions certain legislative or executive competencies” (249). The third and “most radical form” of decentralization is devolution, under which “the central government transfers political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities to autonomous subnational jurisdictions that elect their own representatives and raise their own, usually limited, revenues” (249). Work (2002) adds a fourth form of decentralization, divestment, which occurs “when planning and administrative responsibility or other public functions are transferred from government to voluntary, private or non-governmental institutions” (7). Fessha and Kirkby distinguish federalism from other forms of decentralization in that under federalism, the arranged sharing of governmental power between central and subnational authorities is constitutionally guaranteed and cannot be unilaterally readjusted or centralized by the national government (249).

In this work, references to decentralization focus on the variants of deconcentration and delegation, where subnational government agents are physically located away from the seat of national government and are granted extensive powers of government as well as a significant share of public resources. Decentralization in this study does not refer to devolution, as in the four cases explored in this study, central authorities have the power to appoint regional or provincial leaders. Moreover, the cases examined are all unitary states, where the formal powers granted to subnational authorities are not constitutionally guaranteed. As a result, the central leadership may eliminate or redraw subnational territorial units at its discretion. For this reason, the term “federalism,” which provides legal guarantees to subnational units, is not applied. While subnational authorities in the two decentralized cases explored in this study control a substantial share of state resources and responsibility within their respective regimes, this allocation of state power is neither derived from the constitutional design of these countries nor is sanctioned through subnational elections. Finally, the references to decentralization in this work refer exclusively to the distribution of resources and responsibilities *within* the state rather than between the state and private actors. Consequently, the term “divestment” is not used.

2.2 Functional Decentralization

Willis et al. (1999) also separate “political” and “functional” types of decentralization (8). Political decentralization, which is closely linked to the idea of devolution, refers to the creation of elected subnational governments that are granted the power to make binding decisions over a range of policy issues (Willis et al. 1999, p. 8; Work 2002, 6). According to Work (2002), the process of political decentralization does not result in the outcome of devolution until the “full transfer” of responsibilities to subnational governments is completed and these localities become “autonomous and fully independent of the devolving authority” (6). Fessha and Kirkby (2008) suggest that once these subnational entities and the powers granted to them receive constitutional guarantees and cannot be rescinded by the center, the system can be termed “federal” (249). As mentioned above, in this work, subnational authorities are appointed by the center. Moreover, national authorities may also legally reform the powers of subnational localities or even abolish or redraw the boundaries of these units.

Even formally unitary autocratic systems such as China or Kazakhstan may be functionally decentralized in practice, meaning a substantial “transfer of policy responsibilities and expenditure and revenue-raising powers” from the center to the localities has taken place (Willis et al. 1999, p. 8). As noted by Luong (2004), the actual *de facto* level of decentralization can greatly exceed the official limitation on subnational autonomy suggested by a country’s status as a unitary state (183). This kind of functional decentralization, which she labels “economic” decentralization, involves three basic areas of governing authority. The first, “fiscal” decentralization, refers to the “the degree of subnational discretion over revenue generation and collection” (188). The second, “administrative” decentralization occurs “when either the main locus of state expenditures is at the subnational rather than the national level or when the national and subnational governments have comparable levels of expenditure” (194–195). Finally, “regulatory” decentralization “describes a situation in which subnational officials exercise greater authority over setting and enforcing regulations in practice than they are empowered to do on paper” (198).

Measurement on the fiscal and administrative elements of functional decentralization is relatively straightforward. World Bank (2010) data offers the most comprehensive standardized collection of statistics capable of assessing countries’ levels of fiscal and administrative decentralization. This dataset includes data for 46 of the 149 total countries participating in GFS for 1996. Additionally, this set of data has a uniquely expansive historical range, stretching for three decades, from the year 1972 to 2000. For Taiwan, comparable data is derived from the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of China (1991, 1998). Together, these statistics cover the third wave of democracy and include a sampling of authoritarian cases that have broken down and either transitioned to democracy or experienced regime turnovers. Each of the paired cases compared in this investigation vary substantially on standard measures for both fiscal and administrative decentralization.

As far as the single-party autocracies investigated in this study, China's subnational revenues represented an average of 51.48 % of all government revenues and 54.84 % of expenditures (1995–1998), whereas Taiwan's subnational governments were responsible for 24.8 % for revenues and 27.7 % of expenditures in 1984, several years before the pivotal years of 1986 and 1987, when the opposition DPP was formed and martial law lifted (World Bank 2010; Ministry of Finance 1991, 1998). In the personalist autocracies of Kazakhstan and the Philippines, Kazakh subnational authorities were responsible for 28.77 % of all government revenues and 31.43 % of all expenditures (1997–1998), while subnational governments in the Philippines controlled 7.89 % of revenues and 11.83 % of expenditures (1978–1986) (World Bank 2010). Therefore, on basic measures of both fiscal and administrative decentralization, China nearly doubled those of Taiwan, while Kazakhstan roughly tripled measures of decentralization in the Philippines. Of course, systems of intergovernmental transfer and taxation can enable the center to exert influence over local governments, requiring the researcher to go beyond the regime's stated distribution of revenues and expenditures for assessing the genuine level of subnational fiscal and administrative autonomy in each case.

As for assessing the degree of regulatory decentralization in a case, Luong (2004) suggests examining three central concerns. First, one should consider how regularly or irregularly regulations issued from the national level are enforced by subnational officials (198–199). Secondly, the researcher should look at whether or not local officials have the discretion to independently issue or deny licenses and permits to businesses operating within their jurisdiction (199). Finally, an observer should determine whether or not “regulatory authorities [are] dually subordinated to central and subnational authorities” (199). Having these kinds of autonomous regulatory powers enables subnational officials to exert influence over foreign and domestic investors and even to extract additional funds from them. In such a system, the central government can issue laws and regulations from the top-down, while local administrators will have the latitude to choose which procedures to enforce and how to do so.

2.3 Decentralization of Coercion

In addition to functional decentralization, which includes fiscal, administrative, and regulatory variants, I also refer to the decentralization of a state's coercive resources and the discretion over suppressing popular opponents. As noted in [Chap. 1](#), a number of scholars (Skocpol 1979; Way 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010, pp. 56–61) have found that the presence of an effective internal security apparatus is central to the resilience of authoritarian regimes. This institution is indispensable to an autocrat, enabling him/her to “monitor, co-opt, intimidate, and repress potential opponents, both within and outside the regime” (Levitsky and Way 2010, p. 57). The mere existence of a well-equipped, battle-hardened, and highly disciplined security apparatus, however, does not guarantee that it will remain loyal

to the regime leadership when called upon. As noted by Thompson (2001), the divergent political trajectories in Eastern Europe and China in 1989, for example, were heavily determined by security agents' decision "to shoot or not to shoot" into crowds of demonstrators when ordered to do so (63–64). In his view, the strong internal legitimacy of the "early post-totalitarian" CCP, as opposed to the "frozen post-totalitarian" state of Iron Curtain regimes, can explain the application of effective repression in the PRC but not Eastern Europe in late 1989 (77). Slater (2003) has suggested that the effectiveness of institutions of repression in sustaining authoritarian regimes depends on whether or not leaders "personalize" their decision-making control over such mechanisms. They can accomplish this by packing them with loyalists, rigging their procedures for promotion to deny potential rivals access to important posts, and using extra-institutional channels to divert power and resources to loyalists and away from rivals (87–91). These strategies enable a leader to manipulate the coercive apparatus of the state and ensure that when he/she orders the application of repression against internal rivals or popular challengers, members of these institutions will act as instructed.

A central concern of this book involves the "decentralization of coercion"—the degree to which control of the state's internal security apparatus and responsibility for monitoring, silencing, harassing, and even eliminating popular and internal opponents is transferred from central to subnational authorities. Following Levitsky and Way's (2010) terminology, such coercive activities may involve "high-intensity" coercive acts, such as firing on crowds and arresting or assassinating activists, or "low-intensity" coercion, involving spying on potential opponents, harassing or intimidating them, vandalizing or seizing their property, or denying them licenses or permits to conduct their affairs (57–58). One element of the coercive capacity of authoritarian states has received scant attention outside the research of area specialists on China. This concerns the degree to which central authorities delegate primary responsibility for maintaining social stability and suppressing popular challengers to local officials (O'Brien and Li 2006; Lee 2007b; Cai 2008b). In a state with a decentralized coercive apparatus such as China, subnational authorities have a relatively free hand to decide how to respond to acts of popular contention within their territorial jurisdictions, ultimately making the decision to unleash local security forces against demonstrators, harass protest leaders, or use other strategies to silence popular challengers. However, as noted by Cai (2008a), this autonomy is "conditional." If local agents fail to effectively silence popular challenges, higher ranking authorities may intervene, take control of the situation and fire, demote, or admonish the responsible local official—both to punish the cadre for his/her poor performance and also to placate popular claimants (412–413). In a more centralized system, the coercive apparatus of the regime acts more as a direct appendage of the center and circumvents the bottom rungs of the state hierarchy in carrying out its operations. Following the orders of the center, it can intimidate, arrest, and/or eliminate regime opponents and suppress popular challenges without the guidance or supervision of subnational authorities.

As mentioned briefly in [Chap. 1](#), the two forms of decentralization addressed in this book: functional and coercive, relate directly to Piven and Cloward's

(1979) typology of possible state responses to popular challenges: ignore, conciliate, reform, or repress (27–30). As noted by Shock (2005), while ignoring acts of popular contention is possible in democracies, this is an extraordinarily dangerous course of action for an autocracy, where persistent challenges can have a corrosive impact on the regime's legitimacy (30–31). The regime must in some fashion respond to serious popular challenges; it cannot simply ignore them. One active response, making concrete reforms in direct response to popular contention, is also highly unappealing to autocrats, as it may make the regime appear weak and encourage greater protest (31). These considerations leave conciliation through co-optation or symbolic gesturing and repression as the preferred tools of autocracies in addressing popular contention (31). With functional decentralization, subnational authorities have greater discretion over local taxation, the issuing or denial of licenses and permits, and the allocation of public services. Control over these resources gives local authorities the ability to co-opt the leaders or targeted segments of challenging groups by offering them perks such as lucrative government contracts or subsidies, official appointments, the speedy issuance of needed licenses and permits, official posts, special exemptions from taxation, and/or privileged access to educational institutions for their children. If these measures fail, local authorities empowered through functional decentralization may also respond to the demands of protesters, offering token or more concrete concessions to claimants. Conversely, subnational officials can also deny access to these benefits to troublesome, noncompliant individuals who organize or participate in popular challenges. Furthermore, local cadres can punish these targets through acts of low-intensity coercion, cutting off basic services such as electricity and plumbing, subjecting them to disruptive government inspections, and imposing special taxes on them. Subnational authorities in systems with decentralized coercion enjoy an enhanced degree of decision-making power within their localities and can autonomously craft repressive responses to popular challenges, deploying police or thugs to break up demonstrations, and harass or eliminate organizers. Thus, the decentralization of functional and coercive powers in non-democracies provides subnational authorities with a large menu of responses—both carrots and sticks—they can choose from in deciding how to address outbreaks of popular contention. Conversely, in a more centralized system, the repression or conciliation of local protests is ordered directly from the political center and not determined through the autonomous action of local cadres, who are left as functionaries of the national leadership.

2.4 Decentralization: Causes and Outcomes

Scholarship on decentralization and centralization has provided a wide array of explanations for the forces that motivate such policies and the effects that they create. These concerns relate to the “distribution and division of governmental power” and have been noted as fundamental issues in political science dating back

to the time of Aristotle (Maass 1959, 9). However, scholarly interest in the subject has historically been defined by ebbs and flows. It has gained substantial attention at some periods of time while sliding to the margins of academic discourse during others (Conyers 1984, p. 188). From the mid-1950s to the 1960s, scholarship examined how British and French colonial administrations gradually transferred governing authority to subnational governments in preparation for these countries' political independence (Conyers 1984, p. 188; Work 2002, 5). Important early works such as Hicks (1961), Maddick (1963) as well as a number of UN publications on the topic focused on the way in which decentralization could facilitate greater public participation in government, increase the political efficacy of citizens in developing countries, and lessen the burden on central governments to provide public services (Conyers 1983, pp. 98–99). These policy-oriented first generation pieces have tended to focus on the positive role decentralization could play in improving governance and democracy in changing societies. This mid-century optimism over decentralization was subsequently challenged by a shift towards state centralization in the developing world. In a more recent shift, the allure of centralization has been challenged by a more complex second generation of studies on decentralization, which focuses both on the driving forces behind decentralization and the positive and negative outcomes it produces.

In pendulum-like fashion, the early optimism over decentralization in the mid-twentieth century among leaders of developing countries, international organizations, and academics, was soon replaced by a general cynicism towards this approach. This was followed by a turn towards the approaches embracing the centralization of the state (Conyers 1983, p. 98). Scholars such as Gerschenkron (1962) noted that the unique challenges faced by late-developers, namely needing to overcome developmental backwardness and compete in an international environment already dominated by industrialized countries, required a strong centralized state. This body could invest in technology, push unskilled agrarian workers into the industrial workforce, and concentrate society's limited stock of talent, technology, and resources into large-scale industrial projects (13–20). Leaders of developing countries, such as Egypt, Turkey, and Argentina, noted the example of the Soviet Union, and initiated "revolutions from above" in their own states, using the centralized powers of government to forcefully restructure society and drive it towards rapid industrialization (Huntington 1968, 195; O'Donnell 1973/1988, 2, 31–32; Trimberger 1978). During this process, governments concentrated revenues and expenditures in the center, stripped the autonomy of subnational layers of the state, and developed far-reaching bureaucratic apparatuses that could execute central decrees at the furthest corners of a country (Samuels and Mainwaring 2004, 92–94).

By the late-1970s, decentralization was again becoming the "latest fashion" in scholarship, international organizations, and the rulers of many developing countries (Conyers 1983, p. 97). This second wave of decentralization has affected countries throughout the developing world but much research has tended to concentrate on Latin America, the region that experienced the "most radical changes due to decentralization," seeing a doubling in the proportion of government

revenues gathered and expenditures spent at the subnational level from 1980 to 2000 (Falleti 2010, 6, 7). While some disagreement exists on the forces driving this trend towards decentralization, explanations have typically centered on two major global trends affecting the region: a shift from state-led developmentalism to neoliberal economic development and the transition from authoritarian to democratic forms of government throughout much of the region (Gibson 2004, 9).

After economic setbacks in the 1970s, such as the oil crises and the failure of import-substitution strategies to generate sustained growth, leaders of developing countries began to challenge the role of the central state as the driver of national economic development (Gibson 2004, 10; Payne and Phillips 2010, 88). During the same time period, political elites and economic thinkers in the industrialized North increasingly embraced the logic of neoliberalism, which demanded the dramatic reduction of the state's scope of involvement in society and the economy in order to unleash market forces, and drive countries' economic performance (Wilson 2000, p. 235). These ideas were actively promoted through international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF, which used policy instruments associated with the "Washington consensus" (Williamson 1990) to pressure developing countries into devolving centralized state power to subnational governments as well as civil society and private economic actors (Schuurman 1997, p. 151). Scholars also argued that in a more globalized world, states were increasingly incapable of asserting centralized control over their economies, resulting in the "leak[ing] away" of central state authority "upwards, sideways, and downwards" to non-governmental actors, multinational corporations and subnational authorities (Strange 1995, p. 56). In short, global pressures as well as general thinking on economic strategy were shifting by the end of the 1970s, compelling national leaders to transfer a growing share of state authority and resources from the center to the periphery in the interest of maintaining economic competitiveness.

Secondly, scholars have also attributed increasing decentralization throughout much of the world as a result of the "third wave" of democracy beginning in the 1970s (Huntington 1991a, b). This causal relationship is derived from both an assumed link between federalism and democracy in conventional political thought and observations made by researchers studying the consolidation of third wave democracies. Building on classical thinkers such as Plato, who famously argued the ideal population for a democracy was 5,040, as well as the Enlightenment political philosophers of Rousseau and Montesquieu, Dahl and Tufte (1974) have identified the many advantages of small polities in sustaining functioning democracy (4–8). In communities with small populations, citizens had a higher level of familiarity and trust with one another. They could more readily participate in political decision-making, enhancing the responsiveness, and efficiency of government (5). As described in the *Federalist Papers*, Madison made the case that by dividing political power between national and state-level authorities, a large federal state could enjoy the responsiveness of a small direct democracy while also enjoying the benefits of territorially large polity (10–11). Building on these insights, Diamond (1999) has similarly drawn a close link between the democratizing and

decentralizing trends of the latter twentieth century (121, 122). From this perspective, decentralization stabilizes and enhances the quality of nascent democracies. It is also an outcome of the growing demands of citizens for political inclusion in societies transitioning away from autocracy.

More recently, a growing body of research on third wave democracies in Latin America has cautioned against “celebratory” assertions of any intimate, mutually enforcing link between democratization and decentralization (Gibson 2004, 12). In the view of these authors, decentralization is related to third wave decentralization but there is no straightforward causal linkage between the two processes. As noted by Gibson (2004, 9–12) and Ochoa-Reza (2004), post-democratization decentralization has taken place because electoral reforms initiated during periods of democratization resulted in the “activating [of] once-dormant federal institutions,” wherein previously quiescent subnational offices were empowered and began to demand the transfer of a growing share of central resources to the periphery (Ochoa-Reza 2004, 257). O’Neil (2003), noting the divergent trajectories of decentralization in transitional democracies in Latin America, has found that national leaders only support decentralization when their parties enjoy higher levels of electoral support at the subnational level than in national elections. The decision to decentralize, in other words, has been motivated by elites’ interest in expanding their political power, not an overarching interest in improving democracy *per se*. Falleti (2010) has found that when reforms in a country begin with one particular form of decentralization (administrative, fiscal, or political), this alters the balance of power between national and subnational interests, shifting the nature of governing coalitions and determining how subsequent decentralizing reforms will proceed (13). Further complicating the relationship between democratization and decentralization, Eaton and Dickovick (2004) have examined how Latin American presidents in the 1990s have applied political powers within well-established democracies to “re-centralize” fiscal powers with varying degrees of success. Thus, while these scholars see democratic change as relevant to the determination of a country’s decision to decentralize, there is no clear causal link between democracy and decentralization. Rather, decentralization is an outcome driven by the cynical calculations and distribution of political power among competing self-interested elites.

Second generation studies have also given close attention to the positive and negative effects of the process of decentralization. Scholars have argued that decentralization can improve the efficiency and responsiveness of government (Tiebout 1956; Shah 1998), improve public participation in political decision-making (Manor 1999; Crook 2003), politically accommodate minority groups in diverse societies (Selassie 2003), promote economic development (Weingast 1995; Jin et al. 2005), and increase government transparency and reduce corruption (Huther and Shah 1998; Fisman and Gatti 2002; Arikian 2004; Gurgur and Shah 2005). Others have been more critical of decentralization, finding that such reforms can create coordination problems between various levels of government (De Mello 2000), exacerbate inequalities in economic prosperity and the quality of government services among regions (West and Wong 1995; Manor 1999;

Prud'homme 1995, pp. 202–205), increase corruption (Prud'homme 1995, pp. 211–213; Tanzi 1996), and threaten macroeconomic stability (Prud'homme 1995, p. 205; Dabla-Norris 2006).

Regardless of the supposed merits and deficiencies of such reforms, it is a basic reality that in the latter half of the twentieth century, propelled by advances in global democratization, the rise of neoliberal development policies, and the promotion of international financial institutions, decentralization has rapidly transformed the shape of governments throughout the world. As noted by Work (2002) and Falleti (2010), data from the IMF's Government Finance Statistics project reveal that between 1980 and 1998, countries have reported substantial overall increases in the share of revenues and expenditures commanded at the subnational level. In terms of regional patterns, developed countries, followed by former communist bloc and Latin American states currently have the highest proportion of subnational expenditures, while the most dramatic changes in decentralization from 1975 to 1995 have occurred in developed countries, Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Arzaghi and Henderson 2005, p. 1160). Among the 72 developing and transitional countries participating in the GFS program with populations over 5 million, 63 have reported they are currently implementing decentralization reforms (Work 2002, p. 10). Based on these developments, Falleti (2010) has suggested, "In no period since the formation and consolidation of the nation-states in the nineteenth century have subnational actors, politicians, and interests been as important as they have been since the enactment of decentralization reforms in the last quarter of the twentieth century" (3).

2.5 Decentralization, Institutional Landscaping, and Popular Mobilization

Returning to a central theme of this book, the transfer of state resources and decision-making power from central to subnational authorities may also have an important impact on authoritarian resilience. Like the establishment, modification, or transformation of nominally democratic political institutions or ruling political parties, decentralization represents a form of institutional landscaping that autocrats carry out in the interest of mitigating the threats posed by internal and popular challengers (Schedler 2009a, 6). As noted by Schedler (2009a), when considering how to organize intergovernmental relations between the center and subnational units, autocratic regimes must consider several questions: "Shall rulers strive to monopolize decision-making in the capital city or shall they permit subnational units to exercise bounded political autonomy?" Secondly, "Shall they strive to steer local politics in an immediate fashion, or shall they introduce immediate layers of government between the center and the localities" (6)? As reflected in GFS data on subnational governments' proportion of state revenues and expenditures, Landry (2008) finds that in most cases, autocracies are reluctant decentralizers, at least in comparison to democracies (6). He finds that from 1972 to 2000, the average

subnational share of expenditures and revenues in autocracies were 17.76 and 14.05 %, while these figures were 25.48 and 18.92 % in democracies (6). In fact, he finds only eleven historical autocracies whose proportion of subnational expenditures exceeded 30 % (7). Landry (2008) cites the general reluctance of central authorities to transfer political power to subnational units as being grounded in the fear that local cadres might develop a countervailing source of power to the national leadership (10). These empowered local officials might use this power to challenge the central leadership, posing a horizontal threat to the regime, or join with a popular opposition, enabling a destabilizing vertical threat from the bottom up.

A number of scholars have noted the way in which despotic leaders adjust the distribution of state authority and resources between the center and subnational territorial units in the interest of tightening their grip on power. Observing authoritarian leaders' expected preference for concentrating state authority and asserting the center's power over potential, regionally-based rivals, scholars have documented centralizing trends in a number of authoritarian cases. In post-Soviet Russia, for example, scholars (Bahry 2005; Konitzer and Wegren 2006; Sharafutdinova 2010) have discussed how a shift towards decentralization implemented in the 1990s under the Yeltsin administration has rapidly been reversed under a Putin regime in the 2000s. The president has rapidly asserted centralized authority over regional powerbrokers, stripping them of their previously held autonomous power.

Alternatively, in step with broader global trends affecting both non-democracies and democracies, a number of notable authoritarian governments have overcome any concerns with regional rivals and begun to decentralize to a significant degree. As noted by Landry (2008, 2) as well as Oi (1992), Montinola et al. (1995), Xia (2000), and Jin et al. (2005), decentralization in China, the second case examined in this book, has contributed mightily to the country's impressive economic performance since the early 1980s. By transferring substantial control over economic policy to subnational authorities, China has exemplified what Weingast (1995) has termed "market-preserving federalism" (22). In limiting their grip over economic policy in the provinces, China's national leaders enabled subnational authorities to competitively experiment with economic reform, support and protect local markets, and draw investment into their territories (27). In fact, these provincially held state powers have become so well-entrenched that central authorities have in certain instances proved incapable of re-centralizing state authority when they have attempted to do so (23). In another authoritarian case examined in this study, Kazakhstan has decentralized to a large degree. In this case, the center has formally recognized the autonomy of regional *akims* but only after these authorities informally captured a serious share of state power, using their regulatory, fiscal, and administrative powers to build-up bases of regional support (Luong 2004, 184).

Breaking some new ground in cross-national comparative analysis, this study seeks to explore the proposition that by decentralizing state power, either as the result of top-down decree or the pulling force of regional authorities, authoritarian regimes can increase their resilience against popular challenges. Specifically, the granting of conditional autonomy to subnational territorial units creates a structural barrier between popular claimants and central authorities, which in turn encourages

challenges to the regime to take the form of localized, as opposed to nationalized, forms. When subnational authorities possess a significant share of the state's resources and decision-making authority, local protest entrepreneurs are likely to perceive that their particular grievances can be effectively addressed by carrying out limited, community-specific collective actions. Consequently, when choosing tactics and framing their claims, organizers are more likely to take limited, issue-specific actions that resonate specifically with local residents (rather than more generally with the national public), orient claims in an "us-versus-them" fashion between locality or social sector-specific groups and subnational authorities (rather than the general public or nation as a whole against the regime), and focus on material, geographically limited grievances rather than political issues that bring the totality of the sociopolitical power structure into question. Instead of taking the greater personal risks associated with constructing an organizational infrastructure that forges links across social sectors and communities, protest entrepreneurs can achieve repeated successes, influencing subnational authorities or local private actors by focusing on safer and more readily attainable limited goals. In a parallel of Madisonian predictions of the benefits of a federal republic, not only democracies but also authoritarian regimes may also prove more responsive to their constituents if they empower local governments to determine public policies within their own territorial jurisdictions. However, instead of influencing local government at the ballot box, citizens in authoritarian polities may use extralegal collective action to signal subnational authorities and demand for desired concessions or policy changes. In a twist to the more upbeat predictions of decentralizing optimists, the transfer of political power and authority from the center to the periphery may actually improve overall government responsiveness while *also* preserving and sustaining authoritarian rule and impeding popular demands for democratic change. In this sense, decentralization may improve autocracies' performance in governing, which consequently makes citizens more comfortable with the authoritarian status quo. In short, a system in which authority and state resources are diffused to subnational governments promotes authoritarian resilience in several ways. It creates a perceived structural opening for localized forms of protest, encourages citizens to target their own local governments in collective actions, and discourages social entrepreneurs from linking arms across locality, economic sector, and social class in seeking to challenge the status quo authoritarian order.

Central to this hypothesis is the notion that the degree of centralization in an authoritarian state's structure plays a critical role in shaping the pattern of protest that emerges within a given national context. This idea is not new but has rather distinguished historical roots. As noted by Tocqueville (1856/1955) over 150 years ago, the extraordinary centralization of successive governments proved critical in bringing about the revolutionary upheavals that shook France during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Most qualified observers, so far as I can judge, concur in the opinion that chief among the reasons for the collapse of all the various governments that have arisen in France during the past forty years are the administrative centralization and the absolute predominance of Paris (Alexis de Tocqueville 1856/1955, 76).

In his view, the “administrative centralization” and “absolute predominance” of the center in French states seemed to simultaneously expand the reach and power of the regime while also making it increasingly vulnerable to popular challenges from below (76–77). In the eyes of Tocqueville, under the Old Regime, the centralization of the French state had progressed dramatically and was only sustained by subsequent leaderships. This concentration of power in Paris vis-à-vis the regions had progressed so far that local officials reported, “Nothing could be done without consulting the central authority, which had decided views on everything” (46). The state, in other words, was transformed from a multilevel entity that delegated power, decision-making, and discretionary use of public funds to traditional local aristocratic power brokers. In its place was a centralized structure in which the center assumed responsibility over the smallest of government decisions.

This kind of expansive bureaucratic state was capable of exerting political control across extended national territories. According to leading social scientists, the appearance of this new form of political organization was a watershed moment in human history. Weber (1922/1978) wrote that this kind of bureaucratic state, “from a purely technical point of view, [was] capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense, [was] formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings” (223). This kind of state power was clearly unmatched by any other existing mode of political organization. Critical theorist, Immanuel Wallerstein, went so far as to argue that these “strong state mechanisms,” more than any other particular advantage, were instrumental in enabling the nations of northwest Europe to establish their predominance over the global system by the Seventeenth century (1979, p. 18). However, by consolidating its power over local actors and a growing body of public activities, the national state began to present itself as a single target that served to unify previously fragmented collective actions into single, sustained social movements.

Later scholars of contentious politics have argued that the appearance of this novel form of political organization—the modern nation-state—has been intimately linked to the appearance of nationwide movements of popular contention. According to Tarrow (1994):

As the activities of national states expanded and penetrated society, they also caused the targets of collective action to shift from private and local actors to national centers of decision-making. The national state not only centralized the targets of collective action; it involuntarily provided a fulcrum for...standard forms of collective action (Tarrow 1994, 72).

Instead of taking parochial actions that were restricted to local targets, involved limited actions, and were carried out by specific social groups, contentious repertoires evolved into genuine social movements (Tarrow 1994, 6; Tilly 1993a, 272). These collective actions involved interests and issues that were “national” in scope. Forms of protests were “modular” or could be applied in the same form by different groups, interests, and in different contexts. They were also “autonomous” actions that were initiated by independent groups without direction from central authorities or activists (Tilly 1993a, p. 272). Thus, the birth of the modern national state created a political paradox. While this mode of political organization provided

the machinery, a single absolute ruler needed to assert control over large populations and expansive territories, it also enabled the appearance of the modern social movement—a vehicle that average citizens could use to check state power and assert their own individual political and economic rights.

As suggested in the writing of Landry (2008) and Schedler (2009a), the institutional structure of authoritarian states has not been uniform. While the national leadership of a non-democratic state holds ultimate power, central principals can and do, in the interest of economic performance or government effectiveness, relax their direct control over local agents and grant them a significant measure of authority over local budgets and the implementation of policies and directives issued from the center. In this work, I hypothesize that the granting of a large degree of autonomy to local agents fundamentally changes the way in which claimants can use the state as a fulcrum and target of popular contention. More specifically, I expect that all else being equal, in highly centralized states, authoritarian regimes are more likely to experience vertical challenges from highly organized, national scale popular protest movements than their more decentralized counterparts.

Based on the observation that the state often serves as a “target” and “fulcrum” of collective action (Tarrow 1994, 72), the revelation that modern authoritarian cases might be disaggregated into centralized and decentralized types is a critically important consideration. States with differently shaped institutional structures may serve as targets and fulcrums that are more or less amenable to the outbreak of sustained, nationwide movements of collective action. The institutional makeup of autocratic states, which I am categorizing in terms of regime type and state centralization, might well alter what students of contentious politics labeled as “structures of political opportunities” (Eisinger 1973, pp. 1, 25). In more recent formulations, these political opportunity structures have been expanded to incorporate not only opportunities, the “probability that social protest actions will lead to success in achieving a desired outcome” but also threats, the “costs that a social group will incur from protest, or it expect[ed] to suffer if it [did] not take action” (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, pp. 182–183). In considering non-democracies, where the individual rights of assembly and expression are severely limited, realizing how threats may motivate action is particularly important. The balance between the threats and opportunities presented by a given context dictates whether or not a social group will calculate that it is worth incurring the potential costs of protesting and the likelihood that any action will achieve its desired goals. By changing the shape of the state through decentralization, an autocratic regime can presumably alter the balance of threats and opportunities citizens perceive when they consider organizing or participating in collective actions. This in turn may encourage the appearance of particular modes of protest while dissuading the development of others.

In the case of the Old Regime in France, Tocqueville (1856/1955) found that the extraordinary level of state centralization was closely linked to its collapse and those of subsequent governments. This logic of this pattern was repeated in the experience of 1989–1991, when popular protest movements rapidly mobilized

and rallied against tightly centralized communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, ultimately bringing these systems to collapse. In such systems, where central authorities established near total control over national and local-level politics, society and the economy, the central state could reasonably be blamed for any number of specific grievances. As a result, when perceived opportunities for contention appeared previously disparate and quiescent societies could rapidly rise up in movement and bring down seemingly impregnable regimes.

More recently, regional scholars in China have found evidence to support the notion that popular mobilization may take place in a fundamentally different way in national settings where the state is highly decentralized. Based on observations of protests in the country, the state's decentralized structure appears to present particular sets of threats and opportunities that encourage claimants to engage in limited forms of collective action aimed at specific, local or socialsector-specific targets. This mode of particularized protest is clearly much more manageable than nationwide protest movements. Aside from the domestic turmoil associated with the events at Tiananmen in 1989, China has not seen the kind of sustained popular challenges that have helped bring down regimes elsewhere in the communist bloc during the late-1980s and in third wave transitions such as the Philippines or Taiwan.

In the contemporary PRC, protest actions have been frequent and often highly contentious, increasing in number from 10,000 "mass incidents" in 1994 to 87,000 in 2005 (Kahn 2005). They are, however, typically limited to specific groups of claimants, such as state-owned enterprise (SOE) factory workers, taxi drivers, rural farmers, or urban homeowners. Moreover, as noted by Lee (2007), protest actions, with special reference made to labor activism in her research, are typically highly fragmented, restricted to particular localities and work units (913). Collective actions only infrequently extend beyond factory divisions or geographic areas. In those cases, in which the protest actions have broken out of localities and been replicated elsewhere, they have not diffused to other social sectors or transformed into genuine national social movements. Social movements, defined by Tarrow (1994) as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (4) have effectively been absent from China's social landscape. Thus, while the decentralized structure of the Chinese state has certainly not precluded widespread protest altogether, it has encouraged existing protest patterns to emerge in localized, particularized, and more manageable forms that pose less of an existential threat to the party-state.

In addition to denying local claimants a unifying target, a decentralized structure seems to advantage the state vis-à-vis popular claimants in five additional ways. First, as noted by Cai (2008a), by granting local officials greater authority within their jurisdiction, the center avoids blame for local authorities' official misdeeds and their use of repression (415). This reality grants the center a degree of plausible deniability when acts of state violence occur at the local level—helping the national state preserve its legitimacy even when coercion is used against protestors. According to O'Brien and Li (2006), protestors typically direct their

anger against local officials but hold remarkably higher levels of trust and loyalty towards the center (42, 43). In the view of many claimants, the center has good policies and intentions but is unaware of the incompetence or cruelty of local cadres or is simply unable to control them (43). Citizens thus might perceive that their problems are specific to their region or a particular local cadre, not the entire system or regime. This discourages them from framing their challenges in anti-systemic terms and broadening their claims to be inclusive of other claimants.

Secondly, by having “conditional autonomy” to deal with popular challengers, local officials have wide discretion to deal with protests but understand that they will be disciplined by the center if they extend too many concessions or apply excessive repression (Cai 2008a, p. 415). Being too generous in terms of granting concessions to claimants can reduce public funds as well as make the state appear weak in the face of popular contention, thus encouraging subsequent challenges. Applying excessive or poorly targeted repression that affects groups or individuals not directly involved in contention can encourage outside parties to sympathize with or actively join the initial claimants, widening the scope of protests. A local cadre who over or underplays his/her hand is likely to be sanctioned by the center or removed from office. This state-of-affairs encourages local officials to address protest through methods that minimize political cost and are less likely to prompt intervention from the center. Because they are left entirely responsible for managing unrest, cadres’ professional advancement is dependent upon them being extraordinarily vigilant about developments in their jurisdiction, finding effective ways to deter protests from taking place and dealing with them quietly and efficiently if they do break out.

Thirdly, the decentralized structure of the state reduces the number of incidents that the center will have to deal with directly (Cai 2008a, p. 415). In most cases, the center can ignore popular challenges, allowing local cadres to resolve them alone. This reduces the frequency of times it will need to strike the careful balance between repression and concessions, minimizing the risk of under or overreacting to challenges. By delegating authority to local cadres, the center leaves them with the burden of selecting the appropriate course of action. If they fail to act appropriately, the center can intervene and place personal blame upon the individual cadre and punish him/her.

Fourth, a decentralized structure also compels local officials to first attempt to deal with collective actions through their own initiative before the center will intervene. This gives the center more time to carefully inspect the situation and plan its strategy accordingly (Cai 2008a, pp. 415–416). By delegating power to local officials, the center politically distances itself as a target of protest. Since it leaves local authorities with the responsibility to deal with protests firsthand, the center can then intervene as an outside, third-party player if collective actions spiral beyond the control of local cadres. The center is thus able to intervene more accurately and appropriately, having learned from the failures of the local leader.

Finally, as noted by O’Brien and Li (2006), gaps between the center and local authorities in the Chinese state provide a “structural opening” that local claimants can capitalize upon in launching collective actions aimed at addressing their

grievances (27). By framing their protests against local cadres as defending the laws and regulations promulgated by the center, these “rightful resisters” can seek allies within the state or in the wider public, such as media outlets, and avoid the accusation that they are anti-state or unpatriotic (2, 3). However, by framing their contention in such a way, claimants develop repertoires of contention and bases of support that are conducive to local and particularized but not national, anti-system modes of action. As noted by Tilly and Tarrow (2007), effective social movement campaigns require a “social movement base.” This refers to “movement organizations, networks, participants, and the accumulated cultural artifacts, memories, and traditions that contribute to social movement campaigns” (114). In a decentralized state structure, where localized acts of contention often prove effective and more broadly coordinated efforts are extraordinarily risky to the participants involved, claimants tend to construct bases oriented around particular and specific, not national and inclusive, concerns.

Moreover, if the trend of rightful resistance travels outside of China into other decentralized states, claimants may couch their claims within official rhetoric rather than forging a “counterhegemonic” discourse or set of institutions that might sustain a concerted challenge to the state (Gramsci 1971, 229-231). This would result in a pattern of limited mobilization in which claimants may challenge particular aspects of the state structure but do not repeatedly coordinate their actions with other aggrieved segments of society or develop a frame of collective action aimed at fundamentally challenging the state or demanding it undergo significant political reform. As noted by Scott (1985), even “everyday forms of resistance” can have an important corrosive impact on a regime. However, as reflected in the sudden collapse of autocracies, such as the Pahlavi Dynasty in Iran in 1979, the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986, and in a large number of communist regimes in the late-1980s, rapid and sustained social mobilization on a nationwide scale has often proven critical in overloading the coercive capabilities of powerful regimes and bring about systemic change. Authoritarian regimes facing localized and limited forms of resistance, on the other hand, could persist in maintaining their monopoly on political power for decades. The decentralized state, in short, provides a structural opening amenable to localized and particularized protests while simultaneously closing opportunities to mobilize on a wider and more coordinated scale.

For these reasons, I hypothesize that a decentralized authoritarian state offers an arrangement of threats and opportunities that tends to encourage the development of particularized modes of protest rather than sustained, highly coordinated social movements. In a decentralized state, local officials assume the central place in determining whether or not individual actions of contention will succeed in achieving their desired goals. As a result, they become the direct targets of most protests aimed at the state and the primary mediators of actions directed at third party, non-state actors. Therefore, a decentralized state presents not one, but a multitude of loci for protests, diminishing claimants’ ability to use the central state as a unifying target and fulcrum around which they can organize national movements. Instead of framing their grievances on a national scope or in a fashion

that transcends sectors of society, protest entrepreneurs tend to orient themselves around local or social sector-specific claims, resulting in uncoordinated and sporadic collective actions. According to this logic, highly centralized state structures may serve as intervening variables that facilitate the emergence of nationwide waves of social mobilization when popular claimants perceive a political opportunity. On the other hand, a decentralized structure would inhibit the development of nationwide protest movements and encourage acts of contention to center on local or social sector-specific issues and appear as highly fragmented waves of protest. Ultimately, this would have the effect of increasing the durability of autocratic regimes.

Authoritarian Landscapes

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Resilience in Nondemocracies

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2013, X, 244 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-6536-2