

Understanding Emigration Policy Variation in Authoritarian Regimes: How Pillars of Stability and Regime Type Shape Authoritarian Exit Controls

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Abstract

Why do some authoritarian regimes restrict the exit of their citizens while others do not? Drawing on a comprehensive quantitative analysis of authoritarian regimes from 1946–2010, I argue that this variation in authoritarian emigration policy can be systematically shaped by regime type and stability mechanisms. Employing Gerschewski’s three pillars of authoritarian stability—repression, legitimization, and co-optation as a theoretical framework, I investigate how reliance on each pillar can influence the permissiveness or restrictiveness of authoritarian emigration policy. Additionally, I analyse whether personalist regimes implement more restrictive emigration controls than non-personalist authoritarian regimes. The findings reveal significant patterns: regimes that heavily rely on repression systematically implement more restrictive emigration policies, while those emphasising co-optation tend to adopt more permissive approaches. The analysis also suggests that legitimization may have more complex, non-linear implications for emigration policies than hypothesised, warranting further investigation. Meanwhile, when operationalised through measure of power concentration in a single leader, personalist regimes demonstrate a strong tendency toward restrictive emigration policies. To examine these statistical relationships and explore possible causal mechanisms, I also present diverse illustrative cases of the Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Singapore, and North Korea. These cases provide contextual evidence supporting the quantitative findings while illuminating the strategic calculations that shape authoritarian emigration policies across different regional and historical contexts. Overall, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how authoritarian regimes vary in their control over citizens’ freedom of movement and how deeper structural and institutional features shape such variation.

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List of Abbreviations

BLA	Bilateral Labour Agreements
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DEMIG	Determinants of International Migration
FE	Fixed Effects
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, transl. Mozambique Liberation Front
GDP	Gross domestic product
GWF	Geddes, Wright and Frantz
ILO	International Labour Organisation
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
PAP	People's Action Party
POEA	Philippine Overseas Employment Administration
RoW	Regimes of the World
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Conceptual Background

At the time of writing, an astonishing 71% of the global population resides in non-democratic countries, according to the V-Dem Institute's 2024 report (Nord et al., 2024). This widespread prevalence of authoritarianism reflects a significant global trend, with more countries adopting and solidifying authoritarian practices, deepened through an intensification of democratic backsliding and deconsolidation (Cooley, 2015; Frantz, 2018a; Svobik, 2008; Yuen & Lee, 2025). Contemporary authoritarianism presents a unique and formidable challenge due to its heterogeneous and multifaceted nature (Candeias, 2019), as authoritarian regimes have proven to be highly adaptable, incorporating a sophisticated mix of coercion, co-optation, and legitimation to sustain their rule (Frantz, 2018a; Gerschewski, 2013).

Over the past 18 years, there has been a continuous decline in democratic governance with an increase in democratic backsliding (Gorokhovskaia & Grothe, 2024), where once-democratic states are gradually eroding democratic norms and institutions, leading to the consolidation of authoritarian practices. This process is not always marked by dramatic coups or overt suppression; more often, it unfolds through subtle manipulations—controlling the press, weakening judicial independence, and tilting electoral systems in favour of the ruling elite. As authoritarian rule adapts and the nature of democratic breakdown changes, it presents a significant challenge to human rights, democratic values, and global stability.

One of the most fundamental human rights authoritarian regimes undermine is freedom of movement—specifically, the right to leave one's country. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enshrines this in Article 13(2): "*Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country*" (United Nations, 1948, para. 25). However, authoritarian regimes often strategically undermine this freedom as part of their broader consolidation efforts. Rather than simply violating rights arbitrarily, their emigration policies reflect calculated political choices, varying substantially across non-democratic regimes. Some authoritarian regimes enforce stringent exit restrictions, perceiving free movement as a risk to their stability, whereas others strategically encourage or manipulate emigration flows to neutralise political opposition, manage economic pressures, or gain legitimacy internationally. Thus, examining variations in how authoritarian regimes regulate citizens' freedom of movement provides critical insights into their methods for securing power, maintaining control, and suppressing dissent.

Authoritarianism manifests globally in various forms. For instance, Putin's war against Ukraine starkly illustrates the potential consequences of unchecked personalist rule and institutional degradation (Klimovich, 2023). There is Kim Jong Un, the North Korean leader, who stages mass military parades in Pyongyang showcasing ballistic missiles that threaten nuclear war (Smith & Yim, 2023). However, we also have more subtle authoritarianism, such as in Singapore, where elections occur regularly but are always won by the same party. Less subtle examples of electoral authoritarianism include Nicaragua and Tanzania, where elections are marked by fraud, manipulation and violent intimidation. There are also monarchic authoritarian regimes such as Jordan and Qatar with legislations and elections, while the Islamic Republic of Iran exemplifies a regime that blends democratic elements with theocracy (Akbarzadeh & Saba, 2023). Hence, contemporary authoritarianism can take multiple forms, many of which do not rely on overt repression but instead operate through more subtle control mechanisms. Authoritarian regimes have become increasingly adept at manipulating or circumventing norms and institutions designed to safeguard fundamental freedoms (Frantz, 2018a).

Just as the structures of authoritarian rule vary and have varied in form across time, so too do the methods they employ to regulate emigration. Throughout history, authoritarian regimes have viewed emigration as both a risk and an opportunity. Some regimes impose severe restrictions, fearing an exodus of citizens could weaken their control. One of the most well-known examples is from the Cold War-era when East Germany criminalised emigration and, in 1961, built the Berlin Wall to prevent mass defections (World History Commons, 1989). Today, North Korea continues its draconian policies, enforcing a "shoot to kill" order at its borders, with documented cases of families being executed for attempting to cross into China as recently as 2022 (United States Department of State, 2022).

Yet not all authoritarian regimes restrict emigration—some actively promote it for political and economic gains. In Nasserite Egypt (1954–1970), the government encouraged the emigration of skilled workers to spread Pan-Arab ideology (Tsourapas, 2018). Even during Japan's Meiji era (1868–1912), emigration was encouraged to support economic expansion (Tsuchida, 1998). China today strategically facilitates emigration, using targeted policies and outreach programmes to leverage its global diaspora for economic and soft power gains (Tan et al., 2021).

In other cases, authoritarian regimes have used forced emigration as a tool of repression. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the new regime forced thousands of political opponents and intellectuals into exile (Michaelsen, 2018). Similarly, during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, Fidel Castro's government expelled political dissidents and prisoners, forcing over 125,000 Cubans to migrate to the United States (Stephens, 2021). Under the Bracero Program (1942–1964), the Mexican Government

selectively issued emigration visas to regions with strong opposition, using it as a means of political control (Peters & Miller, 2022).

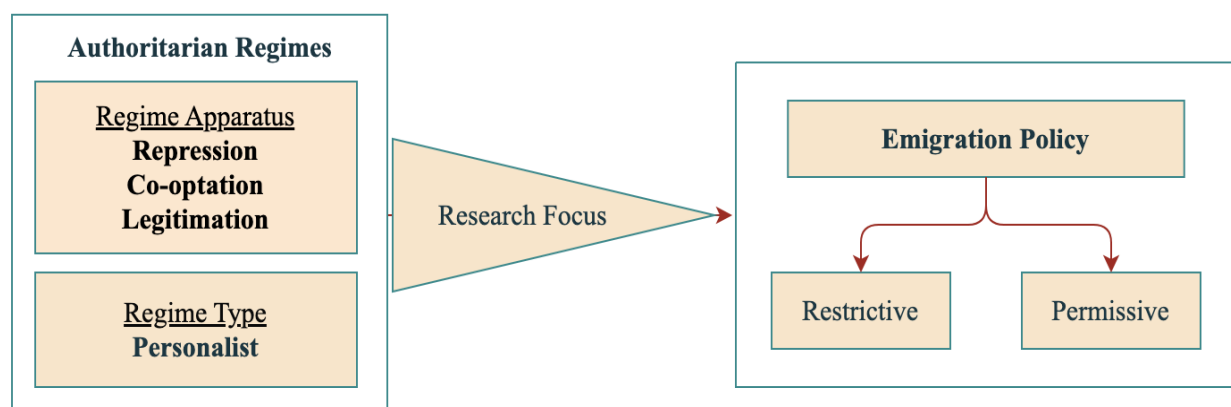
These striking differences in emigration policies among authoritarian regimes raise fundamental questions: What determines whether an authoritarian regime tightly restricts emigration or facilitates it? How do political legitimacy, elite loyalty, and coercion shape these policies? Why do authoritarian regimes diverge so sharply in their approach to controlling who stays and who leaves?

This study seeks to unravel these questions through a large-N quantitative study by examining:

- How emigration policies function as a tool of authoritarian resilience, shaping regime stability through legitimization, elite co-optation, and repression, and
- How the type of authoritarian regimes, particularly personalist authoritarian regimes, influence the nature of emigration policy

Therefore, this research aims to examine the influence of specific mechanisms of authoritarian regimes—namely, the pillars of authoritarian stability, which include **repression**, **co-optation**, and **legitimation**, and the type of regime, specifically, **personalist** versus non-personalist, on **emigration policy**. In this context, the dependent variable is emigration policy, while the independent variables comprise the aforementioned pillars of stability and the personalist regime type. The potential relationship between these variables is explored through a quantitative analysis using country-year panel data from 1946–2010. The analysis aims to elucidate how these factors interact to shape the emigration policies of authoritarian regimes (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Key causal relationships.



Definitions

To establish foundational definitions for this research, I begin with the two key concepts at the centre of this research¹: authoritarian regime and emigration policies. For their definitions, I prioritised simplicity and inclusiveness, selecting specific definitions that succinctly capture the fundamental characteristics and dynamics of these concepts.

To define an authoritarian regime, I follow the operational definition used by Frantz (2018a), where:

a regime is authoritarian if the executive achieved power through undemocratic means (...) or if the executive achieved power via free and fair elections but later changed the rules such that subsequent electoral competition (whether legislative or executive) was limited. (p. 6)

Therefore, an authoritarian regime is characterised by a government where the leader gains power through undemocratic methods or if elected democratically, subsequently alters the rules to limit future electoral competition, thereby reducing democratic processes.

For defining emigration policies, I use the definition provided by De Haas and Vezzoli (2011):

Emigration policies can be defined as laws, rules, measures, and practices implemented by national states with the objective to influence the volume, origin, destination, and internal composition of emigration flows. (p. 6)

Essentially, this means that emigration policies are the strategies governments employ to control who leaves the country, where they go, and the characteristics of those who emigrate.

The Puzzle

The diversity of emigration policies among authoritarian regimes is a curious paradox since it *appears* counterintuitive for these regimes to permit an escape route that could diminish their grip on power, as it grants a degree of “freedom” to those who leave the country. The rationale behind citizens exiting a country has often been explained through the application of Hirschman’s (1970) conceptual framework for social analysis, known as *Exit and Voice* (Burgess, 2012; Fomina, 2021; Gel’man, 2010a; Michaelsen, 2018). Hirschman’s framework has been predominantly employed to understand how citizens respond to dissatisfaction with their government. According to Hirschman, “exit” refers to the act of leaving or emigrating as a response to dissatisfaction, while “voice” involves expressing discontent and seeking to improve conditions from within. In his later works, Hirschman (1993) further elaborates that emigration serves as a form of exit, thereby reducing citizens’ incentives to express their dissatisfaction with the regime through voice. This dynamic can be particularly relevant

¹ Definitions of repression, co-optation, legitimisation and personalist regime type are included in the Operationalisation of Variables section in Chapter 5.

in the context of authoritarian regimes, where the avenues for expressing dissent are often severely restricted. Emigration then becomes a safety valve that allows discontented citizens to leave rather than challenge the regime, thereby reducing internal pressure for political change.

Therefore, certain regimes may actively incentivise emigration as a strategic tool to manage domestic issues such as unemployment, poverty, and the government's inability to provide adequate social welfare. By encouraging the emigration of discontented or economically burdensome segments of the population, these regimes can alleviate social and economic pressures without undertaking significant policy reforms. A notable example of this approach was employed in Mussolini's Italy, where the regime utilised emigration as a tool for addressing domestic economic pressures. During the interwar period, Italy faced significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates and limited social welfare programmes. In response, Mussolini's government implemented policies to encourage emigration as a means of alleviating these pressures. One key aspect of Mussolini's approach was the promotion of emigration as a patriotic duty. Emigrants were portrayed as ambassadors of Italian culture and were encouraged to send remittances back to Italy to support the economy. This narrative helped to justify emigration as a positive contribution to the nation rather than a loss of manpower. His government also implemented measures to facilitate emigration, such as providing financial incentives and assistance with travel arrangements. In this case, emigration was used as a means to reduce unemployment and poverty at home (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011; Stahle, 2016). The flow of remittances from emigrants served to mitigate economic hardships, thereby reducing the likelihood of social unrest among the recipients of such income. This phenomenon has also been seen in countries such as Mexico and Haiti, where the opening of emigration channels to the United States has been observed to have delayed political changes by alleviating economic pressures that might otherwise have motivated citizens to engage in activism or protests (Docquier et al., 2014).

Authoritarian regimes also have a long history of using emigration as a safety valve to purge the country of political opponents, a strategy exemplified by the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in 1977. Under President Idi Amin's regime, this mass expulsion was a calculated move to consolidate power and suppress dissent. Facing significant domestic political challenges, Amin targeted the South Asian community, which held a prominent role in Uganda's economy and society. By expelling South Asians—many of whom were perceived as politically influential or economically powerful, Amin aimed to eliminate potential sources of opposition. The expulsion was framed as part of an "Africanisation" policy, ostensibly intended to redistribute wealth and power to Ugandan citizens. This manoeuvre allowed the regime to cultivate a more homogenous and loyal population by removing those who might dissent (Amor, 2003).

However, when authoritarian regimes allow their citizens greater freedom to travel abroad, empirical evidence suggests that such exposure can lead to increased civil rights awareness and greater

opportunities for citizens to contest the regime's authority through dissent, activism, or demands for reform (Alemán & Woods, 2014). Emigration can also empower individuals to express their dissent more freely, as they are no longer under the direct repression of the authoritarian regime and may benefit from the greater freedoms of expression and assembly in the destination country (Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025). For example, exiled dissidents often become vocal critics of their home governments and can raise international awareness of human rights abuses. This was seen with the Iranian diaspora following the 1979 revolution, where many Iranians abroad actively criticised the regime and advocated for democracy. Iranian student groups in the United States and Europe played a crucial role in raising awareness about human rights abuses in Iran, lobbying for international pressure against the regime, and advocating for democratic reforms. The global network of Iranian exiles has continued to be influential through their support for democracy and human rights in Iran, exemplifying how emigration can empower individuals to challenge authoritarian regimes from abroad (Michaelsen, 2017).

Moreover, emigration can expose individuals to democratic values and practices, potentially fostering democratic ideals in their home countries upon their return. Cross-country studies by Chauvet and Mercier (2014) and Spilimbergo (2009) demonstrate that emigration to democratic countries and education in such countries can significantly reduce support for authoritarian or communist parties and promote democratic reforms at home. An illustrative case of emigration promoting democracy is seen in the Philippines' People Power Revolution of 1986. During President Ferdinand Marcos's authoritarian rule, many Filipinos emigrated to the United States and Canada, where they were exposed to democratic values and political freedoms. Upon returning to the Philippines, these expatriates applied their experiences to mobilise mass protests, organise community groups, and challenge the regime's censorship through independent media, such as the influential "Mosquito Press". The revolution ultimately led to the peaceful ousting of President Marcos, demonstrating the profound impact that exposure to democratic values and practices abroad can have on fostering political change in authoritarian contexts (Kessler & Rother, 2016).

Additionally, mass emigration or "brain drain" can lead to significant labour shortages and impede economic growth, thereby destabilising authoritarian regimes. The loss of skilled workers and professionals creates critical gaps in essential sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology. This depletion of human capital undermines the regime's ability to sustain economic stability and provide necessary services to the population (Horz & Marbach, 2022; Skeldon, 2005). For instance, a substantial exodus of skilled professionals occurred during Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe. Doctors, teachers, engineers, and other highly educated individuals left the country in search of better opportunities abroad. The healthcare sector suffered from a severe shortage of medical professionals, leading to deteriorating health outcomes and a crisis in public health infrastructure. The economic

decline precipitated by this loss of skilled labour increased pressure on Mugabe's regime. As the economy faltered, public dissatisfaction grew, and the regime faced mounting domestic and international opposition. The brain drain not only weakened the country's economic foundation but also eroded the regime's legitimacy as it struggled to meet the basic needs of its citizens (Crush & Tevera, 2010). Hence, the loss of skilled professionals can pose a serious challenge to the regime, as it exacerbates economic decline and contributes to increasing political instability, ultimately challenging the sustainability of that authoritarian rule.

Therefore, authoritarian regimes remain in this illiberal paradox: on the one hand, emigration brings economic benefits and allows those dissatisfied with the regime to exit or be expelled, enabling the regime to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, it may bring democratic ideas to the home country from returning migrants and allow emigrants to express political opposition and expose regime atrocities from destination countries or contribute to economic decline destabilising the regime. This illiberal paradox also raises important questions about the capacity of authoritarian regimes to regulate emigration effectively. Authoritarian regimes differ significantly in the strength and sophistication of their security apparatuses, and restrictive emigration policies might actually destabilise some regimes (Miller & Peters, 2020). For instance, oil-rich authoritarian regimes in the Arab world possess substantially stronger security apparatuses compared to their oil-poor counterparts. The influx of oil wealth enables these regimes to bolster their coercive capabilities by significantly increasing spending on police and military forces. This enhanced security apparatus is pivotal in maintaining the regime's control, as it allows for the suppression of dissent through force and coercion. In contrast, oil-poor authoritarian regimes lack the financial resources necessary to invest heavily in their security infrastructure (Bellin, 2012; Wright et al., 2015). Consequently, these regimes often adopt different strategies to manage internal stability. One such strategy is to encourage emigration. By promoting the departure of citizens, these regimes aim to alleviate pressure on the domestic labour market and mitigate the potential for domestic unrest. Also, labour emigration generates remittances, which provide an essential source of foreign currency and economic support that the regime can rely upon (Roman, 2006).

For authoritarian regimes with the resources to restrict emigration, imposing such restrictions comes with its own set of costs and challenges. One significant drawback is that restricting cross-border mobility denies citizens access to the benefits associated with emigration, such as the development of skilled citizens. Restricting emigration limits access to education opportunities available in other countries, potentially hindering the development of a skilled workforce and innovative ideas within the country. Secondly, restricting emigration limits capital mobility as regimes deny themselves access to financial inflows, which can be vital for economic development and stability (Lu et al., 2013). Additionally, restricting emigration can prevent the diffusion of ideologies through regime

loyalists living abroad. Emigrants who remain loyal to the regime can serve as advocates and influencers in their host countries, promoting the regime's interests and ideologies (Yabanci, 2021). This can be particularly valuable in shaping international perceptions and garnering support for the regime's policies.

Conversely, less economically developed authoritarian regimes may express a desire to encourage emigration as a means to relieve domestic pressures, yet they often face significant obstacles in facilitating this process due to their limited resources. The financial burden associated with emigration is a major deterrent for many citizens, as the costs can be prohibitive. Expenses such as travel, visa applications, and settlement fees in the destination country are substantial barriers many individuals cannot overcome. Moreover, the state itself may struggle to support emigration initiatives. These regimes often lack the financial and administrative capacity to implement comprehensive emigration programmes or to offer necessary services to potential emigrants, such as financial assistance, legal advice, or language training (Lee, 2017). As a result, despite their intentions to promote emigration to alleviate economic and social pressures at home, such countries experience low emigration rates. This gap between a state's policy aspirations and its practical capabilities underscores a critical challenge—the capacity to implement effective emigration policies is often constrained by economic limitations and a lack of institutional support (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011).

In summary, emigration in authoritarian regimes is a strategic dilemma—both a potential liability and an instrument of control. While regimes may use emigration as a tool to alleviate domestic pressures and expel political opponents, they must also navigate the potentially destabilising effects of increased freedom of movement. Emigration can lead to economic benefits through remittances and reduced unemployment but also pose significant challenges by enabling the spread of democratic ideals and the loss of skilled labour. This paradox forces authoritarian regimes to balance their emigration policies carefully, often tailoring them to maintain control and stability. Additionally, multiple factors related to the strength of the regime, such as its security apparatus, also determine the capacity of regimes to regulate emigration. This is the central question this research seeks to address—understanding how the structures and stability of regimes influence the variation in their emigration policies.

Study Contributions

Sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1977), one of the key scholars of migration studies, famously noted that every immigrant is initially an emigrant, yet studies on migration have primarily focused on the context of immigration, disproportionately neglecting emigration. Migration research has predominantly concentrated on immigration, particularly within the Global North, where large-scale inflows of immigrants spur robust scholarly and policy-oriented inquiries. As a result, immigration

policy garners considerable attention, while emigration—especially from less spotlighted countries, receives comparatively scant investigation (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Horz & Marbach, 2022; Natter, 2018; Pedroza & Palop-García, 2025; Solano & Huddleston, 2021). This focus creates a notable gap in the literature, one that this research seeks to address by foregrounding the underexamined phenomenon of emigration. In doing so, it not only provides a more balanced view of global migration dynamics but also makes a substantive contribution to our understanding of the broader migratory landscape.

Even when emigration is studied, it is frequently analysed through an economic lens, often in the context of labour migration from lower-income countries.² Hence, the political dimensions of emigration policy remain comparatively underexplored. Existing research (e.g., Anderson, 2021; Lenard & Straehle, 2012; Shin, 2017; Solomon, 2009) that does engage with the political sphere tends to focus on the role of remittances in shaping political change rather than the political determinants of emigration policy formation. This research aims to move beyond economic considerations to examine the political mechanisms that shape emigration policies, offering a more nuanced understanding of emigration control. Additionally, situating emigration policy within the broader framework of comparative politics contributes to discussions on authoritarian resilience and citizen mobility, bridging a critical gap in the literature.

While authoritarianism has been extensively studied over recent decades, research on mobility within authoritarian contexts remains limited. While research such as Alemán and Woods (2014) explored the destabilising effects of international travel on authoritarian regimes, it did not examine how regimes' own strategies for maintaining stability influence emigration policy. In other words, the causal direction of interest in their work is the inverse of the one pursued here. Additionally, the small research landscape on authoritarian emigration is mostly from state-diaspora and extraterritorial perspectives, such as the works of Glasius (2018a), Tsourapas (2020) and Dalmasso et al. (2018) that focus on how authoritarian states engage with their diasporas and extend their control beyond national borders. However, these studies focus on policies *after* emigration and often do not specifically address the policies that regimes implement to decide who can leave the country, under what conditions, and the broader implications of the regime's characteristics on those policies. This research not only shifts the focus from diaspora policies to emigration policies in an authoritarian context but also sheds light on what impacts authoritarian emigration regulations.

This research is also situated in the growing family of studies that uses V-Dem data to examine the intersection of authoritarian regime characteristics and various policy areas. Scholars have employed V-Dem indicators to examine how authoritarian dynamics interact with a range of policy areas, such

² See studies such as Asch (1994) and Taylor (2004).

as media regulation (Sato & Wiebrecht, 2024), variations in economic reforms (Knutsen, 2021), academic freedom control and authoritarian onset (Pelke, 2023), corruption and authoritarian legislations (Wiebrecht, 2024), authoritarian collaboration and internet regulation (Garbe et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate how regime characteristics and mechanisms translate into tangible policy outcomes beyond survival alone. By extending this approach to the domain of emigration policy, this research contributes to this established literature, positioning itself among studies that link authoritarian regime variation to the design and implementation of diverse policy arenas. This research also contributes to the existing scholarship by Tsourapas (2018, 2021) and Glasius (2018a), which connects the pillars of authoritarian stability to the politics of migration. Whereas their work explores the role of diasporas and transnational dynamics, this study focuses on the politics of emigration, shedding light on how authoritarian regimes regulate mobility prior to exit.

Additionally, this research primarily adopts a large-N quantitative design, spanning the years 1946–2010, thereby offering a broad historical perspective that captures both variation across different authoritarian regime types and within-country changes over time, enabling systematic analysis of how emigration policies evolve under different configurations of authoritarian rule. Traditionally, research on emigration in the context of authoritarianism has been largely country-specific, emphasising domestic economic and cultural factors to explain national policies and laws governing migration (Shachar, 2022). Studies on specific countries or regions, such as Egypt (Tsourapas, 2018), Latin America (Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025), the German Democratic Republic (Lueders, 2021), and Tunisia (Natter, 2022) provide insights into the emigration policies and practices of authoritarian countries. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research systematically examining how different authoritarian regimes vary in their willingness to allow their citizens to travel abroad. Moreover, by examining regime apparatus and typology in relation to emigration policies within a large-N comparative framework, this research yields substantial insights into mechanisms of authoritarian durability through identified patterns across diverse geopolitical contexts and temporal periods.

This research also leverages a novel combination of two extensive and detailed datasets: the Geddes, Wright and Frantz (GWF) Authoritarian Breakdown and Regime Transition dataset (2014) and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database (version 14) (Coppedge et al., 2024a). This integration holds significant potential to provide new insights into authoritarian survival. The GWF dataset is an award-winning dataset that systematically classifies regimes based on their political structures and leadership dynamics and provides data on all independent authoritarian countries from 1946–2010. The V-Dem database, on the other hand, offers a nuanced and detailed measurement of democracy and its various components across 202 countries from 1789 to the present with indicators on regime type, civil liberties, and political institutions, including freedom of foreign movement, that can be

used to operationalise emigration policy. By combining data from GWF and V-Dem, this study uniquely examines the intersection of emigration policy and authoritarian stability. Additionally, I employ illustrative cases from diverse geopolitical contexts and time periods to support my findings by showing what statistically significant relationships might “look like” in the real world. These include the Dominican Republic in the totalitarian paradigm of the 1940s to 1970s, post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, and other diverse cases of Mozambique, Singapore and North Korea, offering a broader examination of how emigration policies function across varying authoritarian regimes.

Lastly, this research broadens the scope of literature on emigration and authoritarianism and informs broader discussions on migration and human rights. The findings will have implications for scholars of comparative politics and international organisations and policymakers engaged in promoting freedom of movement and addressing the challenges posed by authoritarian regimes on global migration patterns. Therefore, this study represents a significant contribution to academic scholarship and practical policymaking in authoritarian governance and emigration.

Study Limitations

The primary limitations of this study arise from the scarcity of comprehensive research on emigration policy, which has resulted in a lack of systematically collected emigration policy data. This constraint will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters. A key challenge is the reliance on the V-Dem database to operationalise emigration policy. While V-Dem offers extensive coverage and detailed coding of freedom of foreign movement, its relevant variable captures only the restrictiveness or permissiveness of emigration, where factors such as prohibitively high passport costs, selective exit controls, or state-sponsored emigration programmes cannot be systematically compared. This limitation underscores the need for further data development in the study of emigration policy.

Additionally, the GWF dataset is only available until 2010, imposing temporal constraints on this study. As a result, recent developments in emigration policies and shifts in the political landscape of authoritarian regimes remain beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this timeframe does offer a crucial advantage—it allows for a comparative analysis of pre- and post-Cold War dynamics, capturing how authoritarian regimes adapted their emigration policies in response to major geopolitical transformations. As the dataset contains the period of 1946–2010, it is possible to examine long-term trends, including the restrictive emigration policies of Cold War-era regimes and the shifts that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc, democratisation waves, and globalisation. This historical perspective is essential for understanding how contemporary emigration policies may have evolved from earlier authoritarian practices.

While this thesis employs a large-N quantitative approach to identify systematic patterns linking authoritarian survival strategies to emigration policies, it is important to acknowledge the limitations

inherent in cross-national, observational data. Large-N analyses can reveal correlations and generalisable trends but often mask the nuanced, context-dependent mechanisms through which policies are implemented. Mixed-methods approaches, including process tracing or detailed single-case studies, could complement these findings by unpacking causal pathways, highlighting variation in state strategies, and capturing the contingent, often informal, mechanisms that quantitative measures cannot observe. Such methodological pluralism in future studies would strengthen the explanatory power of the analysis, situating broad patterns within the lived political and institutional realities of individual regimes. However, I also integrate five illustrative cases to mitigate this limitation.

Despite these limitations, this study makes significant contributions by identifying critical gaps in the literature and highlighting areas that warrant further investigation. It lays the groundwork for future research by offering an analytical framework that can be refined and expanded with more recent data and broader geographical coverage. In particular, future studies could integrate additional policy-specific datasets to deepen the understanding of emigration policies in authoritarian regimes. By addressing these gaps, subsequent research can move toward a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of how authoritarian states regulate emigration.

Research Questions and Arguments in Brief

The central research questions guiding this study on the emigration policies of authoritarian regimes are as follows. These questions aim to fill significant gaps in the current literature, providing a structured framework for the quantitative analysis of how different aspects of authoritarianism influence emigration policies.

1. How do the pillars of authoritarian stability—legitimation, co-optation, and repression, impact the restrictiveness of emigration policies in authoritarian regimes?

This question is grounded in the framework proposed by Johannes Gerschewski (2010, 2013, 2015), who identified three key pillars that sustain the stability of authoritarian regimes: legitimation, co-optation, and repression. These pillars represent the overarching mechanisms through which regimes secure survival and stability. Legitimation refers to the process by which regimes gain voluntary compliance from the populace through ideology, economic success, or institutional legitimacy, creating a sense of legitimacy and acceptance. Co-optation involves integrating potential opponents and elites into the regime through patronage, alliances, or political inclusion, thereby neutralising opposition and fostering loyalty. Repression entails the use of force, surveillance, and coercion to suppress dissent and maintain control, ensuring that any threats to the regime's power are swiftly and effectively managed. Authoritarian regimes often rely on a combination of these strategies to varying degrees to maintain power (Gerschewski, 2013, 2015; Shubladze & Khundadze, 2018).

Hence, this question seeks to investigate the relationship between authoritarian regimes' strategies to maintain power and their policies on emigration. Specifically, it aims to explore how the different methods of maintaining regime stability and control influence the extent to which these regimes allow or restrict citizens from leaving the country.

Hypotheses

H1a. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on repression as a pillar of stability are likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

H1b. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on co-optation as a pillar of stability are likely to impose permissive emigration policies.*

H1c. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on legitimization as a pillar of stability are likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

Repressive regimes maintain control primarily through force, surveillance, and coercion, creating a highly restrictive political environment. Given that domestic repression limits opportunities for dissent within the country, these regimes may seek to prevent dissidents and potential opposition figures from fleeing abroad, where they might organise resistance, gain international support, or undermine the regime's legitimacy. Similarly, legitimization necessitates projecting an image of stability and unity (Kneuer, 2017). Emigration may be perceived as a threat to this image, as it can signal dissatisfaction and instability. Therefore, regimes heavily invested in legitimization may be more inclined to impose stringent controls to prevent such signals. In contrast, regimes that emphasise co-optation incorporate potential opponents into the regime through patronage and alliances, and may have reduced the need for strict emigration controls. By co-opting key societal groups, these regimes might be able to afford to allow some degree of emigration as a strategy to reduce internal tensions without undermining their stability.

2. How does the type of authoritarian regime influence emigration policies?

This question investigates the relationship between personalist regime type and their emigration policies. The aim is to identify whether the high concentration of power evident in personalist regimes causes emigration policies to be more permissive or restrictive.

Hypotheses

H2a. *Personalist authoritarian regime types are more likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

H2b. *Regimes with a high concentration of power on a leader are more likely to implement restrictive emigration policies.*

Personalist regimes, which concentrate power in the hands of a single leader with minimal institutional constraints, may be particularly prone to imposing restrictive emigration policies. Unlike other regime types, which may rely on broader coalitions or bureaucratic mechanisms for stability, personalist regimes could view emigration as a direct threat to their control, particularly when it involves political dissidents or potential defectors from elite circles. Personalist regimes are more vulnerable to external forces than any other regime types (Grundholm, 2020; Koo et al., 2016). Hence, they could be more likely to curb emigration to prevent opposition mobilisation abroad or challenges to their legitimacy.

Thesis Structure

The first part of this thesis establishes the theoretical foundation and situates the study within the broader academic discourse through a review of relevant literature. Chapter 2 begins with an extensive discussion of the dependent variable (emigration policy), tracing its historical evolution and the development of legal frameworks that regulate cross-border mobility. It then categorises different types of emigration policies before introducing Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework as an analytical tool for understanding emigration policies in authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 3 shifts focus to authoritarianism, beginning with an overview of how the literature on authoritarian stability has evolved over time. This chapter introduces Gerschewski's (2013) three pillars of authoritarian stability—repression, legitimation, and co-optation as the theoretical framework for this study. Gerschewski's framework is widely recognised for explaining the mechanisms that sustain authoritarian rule and has been applied extensively in case studies on regime durability. Its applicability to this research also lies in its capacity to structure the selection and aggregation of variables that explain authoritarian resilience. The chapter then explores factors that contribute to the pillars of authoritarian stability, such as economic development, state capacity, and regime type.

Chapter 4 examines the mechanisms linking the pillars of authoritarian stability to emigration policy, as well as the relationship between personalist authoritarian regimes and their approach to emigration regulation, providing the rationale for the hypotheses of this thesis. The chapter is structured in two parts: first, it examines each institutional pillar individually before analysing its relationship to emigration policies; second, it explores personalist regime characteristics and then identifies specific mechanisms connecting personalism to emigration policy decisions.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological approach of the study. It begins by dissecting various typologies for classifying non-democratic regimes and explaining the rationale for selecting the GWF dataset. This is followed by an examination of existing databases on (e)migration policies, highlighting the gaps in current datasets and the need for more comprehensive measures of emigration

policy. The V-Dem dataset is then introduced, detailing the specific variables used in this study and justifying its suitability for analysing the relationship between authoritarian governance and emigration policy. Additionally, the limitations and caveats associated with data from both GWF and V-Dem are critically assessed. The chapter then outlines the research design, specifying the independent and dependent variables and explaining their operationalisation. Particular attention is given to variables from the V-Dem dataset to operationalise legitimisation, repression, co-optation, and emigration policy. Similarly, the personalist regime type variable from the GWF dataset is defined and integrated into the analytical framework.

Finally, the details of the statistical model employed to test the hypothesis are presented. A fixed-effects linear regression model is used, with an explanation of the model specification and diagnostic tests conducted to ensure the validity and robustness of the analysis. This methodological framework provides a rigorous foundation for the empirical investigation that follows.

Chapter 6 provides the data analysis and results. First, descriptive statistics are presented to summarise and understand the spread, patterns and trends present in the data. I highlight trends and central tendencies using violin plots to visualise the data. Second, I present the regression results and briefly discuss the quantitative findings. Correlations between repression and emigration policy, co-optation and emigration policy and personalism and emigration policies are suggested. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the findings using case illustrations of regimes from various time periods and geographical locations, including the Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Singapore and North Korea.

Chapter 8 synthesises the findings from this study and explores their broader implications. It situates the results within the landscape of quantitative research in comparative politics, reflecting on their significance for data interpretation and the methodological challenges inherent in political science, such as coding hybrid regimes and converting complex variables such as legitimisation into an interval scale. Additionally, this chapter identifies key avenues for further research to expand on this study, such as non-linear relationships between authoritarian legitimisation and emigration policy, and the opportunity to cover more recent time periods to account for new developments in authoritarian control mechanisms.

Chapter 2: Emigration Policies

The regulation of emigration has been a fundamental aspect of statehood. In this chapter, I first trace the historical development of emigration policies, highlighting how early states regulated emigration to serve economic and security interests and how national early modern states have implemented legal frameworks to control emigration, from early passport systems to modern international conventions. In the second section, I categorise emigration policies into restrictive, permissive, and forced migration policies, illustrating the diverse ways states regulate mobility. The third section discusses Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* as a theoretical framework for understanding the use of emigration policy as a governance tool.

In this research, emigration is defined broadly as the cross-border movement of individuals departing from their country of origin, both temporarily and permanently. This definition includes all forms of emigration, ranging from voluntary labour migration and educational migration to involuntary and forced displacement, exile, and asylum-seeking due to political, social, or environmental pressures.

The Evolution of Emigration Policies

The field of migration studies provides several theoretical lenses to analyse how states regulate emigration in response to shifting political, economic, and demographic conditions. Early migration theories, such as push-pull theory (Lee, 1966), explain emigration as a response to disparities in opportunity and hardship, albeit more at an individual level than policy. The political-economy lens of Castles and Kosack (1973) provides a Marxist analysis of labour migration, arguing that migration primarily serves the interests of capitalist states while exacerbating economic and social inequalities in both sending and receiving countries (Castles & Kosack, 1985). World-systems theory views migration as a global phenomenon shaped by interactions between societies, where economic imbalances, such as trade-induced decline in one country, can drive migration toward regions with stronger economies (Wallerstein, 1974). Others, such as the migration transition model (Zelinsky, 1971) and migration-development approach (De Haas, 2010b; King & Collyer, 2016), explain how societal and developmental stages of a country cause emigration policies to evolve to be more permissive.

I draw on these migration theories to analyse the evolution of emigration policy. I argue that states have historically encouraged emigration when it served economic expansion and labour market demands but imposed restrictions when population retention became a strategic necessity. From the 19th century to the present, emigration has been managed as a policy instrument and a tool for regime stability, as the upcoming discussions will illustrate, reflecting broader structural transformations in the global economy.

The push-pull model (Lee, 1966) provides a fundamental framework for understanding emigration, explaining why millions left Europe for the Americas, Australia, and other expanding economies in the 19th century. Lee's model was built on Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885, 1889), which were among the first systematic attempts to analyse migration patterns. Ravenstein, a German-English geographer, observed that migration often followed predictable trends, where economic motives were the dominant driver, and large cities tended to attract migrants from rural areas (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889). He also noted that migration occurred in waves, meaning that one group's movement often set the stage for later migration by others, a concept now understood as chain migration. Lee (1966) expanded on these earlier theories by introducing the idea of intervening obstacles—factors such as travel costs, political barriers, and social networks that could either facilitate or hinder migration. This addition challenged the simplistic notion that emigration was a direct response to economic or environmental conditions, showing instead that personal decisions, state policies, and practical constraints all influenced mobility.

In the early modern period, between the 16th and 18th centuries, mainly in Western Europe, as states sought to consolidate power, they progressively introduced legal and bureaucratic measures to regulate the movement of their citizens. The Westphalian system (1648) established territorial sovereignty, reinforcing state authority over cross-border movement. Influenced by mercantilist principles, European states viewed their citizens as economic resources to be maximised. As such, they discouraged the exit of their citizens, fearing the loss of valuable human capital essential for national wealth and prosperity (Pécoud, 2013). However, by the early 19th century, regions worldwide were experiencing economic and demographic pressures that made migration an attractive or necessary option. Population growth outpaced job creation in Europe, leading to land shortages and urban overcrowding. Countries such as Britain, Germany, and Italy saw their populations double between 1800 and 1900, creating a Malthusian crisis in which there were simply not enough resources to sustain growing rural communities (Hatton & Williamson, 1998). The Irish Potato Famine (1845–1852) resulted in mass starvation and forced over 1 million Irish people to flee, many of whom settled in the United States, Canada, and Australia (Gráda, 2009).

Outside of Europe, similar patterns emerged. In China, the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) and ongoing internal conflicts forced millions of people to migrate. The collapse of the Qing economy and rising land taxes drove many Chinese migrants to seek work abroad, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Americas (McKeown, 2004; Miles, 2020). In South Asia, particularly British-controlled India, land displacement due to colonial agricultural policies left many peasants with few options beyond migration (Tinker, 1974). The British government facilitated these migrations, which actively recruited Indian labourers for plantation economies in Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, and East Africa under the indentured labour system (Carter, 1995).

Political instability also acted as a major push factor. The revolutions of 1848 across Europe led to government crackdowns on political dissidents, many of whom fled to the United States and other democracies (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2009). Similarly, the violent attacks on the Jewish population in the Russian Empire (1881–1884) pushed thousands of Jewish migrants to escape persecution and seek safety in cities such as New York and Buenos Aires (Dubnow, 1916). In Africa, the expansion of European colonial rule forced many people to migrate internally, as land was expropriated and local economies were disrupted to serve imperial trade interests (Settles, 1996).

While many states in the 19th century actively facilitated emigration to relieve population pressures and stimulate economic expansion, others imposed strict exit controls, fearing the negative consequences of mass outmigration. In this context, France and Germany implemented administrative controls in the 19th century to prevent excessive depopulation and labour shortages. France, for instance, had long regulated emigration through legal mechanisms such as the Code Civil (1804), which reinforced state authority over individual mobility. By the mid-19th century, French authorities introduced passport laws that required government approval before citizens could leave the country, particularly targeting skilled labourers and military-aged men (Noiriel, 1991). Similarly, after the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), Prussian authorities recognised that losing young men to emigration could deplete military reserves and disrupt the labour market (Torpey, 2000). By the mid-19th century, German states introduced laws requiring state-issued exit permits for those wishing to emigrate, ensuring that critical labourers and military-age males remained within national borders (Wojcik, 2011). These policies illustrate how state intervention in emigration was not merely a defensive reaction, but a strategic effort to control economic and political stability. The regulation of emigration thus functioned as a mechanism for maintaining global political and economic dominance.

The regulation of emigration in 19th-century France and Germany reflects broader patterns in the political-economy view of migration (Castles & Kosack, 1973), which argues that states manage emigration to maintain existing class and labour structures. Emigration restrictions were not merely economic safeguards but strategic measures to preserve industrial workforces and prevent social destabilisation caused by labour shortages. Therefore, European states controlled migration flows to reinforce economic hierarchies, retaining skilled labour domestically while exploiting migrant labour in their colonies. This dynamic also aligns with world-systems theory (Massey et al., 1993; Wallerstein, 1974), which situates migration within global economic structures. Industrialised states, which are conceptualised as the “core”, extracted resources, including labour, from the less developed states known as the “periphery” while regulating emigration to protect their skilled workforces (Mittleman, 1993).

Emigration restrictions were hence applied selectively. Unlike settler-colonial migration, where European powers actively encouraged emigration to the Americas and Australasia to consolidate

territorial claims, movement to Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean was tightly controlled. European states allowed the mobility of administrators, military officers, and business elites while restricting the emigration of non-European populations to prevent economic and political disruptions within the colonial order (Achieme, 2019). Here, world-systems theory diverges from push-pull models of migration, which assume that migration is driven by individual economic decisions rather than state intervention. Instead, migration governance under the empire was structured to sustain economic exploitation while restricting social mobility (Bradley, 2023).

Exploitative emigration was evident in the strategies of colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries in the form of punitive mobility and labour systems. In the 19th century, European states shifted from public executions and corporal punishment to prison systems and penal transportation. Imperial powers, especially Britain and France, transported convicts to colonies such as Australia, New Caledonia and French Guiana to address prison overcrowding while creating a compliant workforce for colonial development (De Vito et al., 2018). Convicts provided essential forced labour in mining, agriculture, and construction, establishing infrastructure and extracting resources for imperial benefit. This system simultaneously served as population management, colonial expansion, social control, and economic development, creating the foundation for colonial economies through coerced labour (Anderson & Maxwell-Stewart, 2013; De Vito et al., 2018).

Another instance of state-regulated emigration within imperial structures was the control of indentured labour after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Britain, France, and the Netherlands replaced chattel slavery with a system of contract migration, relocating millions of labourers from India, China, and Southeast Asia to plantations, mines, and infrastructure projects across the Caribbean, Africa, and the Pacific (Carter, 1995; Northrup, 1995). Unlike European settlers, these workers were bound by legal contracts, denied permanent settlement, and subjected to legal and economic restrictions that kept them within colonial economies. British India, the largest supplier of indentured labour, implemented strict state-controlled recruitment, contract terms, and return policies to ensure that migrants remained a temporary workforce rather than a permanent diaspora (Tinker, 1974).

This pattern is evident in historical cases beyond European empires. The Chinese “coolie” trade, for instance, saw millions of Chinese labourers forcibly relocated under coercive contracts to plantations in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America (McKeown, 2004). While framed as voluntary labour, many migrants were deceived, trafficked, and subjected to harsh conditions, illustrating how state-controlled migration regimes were structured to sustain imperial economic systems rather than facilitate individual agency. Similarly, Japan’s state-managed labour migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries directed surplus rural workers to Brazil, Hawaii, and the United States (U.S.)

West Coast under contract labour agreements, ensuring economic oversight while using migration to project national influence (Eaton & Tamura, 1994).

Beyond indentured labour, colonised populations faced state-imposed exit restrictions, which controlled movement within and beyond imperial territories. In the Dutch East Indies, laws restricted Indigenous mobility, limiting their ability to seek employment elsewhere (Bremner, 1990). Similarly, in French Algeria, while European settlers moved freely between Algeria and France, Indigenous Algerians faced extensive bureaucratic barriers to emigration, even after decades of forced labour and military conscription (Lorcin, 1999). These restrictions illustrate how colonial migration governance served imperial power by facilitating mobility for those who reinforced colonial authority while restricting movement for those who might challenge it.

Although indentured and contract labour migration declined after the mid-20th century, the structural mechanisms of colonial labour migration persist in contemporary migration governance. Temporary labour migration programmes in the Gulf States, Southeast Asia, and parts of Europe closely resemble colonial-era labour systems, where workers are recruited under short-term contracts, denied full labour rights, and prevented from settling permanently (Betts, 2011). World-systems theory remains a crucial framework for understanding these continuities, highlighting how states regulate emigration to sustain global economic hierarchies rather than allowing truly free labour mobility (Martínez-Vela, 2001).

The legacy of colonial emigration governance persists today. Post-colonial states have inherited and adapted colonial-era emigration controls to regulate labour outflows and protect remittance economies (Betts, 2011; De Haas, 2010a). In South and Southeast Asia, governments manage worker migration through state-mediated recruitment agencies and restrictive contract systems, much like their colonial predecessors. Meanwhile, former imperial powers such as Britain and France continue to impose selective immigration policies that favour some post-colonial migrants over others, reflecting long-standing economic relationships forged under the empire (Hansen, 2000). Just as indentured Indian and Chinese labourers were legally restricted from integrating into colonial societies, modern guest worker programmes and visa restrictions ensure that migrants remain a temporary, disposable workforce with limited rights and mobility (Hollifield, 2004).

Thus, while emigration is often framed as a personal decision, historical and contemporary migration policies reveal that imperial and post-colonial states actively structure and restrict mobility to serve economic and political interests. The restriction of movement from the periphery to the core, whether through imperial labour regimes or modern migration policies, underscores how migration governance has long been a strategic tool of state power rather than a purely reactive process.

Following this, in the 20th century, states that had previously promoted emigration to manage population pressures and unemployment began to impose new restrictions. This transformation is best understood through the migration transition model (Zelinsky, 1971), which explains how industrialisation alters migration dynamics over time. In agrarian societies, high population growth and limited economic opportunities can push people toward emigration. However, as countries industrialised and developed advanced manufacturing sectors, their need for skilled labour increased, leading to greater restrictions on emigration (Zelinsky, 1971). Southern European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, which had long supplied large numbers of emigrants to the Americas, began to reconsider mass outmigration as their economies shifted toward industrialisation (Sánchez-Alonso, 2019). Italy, for instance, had previously encouraged emigration to Argentina and the United States but, by the 1930s, sought to retain workers to support domestic industrial expansion under Mussolini's nationalist policies (Gabaccia, 2000). Spain, under Franco, restricted emigration in the mid-20th century as part of an effort to maintain labour for state-led economic recovery despite continuing high levels of clandestine migration. Similarly, Portugal shifted from facilitating labour migration to restricting it as the Estado Novo (1933- 1968) regime sought to strengthen its domestic workforce while maintaining colonial labour supplies in Angola and Mozambique (Castelo, 2018).

The outbreak of World War I marked a fundamental turning point in global migration governance, reshaping how states viewed emigration in relation to national security, labour management, and sovereignty. Within James Hollifield's (2004) concept of the "migration state", which argues that modern states balance economic openness with political control over migration, wartime policies demonstrated a decisive shift toward tighter state regulation over emigration. Hollifield argues that migration states operate within a complex framework of economic pressures, security imperatives, and legal norms (Hollifield, 1992, 2004). Governments that had previously viewed emigration as a *laissez-faire* economic process began treating emigration as a matter of strategic national interest, integrating migration control into broader concerns of economic stability, military capacity, and state security (Adamson, 2023). During World War I, European countries imposed travel bans, passport regulations, and conscription policies to retain industrial and military manpower (Yan, 2017). The institutionalisation of exit controls during the war laid the foundation for modern border regimes, demonstrating how emigration policies, once implemented in response to temporary crises, often became permanent features of state governance (Bendixsen & Näre, 2024).

The aftermath of World War I further reshaped migration governance. Mass displacement and economic devastation highlighted the need for structured migration policies. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was established in 1919 to regulate labour migration and protect migrant workers, setting early precedents for migration treaties. One of the earliest examples of this shift was Britain's Aliens Order of 1920, which introduced work permits, nationality requirements, and emigration

quotas (Dias-Abey, 2025). This reflected a broader pattern across industrialised states, where governments asserted greater control over who could leave and under what conditions, reinforcing the state's role in regulating emigration for economic and security purposes. Meanwhile, the League of Nations' Nansen Passport (1922) provided legal identity to stateless persons, though its effectiveness was limited by state sovereignty (Armpounioti & Stovall, 2024). Similarly, the U.S. National Origins Act of 1924, while primarily an immigration restriction, profoundly affected emigration patterns from Europe, as it discouraged outflows from certain countries by limiting future return migration and opportunities abroad (Ngai, 2004). These policies further illustrate Hollifield's (2004) assertion that migration governance is dictated no longer by labour market needs but by a state's broader geopolitical and economic strategies.

World War II further solidified the securitisation of emigration policies, as governments tightened exit restrictions to prevent labour shortages and maintain military capacity. Authoritarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy used forced labour programmes and emigration bans to retain skilled workers, ensuring that critical industries remained operational while simultaneously preventing political opponents from fleeing (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011). Thus, states increasingly viewed emigration through the lens of national security, where the right to leave one's country was subordinated to national economic and political interests (Hollifield, 1992).

The post-World War II period further marked the institutionalisation of migration governance as states prioritised economic reconstruction, labour market stability, and demographic management. Recognising the potential disruptions of large-scale emigration, governments in Western Europe, particularly France and West Germany, implemented restrictive policies to retain skilled labour, preventing workforce depletion during a critical phase of economic recovery. Simultaneously, the Marshall Plan (1948–1952) played a pivotal role in stabilising European economies, reducing economic push factors that might have otherwise fuelled mass migration to the Americas (Massey & Pren, 2012; Strangio, 2020). This period exemplified the tension within the migration state framework, where the economic logic of labour mobility, which favours open migration flows to address labour shortages or optimise economic productivity, must be balanced against the political logic of state sovereignty, which prioritises national security, economic planning, and social cohesion (Hollifield, 2004).

The Cold War also caused a fundamental reshaping of global migration governance, embedding emigration restrictions into broader geopolitical, ideological, and security concerns. In communist states, emigration was perceived as a direct threat to regime legitimacy, prompting the implementation of strict exit controls and surveillance mechanisms (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011). Conversely, Western states instrumentalised migration policy to destabilise rival regimes, offering asylum and resettlement to dissidents as part of a broader ideological battle (Bernard, 2023). In the

Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellite states, emigration was a logistical challenge and an existential crisis for authoritarian governance (Gel'man, 2010a). Mass outmigration risked exposing the failures of communist rule, particularly in terms of economic stagnation, political repression, and declining living standards. As a result, communist states imposed harsh exit restrictions, including exit visa regimes, physical barriers, and punitive measures against would-be defectors (Scott, 2023; Zahra, 2016).

The Berlin Wall (1961) became the most visible symbol of this emigration control regime. Following World War II, East Germany faced severe population outflows, with nearly 3.5 million people defecting to West Germany between 1945 and 1961 (Jarausch, 1994). The East German Government, backed by Moscow, framed emigration as both a security risk and an ideological betrayal, justifying the construction of the Berlin Wall as a means of preventing “brain drain” and preserving socialist order (Dehm, 2019). Emigration was condemned as disloyalty and treason, viewing citizens’ departure—particularly to ideological rivals, as a rejection of the collective society and an act of individual defiance (Dowty, 1988). Legal and bureaucratic measures were implemented to prevent unauthorised emigration. The Soviet Union’s exit visa system made it nearly impossible for ordinary citizens to leave, ensuring that international travel was reserved only for those deemed politically reliable. Unauthorised attempts to leave were met with severe punishment, including imprisonment, forced labour, or exile to Siberian gulags (Chudinovskikh & Denisenko, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 1991).

While communist regimes restricted emigration, Western governments viewed migration as a geopolitical weapon, using asylum and refugee policies to undermine authoritarian adversaries. This strategy aligns with Adamson and Tsourapas’ (2019) theory of migration as statecraft, which posits that states manipulate migration policies to gain strategic advantages in international conflicts. During the Cold War, the United States and its allies sought to destabilise communist regimes by selectively granting asylum and resettlement to defectors, dissidents, and politically persecuted individuals (Salehyan, 2018). The U.S. Refugee Relief Act (1953) was one of the first Cold War-era migration policies designed to undermine communist legitimacy. By admitting refugees from Eastern Europe, the U.S. framed emigration as evidence of the failures of communist governance, reinforcing anti-Soviet narratives. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment (1974) further institutionalised this approach by tying U.S.-Soviet trade relations to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’s willingness to grant exit visas to Jews and political dissidents (Ginsburg, 2009). This policy was a direct challenge to Soviet sovereignty, forcing Moscow to either concede to international pressure or risk economic consequences (Salehyan, 2018). Similarly, West Germany’s *Wiedergutmachungspolitik* (“compensation policy”) actively facilitated the resettlement of East German defectors, offering them

citizenship and financial support as part of a broader effort to delegitimise the East German state (Hockerts, 2013).

Additionally, co-ethnic migration was the primary legal means of leaving Eastern Europe during the Cold War, with Yugoslavia being a notable exception. Unlike other socialist states, Yugoslavia permitted free movement, allowing hundreds of thousands of its citizens to travel to Western and Northern Europe as *gastarbeiter* (guest workers), many of whom eventually settled in their host countries (Kerckänen, 2001). In contrast, large-scale emigration from other Eastern European nations remained limited until the mid-1980s, when political and economic reforms started to facilitate greater mobility. Even then, ethnic minorities were disproportionately represented among emigrants, as they were more readily accepted by Western countries. Ethnic Germans migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany, while Jewish emigrants resettled primarily in Israel, the United States, and Germany, the latter of which classified them as “quota refugees” from 1991 onwards (Bencsik, 2024; Panagiotidis, 2021).

The Cold War’s impact on restricting emigration from authoritarian regimes and strategically facilitating asylum in liberal democracies has had lasting implications for global migration governance. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a dramatic transformation, as former communist states transitioned from emigration-restricting regimes to emigration-exporting economies. Countries such as Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States saw mass outmigration to Western Europe, facilitated by new liberalised migration policies and the expansion of EU mobility rights in the 2000s (Kahanec, 2013; Mazurkiewicz, 2015). Migration strategies of that era continue to influence contemporary geopolitical conflicts. Western states continue to employ selective asylum policies to challenge authoritarian regimes, as seen in the U.S. approach to Haitian and Venezuelan political refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

By the late 20th century, more than ever, emigration started being shaped by globalisation, state policies, and regional governance structures. China cautiously relaxed its emigration controls, allowing students and professionals to work abroad while still maintaining political oversight through its Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (Nyíri, 2001). Many post-colonial states, such as India and the Philippines, also began actively facilitating temporary labour migration to boost remittances, creating state agencies such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) (Battistella, 2018).

Similarly, in the 21st century, many states have continued toward “managed emigration” approaches, where emigration is selectively facilitated or restricted based on economic and strategic considerations. Labour-sending states such as India, the Philippines, and Mexico have actively promoted overseas labour migration to increase remittance inflows, constituting a significant share

of their gross domestic product (GDP) (De Haas, 2020). China and Vietnam continue to manage emigration through state-linked recruitment agencies, ensuring that migration benefits the national economy while minimising political risks. To address brain drain, countries also apply selective retention, where high-income countries in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia have implemented return migration programmes to counteract the brain drain, such as Poland's "Return Programme" (FNFA, 2023; VOA News, 2019). At the same time, emigration has also been weaponised in international conflicts. Russia, for example, deliberately manipulated refugee flows to destabilise Europe, particularly during the Syrian crisis since 2011 and the Ukraine refugee crisis since 2022 (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Rosina, 2023).

The restrictive emigration policies of authoritarian states also persist. Countries such as China, North Korea, and Cuba maintain strict exit visa requirements, limiting their citizens' ability to leave (Friedman & Lee, 2010). In China, while economic liberalisation has increased mobility, politically sensitive groups, such as Uyghurs and dissidents, face exit restrictions and passport denials, demonstrating how state control over emigration remains a tool of political repression (Human Rights Watch, 2025). There are also cases where sending countries, such as poorer South Asian countries, often impose emigration bans or strict conditions to protect citizens from exploitation, restricting them from accepting temporary labour contracts in high-risk destination countries or, in some cases, blocking foreign employment altogether (Reed-Sandoval, 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical evolution of emigration policies demonstrates how states have strategically controlled citizens' exit rights to advance national interests. From mercantilist-era restrictions preserving human capital to colonial exploitation through indentured labour systems, from Cold War exit controls to contemporary managed emigration programmes, emigration governance has consistently reflected power dynamics rather than individual freedom of movement. Today's emigration landscape—characterised by selective facilitation for economic benefit, weaponised displacement in geopolitical conflicts, and persistent restrictions in authoritarian regimes, demonstrates remarkable continuity with historical patterns. These policies continue to reinforce global inequalities while serving state interests, showing that emigration remains fundamentally a tool of statecraft.

Types of Emigration Policies

The previous discussion illustrated how governments adopt varied emigration policies depending on their economic structure, political system, and national security concerns. Based on a review of academic literature and policy reports, I categorise these variations of emigration policies into three broad categories: restrictive, permissive and forced.

Restrictive Policies

Despite the growing recognition of emigration as a fundamental right in international law, many states continue to impose restrictive emigration policies to retain skilled labour, limit political opposition, and maintain economic and political control (De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011). These restrictions take various forms, ranging from direct exit bans and selective mobility controls to bureaucratic and financial barriers that make legal departure increasingly difficult. While outright prohibitions on emigration have declined since the Cold War, states continue to deploy indirect administrative deterrents, financial penalties, and selective skill-retention policies to regulate human mobility (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). The motivations behind these restrictive measures broadly fall into two categories: economic justifications, particularly concern over brain drain and human capital loss; and political concerns, specifically the fear of dissident activity abroad.

Some states impose blanket emigration restrictions through legal prohibitions, militarised borders, or systemic administrative barriers that make leaving virtually impossible. While this practice has become less common, a few regimes continue to enforce such measures. For instance, North Korea does not issue passports to ordinary citizens, requiring explicit state approval for any foreign travel, effectively making emigration impossible except for government-sanctioned labour migrants (Lankov, 2013).

More recently, China has systematically denied passports and imposed exit bans on dissidents and ethnic minorities, particularly Uyghur activists, preventing them from seeking asylum or engaging with international human rights organisations (Roberts, 2021). In such cases, emigration restrictions serve not as economic tools but as instruments of political repression designed to limit external threats to state legitimacy. When individuals flee oppression or political instability, they often become vocal critics of their home regimes, leveraging international platforms to expose human rights abuses, organise opposition movements, and advocate for policy changes. Consequently, states that fear external political pressure often tighten emigration controls to suppress the formation of diaspora-led opposition movements (Michel et al., 2023; Tsourapas, 2023).

While outright bans on emigration have become less common, many states continue to impose bureaucratic and financial obstacles that make legal departure technically possible but practically prohibitive. These measures, ranging from high passport fees and selective denials of exit documents to prolonged administrative delays and financial penalties, allow governments to regulate migration without formally violating international commitments to freedom of movement (McKenzie, 2007; Torpey, 2000). For example, some states require exit permits, ensuring that departures remain tightly controlled and subject to political discretion. Prior to 2013, Cuban citizens needed government-issued exit permits to travel abroad. While these formal restrictions have been lifted, Cuban authorities continue to deny passports to activists, independent journalists, and defectors, effectively preventing

their emigration (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Similarly, following the 2021 coup in Myanmar, the military rule has enacted travel bans for conscription-aged citizens to maintain control over the country's conscription pool (Kaung, 2025). Simultaneously, the regime has imposed extreme financial and bureaucratic hurdles on obtaining passports and transitioning between its seven passport categories, significantly complicating the process for individuals seeking to travel or change their legal status (Naing, 2023).

Beyond political considerations, restrictive emigration policies are often driven by economic concerns, particularly in countries that depend on highly skilled labour for industrial, technological, and scientific development. The concept of brain drain, first used to describe the migration of British doctors to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, has since expanded to encompass the widespread loss of skilled professionals from developing economies (Khadria, 2007). Countries experiencing high rates of skilled emigration often suffer from reduced innovation, slower economic growth, and productivity declines (Prato, 2025). To counteract these effects, some governments impose emigration restrictions to retain talent and ensure that investments in education and training benefit the domestic economy (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

One of the most common state-enforced skill-retention measures is the use of bonding agreements, which require students who receive state-funded education to return and work in their home country for a fixed period. India and Ethiopia, for example, impose return clauses on government-sponsored students, preventing them from immediately taking long-term employment abroad (Jonkers, 2008). Similarly, China has imposed exit controls on scientists and researchers working in critical sectors, restricting their ability to accept foreign employment without government approval (Huang, 2019).

In addition to administrative hurdles, some governments impose financial penalties on emigrants, discouraging migration while maintaining economic leverage over the diaspora (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). One of the most notorious examples is Eritrea's 2% diaspora tax, which requires all Eritrean emigrants to pay a portion of their income to the government in exchange for consular services and document renewals (Hepner, 2009). Those who refuse to comply risk bureaucratic retaliation, threats to family members, or denial of state services, forcing compliance even among those who fled for political reasons (Kibreab, 2017).

Beyond direct taxation, some states issue penalties to ensure return. Several countries implement return migration bonding policies to ensure that citizens who receive government-sponsored education abroad contribute to national development upon completing their studies. These policies often require beneficiaries to return home and serve in their country's workforce for a specified period; failure to comply typically results in financial penalties or the obligation to repay the scholarship funds. For instance, Vietnamese professionals studying abroad under government

scholarships must fully repay tuition and training costs if they fail to return, reinforcing state control over skilled migration (Liu-Farrer & Tran, 2019).

These bureaucratic, financial, and administrative restrictions illustrate how states continue to exert control over emigration without resorting to outright bans. By making legal departure costly, time-consuming, or administratively complex, governments restrict mobility in politically strategic and economically advantageous ways. While such measures may not explicitly prohibit movement, they create a system where leaving is a privilege rather than a right, reinforcing state power over emigration in ways that serve domestic stability, economic interests, and political control.

Permissive Policies

Permissive or liberal emigration policies, where states actively facilitate or permit the free movement of their citizens, are particularly evident in liberal democracies. The European Union's principle of the right to move freely allows citizens of member states to relocate, work, and reside across borders without restrictive emigration controls (Carrera, 2005). Similarly, New Zealand and Australia maintain a reciprocal agreement under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement, which grants citizens of both countries the right to live and work in each other's territories without requiring visas or formal emigration approval (O'Sullivan, 2011). Bilateral mobility agreements, such as the widely adopted Working Holiday Schemes between countries such as Japan, Canada, Australia, and several European states, also exemplify permissive emigration arrangements. These schemes facilitate temporary labour mobility, especially among young adults, without imposing restrictions on exit or re-entry (Ghazarian, 2022). Such arrangements demonstrate the policy landscape of democracies in the Global North where the approach to emigration is often *laissez-faire*.

As the previous discussion on the evolution of emigration policies depicted, one of the primary reasons states adopt permissive or encouraging emigration policies is economic necessity. Remittance economies, in particular, depend on the emigration of workers to sustain foreign exchange reserves, alleviate unemployment, and support household incomes in the sending country (Asad et al., 2016; Ratha, 2005). Many countries of the Global South have developed extensive state-led emigration programmes that ensure remittances remain a reliable economic asset. The POEA is a state-managed system for labour export, ensuring Filipino workers—particularly domestic workers, seafarers, and healthcare professionals, can access jobs abroad while remaining legally protected (Galam, 2025; Garabiles & Asis, 2022). Similarly, Bangladesh's Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training coordinates labour migration through bilateral agreements with Gulf States, Malaysia, and South Korea, facilitating an average of 700,000 emigrants annually (Rahman et al., 2021). Nepal's Foreign Employment Act (2007) institutionalised labour migration, making it a key driver of Nepal's remittance-dependent economy, where remittances constitute over 25% of GDP (Jones & Basnett, 2013).

These countries not only maximise migration flows to benefit from external labour demand but also minimise the social costs of domestic unemployment. For countries experiencing high population growth and unemployment, emigration provides a mechanism for managing demographic pressures. Many governments adopt policies that encourage young workers to seek opportunities abroad rather than strain domestic labour markets (Clemens, 2014). Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia have historically facilitated labour emigration to France, Italy, and Spain, using migration agreements to regulate population movements while maintaining transnational economic ties (Khan, 2024; Özden et al., 2011). Similarly, Mexico's Bracero Program (1942–1964) was an institutionalised emigration policy, sending millions of Mexican workers to the U.S. to alleviate labour market pressures while securing wage remittances (Durand & Massey, 2003). Indonesia and Vietnam use state-sponsored labour migration programmes to channel surplus workers into international markets, particularly in manufacturing and domestic service sectors (Lindquist et al., 2012). Governments frequently negotiate bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) with destination countries to ensure predictable migration flows, labour protections, and economic benefits. These agreements serve multiple functions, such as facilitating legal pathways for emigration, reducing illegal emigration, and protecting labour migrants from exploitation by ensuring minimum wage standards, legal rights, and return migration protocols while strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between sending and receiving states. For example, India's BLAs with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia regulate the flow of Indian migrant workers, particularly in the construction and service sectors (Wickramasekara, 2012).

Emigration has long been recognised as a key driver of economic and social change, but states also use emigration as a “soft power” instrument to shape global perceptions, strengthen diplomatic ties, and extend their influence beyond national borders. Joseph Nye's (1990, 2004) theory of soft power defines it as a state's ability to achieve foreign policy goals not through coercion (hard power) but through attraction and persuasion, using cultural, political, and ideological means. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt actively promoted labour migration to the Gulf States and North Africa to propagate Pan-Arabism and anti-imperialist sentiments. Egyptian professionals, including teachers, engineers, and political advisors, were dispatched abroad with the explicit mission of promoting Arab socialist values and enhancing Egypt's regional influence (Tsourapas, 2018). This strategy effectively extended Cairo's ideological reach beyond its national borders. Similarly, Castro's ascent to power in Cuba led to the implementation of medical internationalism, a policy through which the Cuban Government financed the deployment of thousands of medical professionals across Latin America and Africa. This initiative served not only as a humanitarian effort but also as a strategic tool of cultural diplomacy, strengthening Cuba's ideological influence abroad (Sorge, 2018).

Another explicit example of emigration as a soft power strategy is China's global diaspora engagement policy. Since the late 20th century, the Chinese Government has actively promoted the integration of overseas Chinese citizens into global markets while maintaining strong ties between expatriates and the homeland. Through state-backed initiatives such as the Confucius Institutes, which provide Chinese language and cultural education worldwide, China ensures that its emigrants remain connected to their heritage while also fostering interest in Chinese culture among foreign audiences (Zweig, 2006). Additionally, China has leveraged its business diaspora to strengthen economic relationships with foreign states, using overseas Chinese communities as intermediaries in trade, investment, and political diplomacy (Nyíri, 2018). Thus, emigration strategies exemplify the use of soft power, where states leverage cultural and ideological appeal to shape preferences and influence behaviour in the international arena. By embedding ideological narratives within emigrant communities and cultural institutions abroad, states can cultivate a favourable global image and extend their influence without resorting to coercion. This also reflects a broader trend in which states recognise emigration as an opportunity for global engagement rather than a loss of human capital, reinforcing transnational loyalty and political alignment among their diasporas.

Forced Emigration

Forced emigration represents one of the most extreme forms of state-driven migration policy, often serving as a tool for political repression, ethnic cleansing, and religious persecution. Unlike voluntary migration,³ where individuals relocate for economic or personal reasons, forced emigration involves the coercive removal of populations through expulsion, exile, or targeted displacement policies. Throughout history, authoritarian regimes and shifting political boundaries have led to mass expulsions, often resulting in humanitarian crises, stateless populations, and long-term sociopolitical instability.

One of the most infamous historical expulsions is of Jews from Spain in 1492, following the Alhambra Decree. The decree forced hundreds of thousands of Spanish Jews to either convert to Catholicism or leave the country, leading to mass displacement across the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire, and North Africa (Bodian, 2014). Similar policies were later enforced against Moriscos (Muslim converts to Christianity) in 1609, further reshaping Spain's religious and ethnic landscape (Amelang, 2022). Expulsion and forced emigration have also been used explicitly as tools of state-building and ethnic homogenisation, as seen in the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, where approximately 1.5 million Anatolian Greeks and 500,000 Muslims from Greece were forcibly relocated under the Treaty of Lausanne (Kinley, 2019). More contemporaneously, for instance, in Myanmar, the government's persecution of Rohingya Muslims has led to one of the

³ Forced migration in this research falls on the restrictive side of the emigration policy continuum.

largest forced migrations in recent years. Since 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, escaping state-backed genocide, ethnic violence, and military atrocities (Amnesty International, 2020). The Myanmar Government's refusal to recognise the Rohingya as citizens has rendered them stateless, a common feature of forced emigration that increases vulnerability to exploitation and legal precarity.

While mass expulsions often target ethnic and religious groups, forced emigration is also a political strategy used by authoritarian regimes to eliminate dissent and opposition. Whether imposed by governments or undertaken as a means of survival, political exile has shaped opposition movements, diaspora activism, and international asylum policies. For instance, during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990), an estimated 200,000 Chileans fled the country due to state persecution (Wright & Oñate Zúñiga, 2007). Many were blacklisted, threatened, or tortured, leading to forced exile in countries such as Sweden, Canada, and Australia. Chilean exiles played a significant role in denouncing the regime's human rights abuses, contributing to international pressure against Pinochet. Even after democratisation, many exiles remained politically active abroad, advocating for justice and reparations (Doña-Reveco, 2020).

Exile as a tool of political control is still prominent to this day, as regimes have expelled intellectuals, opposition figures, and minority groups to weaken resistance and consolidate power. Under President Daniel Ortega's Government, Nicaragua has experienced significant political unrest since 2018. Crackdowns on dissent have led to the exile of numerous opposition figures and activists. For instance, singer Olguita Acuna fled to Costa Rica after participating in protests and now uses her music to raise awareness about the situation in Nicaragua. Similarly, opposition leader Félix Maradiaga relocated to the U.S., where he continues to advocate for democratic reforms and unity among exiled communities from Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela (Slipowitz et al., 2024).

Beyond politically induced forced emigration, involuntary emigration also occurs through coercion, deception, and force, particularly for labour and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking, as defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2000), involves the recruitment, transportation, and harbouring of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. This form of forced emigration is particularly prevalent in the sex industry, forced labour, and domestic servitude. A significant dimension of this issue is sex trafficking, where individuals, predominantly women and girls, are trafficked across borders for sexual exploitation (Reed et al., 2016). For example, women from Eastern Europe have been trafficked to the Netherlands, where they are coerced into prostitution through fraudulent job offers or outright abduction (Shelley, 2010). Similarly, trafficking for forced labour affects vulnerable populations, including migrant workers who are trapped in debt bondage, agricultural labour, and domestic servitude, particularly in Gulf countries, South Asia, and parts of Africa (ILO, 2017). While this form of emigration may not be directly

orchestrated by the state, a government's inaction, negligence, or lack of enforcement reflects its broader emigration policies. The failure to address human trafficking and forced emigration effectively can signal implicit complicity or systemic weaknesses in governance, reinforcing exploitative practices within and beyond national borders.

Conclusion

Thus, emigration policies vary based on states' economic structures, political systems, and security concerns. States actively regulate who can leave, under what conditions, and how emigrants maintain homeland connections. Restrictive policies predominate in authoritarian and fragile governments seeking to limit dissent, retain skilled labour, or prevent capital flight through exit bans, bureaucratic obstacles, or economic penalties. Though outright prohibitions have declined since the Cold War, indirect deterrents persist to this day. Permissive policies emerge in states that benefit economically from emigration through remittances and labour programmes. Many developing economies encourage emigration to reduce unemployment and increase foreign exchange, while leveraging diaspora networks for cultural and diplomatic influence. Furthermore, forced emigration policies reflect coercive state actions expelling populations for political, ethnic, or economic reasons. Therefore, the regulation of emigration remains intertwined with state sovereignty and economic strategy. Despite international frameworks establishing the right to leave one's country, freedom of movement remains contested, shaped more by state control than individual agency.

Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* as a Framework for Understanding Emigration Policies in Authoritarian Regimes

Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework offers a foundational lens for understanding the emigration policies of authoritarian regimes. Hirschman's framework is particularly useful in understanding the trade-offs regimes face between allowing citizens to leave and suppressing dissent internally. Originally developed to explain consumer behaviour, market dynamics, and institutional change, Hirschman's framework examined how individuals respond to the decline of firms and organisations. Hirschman conceptualised three responses to institutional decline: exit—leaving the system, voice—expressing dissent through protest or reform efforts, and loyalty—remaining compliant, either due to genuine support or the cost of exit and voice (Hirschman, 1970). This framework has been widely applied to state-citizen relations as well, particularly in authoritarian regimes, where the state actively manipulates these mechanisms rather than passively allowing individuals to choose among them (Docquier et al., 2016; Fomina, 2021; Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025; Michaelsen, 2018; Michel et al., 2023; Pfaff & Kim, 2003).

Hirschman's later work, *Exit, Voice, and the State* (1978), expanded on his original *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework by systematically analysing how states regulate both exit (emigration) and voice

(political protest or participation). He contrasted stateless societies, where exit functioned as the primary mechanism for resolving conflict, with modern nation-states, which actively suppress exit to consolidate power. Drawing on Rousseau's principle of small, self-governing communities in ideal states and anthropological studies, Hirschman highlighted how small, acephalous societies historically relied on exit as a means of conflict avoidance. In such communities, dissatisfied individuals or factions could leave and form new groups, thereby preventing large-scale disputes. In these contexts, exit effectively replaced voice, as political structures did not accommodate internal dissent (Hirschman, 1978). However, with the rise of centralised states, particularly in 17th- and 18th-century Europe, governments sought to curtail exit to maintain territorial control, prevent secession, and ensure economic and political loyalty. As depicted by the discussion on the evolution of emigration policies, the advent of taxation, military conscription, and centralised governance made it imperative for states to bind their populations politically and economically, thereby restricting the freedom to exit (Hirschman, 1978). As a result, modern states actively started to regulate emigration, using legal, economic, and political tools to discourage population outflows that might weaken their authority.

Hirschman (1993) conceptualised voice as political engagement aimed at reforming institutions from within, contrasting it with exit, where individuals withdraw from a failing system. While exit offers an immediate escape, voice represents an attempt to enact change. The effectiveness of voice, however, depends on the state's willingness and capacity to respond to citizen demands. In democratic settings, voice is institutionalised through electoral competition, civic engagement, and public discourse, enabling citizens to express grievances and push for reform (Docquier et al., 2016). Authoritarian regimes, by contrast, systematically curtail voice through censorship, repression, and surveillance, rendering political participation both dangerous and costly. This repression often forces dissatisfied citizens to seek alternatives to voice, most notably exit.

Exit provides a means of avoiding repression, but when widely available, it may inadvertently delay political reform. By allowing the most dissatisfied individuals to leave rather than mobilise, exit can reduce the internal pressure needed for change (Hirschman, 1993). Hence, some authoritarian regimes take advantage of this dynamic by facilitating emigration to defuse dissent, stabilising their rule by letting discontent dissipate rather than escalate (Hoffmann, 2005).

Building on Hirschman's framework, recent scholarship has shifted attention from individuals' decisions to exit, to how regimes themselves strategically regulate exit. Authoritarian regimes do not merely restrict emigration; they actively manipulate it to consolidate power. Emigration policy is thus used to neutralise opposition, preserve economic stability, and limit the emergence of transnational dissent (Docquier et al., 2016; Isaacs, 2022; Michel et al., 2023; Miller & Peters, 2020). In this way, exit is transformed from an act of individual escape into a tool of authoritarian resilience.

While Hirschman's framework provides the conceptual foundation for this chapter, it is important to clarify its role in the thesis as a whole. In this thesis, exit is foregrounded as the central mechanism, given the focus on emigration restrictions, and is empirically operationalised through indicators of freedom of movement, as detailed in the upcoming chapters. By contrast, voice and loyalty serve as conceptual scaffolding of the argument. This selective application reflects the scope of this thesis, which prioritises the politics of exit as a mode of authoritarian governance. At the same time, acknowledging the broader framework of Exit, Voice and Loyalty highlights how authoritarian strategies around emigration cannot be understood in isolation from their effects on domestic voice and the cultivation (or coercion) of loyalty. The framework is used primarily to theorise exit as a political act, while acknowledging that voice and loyalty remain implicit elements. Yet, though Hirschman's framework was groundbreaking and provides a valuable backdrop, it is not sufficient on its own for explaining the regime-specific mechanisms at the heart of this thesis. For that reason, the analysis draws on a conceptual approach of authoritarian resilience that capture the repressive, co-optative, and legitimatising mechanisms in relation to exit strategies of authoritarian rule. By delimiting the empirical scope in this way, the analysis highlights the centrality of exit without overstating the evidence for the other dimensions.

Exit for Regime Stability

As discussed in Chapter 1, authoritarian regimes frequently manage dissent by selectively regulating emigration, allowing political dissidents to leave while restricting the exit of individuals critical to regime stability. By permitting the departure of opposition figures, regimes neutralise potential threats of voice without resorting to overt repression, thereby maintaining an appearance of openness while preventing domestic unrest (Michel et al., 2023). However, they may simultaneously curtail the emigration of skilled professionals, business elites, and military personnel, recognising that their departure could weaken administrative capacity or lead to the formation of rival power structures abroad (Miller & Peters, 2020).

Beyond managing opposition, emigration can serve as a "safety valve", mitigating political instability by allowing citizens to leave rather than voice against the regime. In periods of economic crisis, authoritarian regimes often facilitate outmigration to reduce unemployment, pre-empt social unrest, secure remittance flows and remove threatening opposition groups (De Haas et al., 2019; De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011; Hoffmann, 2005; Horz & Marbach, 2022; Lueders, 2021; Michel et al., 2023; Miller & Peters, 2014, 2020; Lindström, 2021; Tsourapas, 2018, 2020;). This is evident in the long-standing history of authoritarian governments utilising emigration to serve their own ends, particularly in mitigating internal dissent and fortifying regime stability (Amor, 2003; De Haas & Vezzoli, 2011; Michel et al., 2023; Miller & Peters, 2014, 2020; Tsourapas, 2018, 2020). A classic example of this strategy is evident in the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in 1977 (Amor, 2003). This strategic

manoeuvre not only removed immediate threats but also served as a warning to others who might harbour oppositional sentiments. Similarly, other historical examples illustrate how regimes use emigration as a strategic tool rather than simply a reactive measure. During the Mariel boatlift of 1980, Fidel Castro's Government facilitated the mass departure of political opponents while ensuring that key regime-aligned elites remained in Cuba (Colomer, 2000). Nicolás Maduro's Government in Venezuela encouraged the emigration of economically struggling citizens to reduce social pressure while blocking the departure of military personnel and high-ranking officials whose defection could destabilise the regime (Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025). However, regimes often respond with coercive measures if emigration escalates beyond state control. The case of East Germany exemplifies this shift—as large numbers of citizens defected to West Germany in the late 1950s, the regime responded by constructing the Berlin Wall in 1961 to physically block further emigration (Amor, 2003; Hirschman, 1993; Lueders, 2021; Tsourapas, 2018, 2020). These cases demonstrate that authoritarian emigration policies are carefully designed to control dissent while preserving internal stability.

The Overlap of Exit and Voice in Authoritarianism

In authoritarian contexts, exit and voice are not necessarily binary choices but can coexist and function simultaneously. Hirschman (1993) argued that exit and voice can also reinforce and amplify each other. Individuals and groups often navigate a spectrum of strategies that blend both exit and voice to challenge or cope with oppressive systems. Exit opportunities often influence the propensity for voice. For instance, in the context of the East German revolution of 1989–1990, a study found an inverted-U relationship between emigration (exit) and protest (voice). Moderate levels of emigration were associated with increased protest activity, suggesting that the possibility of exit can embolden those who remain to voice dissent, while excessive emigration could deplete the critical mass needed for effective protest (Pfaff & Kim, 2003).

Authoritarian regimes also permit regulated emigration under strict conditions, ensuring that emigrants remain financially and politically dependent on the state. The concept of “bounded exit”, as introduced by Yi and Bahk (2022), describes how certain authoritarian regimes permit regulated migration under strict conditions, ensuring that emigrants remain financially and politically tethered to the state. This strategy allows regimes to benefit economically from controlled migration while minimising the risk of political dissent abroad. For instance, in North Korea, during the famine in the 1990s, market traders and labour migrants abroad provided economic lifelines while remaining tied to the regime through remittances and legal constraints. These non-defecting labourers worked under contracts that generated foreign currency for the North Korean Government, thereby contributing to the state's economy (Margesson et al., 2007; Yi & Bahk, 2022). Simultaneously, the regime criminalised unauthorised departures, especially those aimed at defecting to South Korea, treating such acts as treasonous offences (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This dual policy enabled North Korea

to harness economic benefits from its citizens working abroad while maintaining strict control over their movements and allegiances.

When authoritarian regimes give any exit option, it is also a response to the failure of the accountability mechanisms of a regime. For instance, corruption is extremely prevalent in regimes that rely highly on co-optation for survival (Markowitz, 2017). If citizens perceive corruption as widespread and persistent, they may become disillusioned with voice-based alternatives such as voting or protesting, leading them to seek emigration as an alternative means of addressing their grievances (Hirschman, 1970; Schneider, 2015; Sellar, 2009). This departure can weaken domestic political movements by removing politically aware, reform-minded citizens from the system, reinforcing a cycle where corruption remains unchecked due to the absence of those most motivated to challenge it (Helms, 2023). Corruption-sensitive citizens do not simply weigh exit and voice simultaneously but gradually shift from voice to silence before ultimately pursuing exit. Hence, individuals who perceive high corruption are less likely to participate in elections or express confidence in democratic institutions, signalling a pre-emptive disengagement from voice before choosing to exit (Ivlevs & King, 2017). The departure of informed citizens reduces domestic pressure for political reform, making it more difficult to address grievances over time. However, some emigrants may choose to engage in activism transnationally (discussed later), challenging the traditional exit-voice dichotomy (Helms, 2023; Ivlevs & King, 2017).

In authoritarian settings, voice may not always disappear but instead shift into informal channels, as formal institutions such as elections, legislatures, and legal advocacy are often repressed. Well-connected citizens can rely on personal networks with bureaucrats, party officials, or local elites to access services, evade restrictions, or resolve disputes, reinforcing a patron-client system where favours are exchanged for loyalty (Inoguchi, 2017). Corruption also becomes a functional form of political expression, allowing individuals to bypass inefficient or discriminatory policies when direct protest is too risky. For example, while formal dissent is tightly controlled in China, local corruption enables negotiations over land rights and business regulations. Thus, authoritarian regimes often tolerate limited informal voice as a pressure-release mechanism, ensuring stability while maintaining centralised power (Huang, 2015; Pan & Chen, 2018). Hence, some authoritarian regimes remain stable despite governance failure as they allow limited informal voice to substitute for genuine political participation (Inoguchi, 2017).

Alternatively, exit can also facilitate voice, even within strict political constraints. Following the North Korean example, regulated economic emigration allowed some citizens to temporarily leave and return with money and information, subtly shaping domestic economic policies (Kim et al., 2021; Robinson, 2010). While direct criticism of the ruling Kim family remained off-limits, returning migrants contributed to discussions on local governance and market reforms, creating a controlled

space for limited dissent. Within such authoritarian contexts, a hierarchy of exit and voice exists, where the degree of state control over emigration determines an individual's ability to influence domestic affairs (Robinson, 2010; Yi & Bahk, 2022). Hence, while allowing regulated emigration benefits the regime economically by generating foreign currency and trade opportunities, it also introduces external influences, such as exposure to foreign markets and media (Yi & Bahk, 2022).

Economic influence also reinforces emigrants' political voice. Emigrants frequently send financial remittances to their families, reducing recipients' dependence on state-controlled resources. This economic autonomy can diminish the regime's provision legitimacy, fostering a civil society more inclined to demand political reforms. This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "democratic remittances", illustrates that emigration does not always neutralise opposition but can instead externalise it, making it more difficult for regimes to suppress political mobilisation (Docquier et al., 2016; Escribà-Folch et al., 2015; Fomina, 2021). The dispersion of remittances across communities can create a collective sense of economic empowerment, fostering a conducive environment for political discourse and activism (Bayat, 2000, 2002; Newland & Patrick, 2004). This phenomenon often leads to a more informed and engaged electorate capable of mobilising for democratic reforms. Hence, remittances also serve as a mechanism for emigrants to demand political participation in their home countries (Burgess, 2012; Fomina, 2021). Additionally, the global exposure and networks that come with transnational financial flows often introduce new ideas and perspectives, further challenging authoritarian narratives and promoting democratic ideals (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013; Rudra, 2005).

Similarly, exit can also strengthen voice through transnational activism. Once emigrants are outside the reach of the authoritarian regime, they benefit from the enhanced freedoms of expression and assembly provided by the destination country (Hoffmann, 2005; Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025). Exiled activists do not fully "exit" but continue to exercise political voice through digital networks, creating new challenges for authoritarian control. With diaspora mobilisation, exiled activists can influence home-country politics by lobbying, funding opposition movements, and organising protests from abroad (Hoffmann, 2012). For instance, Russian exiles have played an active role in shaping international responses to Putin's authoritarianism, advocating for sanctions and exposing corruption through independent media outlets (Ivlevs, 2021). Similarly, Cuban and Venezuelan exiles have lobbied U.S. policymakers to adopt hardline stances against their home governments, demonstrating that emigration does not always equate to political disengagement (Colomer, 2000; Ivlevs, 2021). These cases suggest that authoritarian regimes cannot assume that exit eliminates opposition voice; instead, emigration can reconfigure dissent into a transnational force. Exiles can use online platforms, social media, and international media networks to bypass state censorship, mobilise opposition, and influence international discourse. This trend, on the flip side, has intensified transnational repression,

with authoritarian regimes adopting digital surveillance, cyberattacks, and targeted harassment to silence exiled dissidents and curtail their political engagement (Michaelson, 2018; Tsourapas, 2018, 2020). Thus, while exit weakens domestic opposition by removing dissidents, it also creates “externalised voice”—hostile exile communities that can mobilise international pressure against the regime (Hoffmann, 2005).

These phenomena challenge the traditional binary between exit and voice by demonstrating how transnational migration allows emigrants to maintain ties to their home countries and continue exerting political influence. Rather than silencing dissent, emigration often leads to the transnationalisation of voice, where migrants externalise their political engagement through lobbying international actors, mobilising diaspora communities, and participating in home-country politics from abroad.

Loyalty and Silence in Authoritarian Regimes

Hirschman’s (1970) framework also focuses on loyalty as one of the responses to dissatisfaction. Loyalty is not simply passive compliance but a strategic choice made when neither exit nor voice is viable. Loyalty can arise from a lack of alternatives; for example, citizens remain loyal not because they support the regime but because exit is too costly or voice is too risky (Clark et al., 2017). Thus, loyalty in authoritarian regimes is often not a product of genuine ideological support but rather a form of resigned acceptance, where citizens comply with the system out of a lack of viable options rather than trust in the government (Larratt-Smith & Leon, 2025). The regime can reinforce this passive loyalty by suppressing dissent, manipulating elections, and providing economic incentives that discourage opposition. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which limited opportunities for voice push individuals toward exit, and the absence of exit opportunities solidifies reluctant loyalty. Although this strategy can contribute to regime stability in the short term, this coerced loyalty can lead to a brittle political system, where underlying discontent may surface explosively if the regime’s economic performance and elite cohesion deteriorate (Gel’man, 2010b).

Beyond loyalty, silence serves as a distinct yet equally significant factor in authoritarian politics (Vieira, 2021). Silence is not merely the absence of voice but a strategic adaptation to repression. Authoritarian regimes often cultivate a climate of legal ambiguity and broad repressive laws, fostering uncertainty that compels individuals to engage in pre-emptive self-censorship rather than openly resisting. This suppression is further reinforced by social networks such as family, friends, and peers, who caution against speaking out, creating a feedback loop in which silence becomes the perceived social norm, discouraging political engagement (Yuen & Lee, 2025). Silence serves several critical functions for authoritarian rulers, allowing them to appear unchallenged, suppress opposition without overt coercion, and manufacture legitimacy. However, this reliance on silence is inherently fragile, as misinterpreting it as loyalty can lead to sudden regime collapse when grievances reach a breaking

point. Similar to loyalty, silence does not indicate genuine support. In highly repressive states, individuals often remain silent out of fear rather than loyalty, making it difficult for regimes to determine whether silence signifies consent or concealed resistance (Isaacs, 2022; Olimpieva, 2024; Salamey & Pearson, 2012). The East German experience before 1989 illustrates the risks of authoritarian overreliance on silence. For decades, the Socialist Unity Party mistook public quiescence for stability, failing to recognise the underlying dissatisfaction simmering beneath the surface. When exit options were blocked, this silent discontent erupted into mass protests, ultimately leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall (Hirschman, 1993; Vieira, 2021). Thus, authoritarian rulers who misinterpret silence as loyalty risk sudden and unpredictable collapse when alternative outlets for dissent, such as exit, are eliminated (Vieira, 2021; Yuen & Lee, 2025).

Conclusion

Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework provides a powerful lens for understanding how authoritarian regimes manipulate emigration policies to maintain political control. Exit, voice, and loyalty are actively shaped by the state, with regimes using a combination of coercion, incentives, and legal constraints to regulate emigration and suppress dissent. While exit can function as a pressure valve, allowing regimes to rid themselves of opposition figures while mitigating economic crises, it also carries the risk of backfiring, as exit does not always signify political disengagement; rather, it can serve as a tool for resistance. Diaspora activism, democratic remittances, and transnational opposition movements illustrate how exit can evolve into an externalised form of voice, challenging the assumption that emigration weakens political mobilisation. At the same time, in the absence of exit, loyalty and silence play crucial roles in sustaining authoritarian rule, with regimes fostering a climate of fear that forces individuals into compliance or self-censorship. However, as history has shown, silence is a fragile foundation for political stability, and when exit is blocked, long-suppressed grievances can erupt into mass uprisings. Ultimately, the strategic use of emigration as a governance tool reflects both the strengths and vulnerabilities of authoritarian regimes. While carefully managed emigration policies can reinforce regime durability, they also expose inherent contradictions that, if miscalculated, may lead to destabilisation or even collapse. To fully understand the conditions under which emigration policies contribute to either resilience or vulnerability, it is necessary to situate them within the broader framework of authoritarian survival strategies. The following chapter engages with this framework by exploring the role of repression, legitimisation, and co-optation in shaping the stability of authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 3: Authoritarian Resilience and Pillars of Stability

This chapter examines the key mechanisms that sustain authoritarian stability, tracing the evolution of scholarly perspectives on the subject. By identifying the factors contributing to regime durability, this chapter establishes a foundation for understanding how emigration policies function within the broader framework of authoritarian resilience. Additionally, it moves beyond Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework to focus more directly on regime stability, addressing its limitations in fully capturing the strategic use of emigration policy by authoritarian regimes. While Hirschman's framework offers valuable insights into the regime-citizen dynamic, it does not fully account for how a regime's broader stability—shaped by various political, economic, and institutional factors, can influence its approach to emigration policy. This chapter, therefore, sets the stage for the next chapter, which examines the specific mechanisms linking the pillars of authoritarian stability to emigration policy.

I begin by examining the major waves of research on authoritarianism, leading to the introduction of Gerschewski's (2013) framework of the three pillars of authoritarian stability—legitimation, repression, and co-optation, the theoretical framework underpinning the empirical research behind this thesis. I then examine the structural and contextual factors that shape these pillars of authoritarian durability, including economic development, state capacity and regime type. Within regime type, I discuss characteristics of regime types that can lead to variation in their stability, establishing the groundwork for the discussion on the personalist regime type and its potential impact on emigration policy variation in the subsequent chapter. I also discuss the origins and succession of leadership and consider the increasing significance of authoritarian collaboration and learning, highlighting how these factors impact regime stability.

Understanding Authoritarian Resilience

A substantial body of research has sought to explain authoritarian resilience by examining the mechanisms through which these regimes maintain control. Gerschewski (2013) identified three distinct waves in the study of authoritarian stability: the totalitarian paradigm (1940s–1970s), which emerged in response to the dominance of brutal dictatorships of various kinds; the rise of authoritarian studies (1970s–1980s), which challenged deterministic views and explored variations in authoritarian governance; and the neo-institutional turn (1990s–present), which emphasised the role of institutions, elite dynamics, and hybrid regime structures in sustaining authoritarian rule.

The totalitarianism paradigm emerged in the mid-20th century as scholars sought to conceptualise the nature of extreme dictatorial regimes, particularly Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. Totalitarian regimes were characterised by their pursuit of absolute control over society, ideology, and political life. Scholars such as Carl J. Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Hannah Arendt theorised that the stability of such regimes rested on three fundamental mechanisms: ideology, mass mobilisation, and terror. Totalitarianism was not solely defined by the suppression of opposition but by its ambition to reshape individual consciousness and societal structures, effectively eliminating all potential sources of dissent (Arendt, 1951; Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956).

Friedrich and Brzezinski's influential work, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) outlined six defining characteristics of totalitarian regimes that distinguish them from other authoritarian systems. First, they rely on an official ideology, a guiding doctrine that justifies state control and demands absolute loyalty. For instance, in Nazi Germany, racial purity formed the ideological core, while the Soviet Union promoted Marxist-Leninism as the inevitable path of history. Second, totalitarian states are structured around a single mass party led by a supreme leader, infiltrating all aspects of governance and social life, as seen in the Nazi Party, the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and Mao's Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Third, repression in totalitarianism was institutionalised through a system of terror enforced by secret police that monitor, imprison, and execute perceived enemies of the state. Fourth, totalitarian regimes exercise complete control over media and information to reinforce ideological control, ensuring that newspapers, radio, and education are aligned with state doctrine. This was evident in Goebbels' propaganda machine in Nazi Germany and Soviet control of the newspaper, *Pravda*, and other state-run media which were heavily controlled. Fifth, economic and military structures are also tightly controlled. Through policies such as Stalin's Five-Year Plans, Nazi Germany's war economy, and Mao's Great Leap Forward, totalitarian regimes prioritised state-directed central economic planning over private enterprise. Finally, social and cultural life was deeply regulated, with youth indoctrination, censorship, and mass organisations shaping citizens from an early age, as demonstrated by the Hitler Youth, the Komsomol (Young Communist League) in the Soviet Union, and Maoist political campaigns. Hence, totalitarian regimes sought absolute ideological conformity to sustain their rule (Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956).

While Friedrich and Brzezinski provided a model that centred on the formal apparatus of totalitarianism, Arendt emphasised the psychological and existential dimensions of totalitarian stability. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt argued that totalitarianism goes beyond dictatorship by aiming to eliminate independent thought and individuality. The regime's ideology is presented as absolute truth, legitimising mass purges, surveillance, and control. Communist states

framed their repression as part of historical necessity, while Nazi Germany justified racial extermination as a scientific imperative (Arendt, 1951).

A key mechanism of totalitarian stability is the destruction of individuality as citizens are reduced to passive instruments of the state. As Arendt (1951) noted, “the fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (p. 296). Without political membership or recognition, individuals are excluded from participating in public life, rendering their voices insignificant and their actions futile. Mass mobilisation was essential to achieving this. Public rallies, compulsory political participation, and personality cults reinforce submission to the leader, as seen in the Stalinist Soviet Union, Maoist China, and Hitler’s Germany. Mass mobilisation also serves a disciplinary function when everyone is forced to demonstrate loyalty, as it becomes harder to distinguish true believers from those acting out of fear. This isolates dissenters, making opposition more difficult to organise (Arendt, 1951, 1958b). Similarly, propaganda was also an important part of the totalitarian toolkit to reinforce loyalty and isolate dissenters. Through state-controlled narratives, revisionist history, and enemy demonisation, totalitarian regimes manufacture a worldview where the leader is infallible and the opposition is treasonous. Stalin erased Trotsky from Soviet history, Nazi propaganda depicted Jews as existential threats, and Mao’s China promoted a sanitised version of the Communist struggle. By ensuring that citizens are bombarded with ideological messages daily, totalitarian regimes reduce the space for alternative thinking and create self-reinforcing cycles of support (Arendt, 1956, 1958a, 1958b).

By the late 1960s, scholars recognised that not all authoritarian regimes functioned like totalitarian states. While totalitarianism aimed for complete ideological and social control, many authoritarian regimes operated more pragmatically, prioritising elite survival and economic management over mass mobilisation. The authoritarianism studies of this period focused on how regime structures, socioeconomic conditions, and informal power networks contributed to regime stability. Unlike totalitarian regimes, which sought absolute control, authoritarian governments often allowed limited pluralism, relied on elite coalitions, and selectively repressed opposition. These adaptations made them more flexible and durable, allowing them to persist despite economic crises or leadership transitions (O’Donnell, 1978; Roth, 1968; Von Beyme, 1978).

Juan Linz’s work was foundational in distinguishing authoritarian regimes from totalitarian ones, a distinction largely absent in earlier totalitarian studies. In *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* ([1975] 2000), Linz argued that authoritarianism was defined by limited pluralism, a lack of ideological mobilisation, and elite-driven governance. Unlike totalitarian states, which aimed to reshape society through ideology and mobilisation, authoritarian regimes focused on sustaining elite rule and maintaining order rather than enforcing mass ideological conformity and through

demobilising the population by turning them away from politics through force. Juan Linz identified four key features of authoritarian rule that distinguish it from totalitarianism. First, authoritarian regimes restrict but do not eliminate political pluralism, allowing some non-threatening opposition while preventing genuine political competition. Second, they do not rely on mass ideological mobilisation; instead of enforcing rigid doctrines, they justify their rule through stability, nationalism, or economic growth. Third, their primary goal is power maintenance rather than societal transformation, relying on co-optation and targeted repression rather than mass surveillance or ideological re-education. Finally, authority is typically concentrated in a personalist leader or bureaucratic elite rather than being embedded in a fully mobilised party-state. These characteristics make authoritarian regimes more flexible and pragmatic than totalitarian systems, allowing them to adapt to crises without collapsing. Linz's framework helped explain why authoritarian regimes were often more durable than totalitarian ones. By avoiding costly mass mobilisation efforts, allowing limited dissent, and adapting their strategies in response to crises, these regimes could stabilise power without provoking large-scale resistance (Linz, 2000).

While Linz distinguished authoritarianism from totalitarianism, Guillermo O'Donnell (1973) provided an analysis of how authoritarian regimes functioned, particularly in Latin America. O'Donnell's theory of "bureaucratic authoritarianism" explained how military-led regimes in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile sustained power through elite alliances and economic modernisation. These regimes were not personalist dictatorships but technocratic-military coalitions that emphasised order, development, and the suppression of mass politics (O'Donnell, 1973).

Bureaucratic authoritarian regimes had several defining traits. First, they were led by military or technocratic elites rather than charismatic leaders, presenting themselves as caretaker governments focused on national stability. Second, they sought to exclude the working class from politics, repressing labour unions and leftist movements while aligning with business elites and foreign investors. Third, they justified their rule through economic performance, arguing that authoritarian governance was necessary for modernisation. Finally, these regimes used targeted repression rather than mass terror, eliminating opposition through disappearances, imprisonment, and media control without resorting to totalitarian surveillance or indoctrination (O'Donnell, 1973, 1978). Hence, authoritarian regimes could consolidate power through economic development, using controlled liberalisation and elite co-optation to maintain stability. O'Donnell's theory explained why many Latin American military dictatorships remained resilient for decades, only transitioning to democracy when economic crises weakened their legitimacy (Remmer & Merks, 1982).

The authoritarianism studies of the 1970s–1980s also examined how different authoritarian regimes stabilised power in diverse political and economic contexts. In Latin America, military juntas adopted the bureaucratic authoritarian model, prioritising economic modernisation and elite alliances while

suppressing opposition. In the Middle East, many regimes followed a neo-patrimonial model, where power was maintained through personalist rule, patronage networks, and resource wealth rather than mass repression or ideological control. Meanwhile, in post-colonial Africa, many states embraced one-party rule, using state resources and ethnic coalitions to maintain power while limiting political competition. Despite these differences, a common theme across these regions was that authoritarian regimes relied less on ideology and more on strategic adaptation. Instead of enforcing total loyalty through propaganda and mass mobilisation, they used economic policies, controlled liberalisation, and elite co-optation to sustain authority (Arat, 1988; Eisenstadt, 1964; Remmer & Merks, 1982).

By the 1990s, scholars moved beyond earlier structural and ideological explanations of authoritarian rule, shifting focus to how institutions function within non-democratic regimes. A central claim of the neo-institutional approach is that ruling parties serve as key stabilising mechanisms in authoritarian regimes. Strong, institutionalised ruling parties enhance regime resilience by structuring elite interactions, preventing factionalism, and providing a predictable framework for leadership succession. Unlike personalist dictatorships, where power is concentrated in a single ruler, single-party regimes institutionalise elite cooperation, reducing the likelihood of coups or elite fragmentation (Brownlee, 2007a; Garibov, 2022; Van den Bosch, 2020). Beyond elite cohesion, ruling parties function as tools for opposition co-optation, incorporating potential challengers into the system while denying them real power (Gandhi, 2008; Kavasoglu, 2022; Turovsky, 2014). This controlled inclusion allows regimes to channel opposition grievances through formal institutions rather than through mass protests or rebellion.

The neo-institutional approaches also examine how authoritarian regimes use formal institutions to regulate intra-elite conflict and prevent coups. Authoritarian rule is inherently precarious because elites constantly weigh the risks of staying loyal versus defecting. In systems where power is highly concentrated, elites may turn against the ruler if they fear being excluded from power or if they perceive the regime as weakening (Gandhi & Heller, 2018; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007). This explains why many autocrats create advisory councils, ruling parties, or legislative bodies—not to share power, but to provide elites with predictable access to resources and influence, reducing their incentives to defect. In this regard, legislatures in authoritarian regimes serve as mechanisms for elite co-optation rather than democratic representation. By allowing elites and business interests a controlled space for negotiation, authoritarian rulers reduce the likelihood of elite rebellions and maintain stability through structured patronage networks (Gandhi, 2008; He & Warren, 2011; Meng & Paine, 2022; Williamson & Magaloni, 2020).

The neo-institutional approach also highlights how elections, rather than being democratising forces, function as mechanisms of authoritarian control (Bernhard et al., 2020; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Magaloni, 2006). In hegemonic-party systems, rulers hold elections not

to transfer power but to signal regime strength, manage elite expectations, and divide opposition forces (Magaloni, 2006; Reuter & Gandhi, 2011). By staging controlled electoral competition, authoritarian rulers co-opt opposition parties, distribute patronage, and deter elite defections. This argument was further strengthened when Levitsky and Way (2010) introduced the concept of competitive authoritarianism, which argued that many non-democratic regimes adopt democratic institutions but manipulate them in ways that tilt the playing field in favour of the ruling elite. In these regimes, formal opposition parties and elections exist, but they are systematically undermined through media control, judicial interference, and repression (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Schedler (2006) further expands on this by developing the concept of electoral authoritarianism, where regimes hold elections but engage in media censorship, vote-rigging, legal restrictions on opposition parties, and selective repression to ensure that elections do not lead to genuine power transitions. However, Schedler (2006, 2013) notes that elections also create vulnerabilities, as they provide opposition movements with institutional openings to challenge the regime. Additionally, competitive authoritarian regimes are inherently unstable because they operate in a constant state of tension between democratic institutions and authoritarian control. The very institutions that autocrats manipulate for their survival (elections, courts, legislatures, media) also create opportunities for opposition mobilisation. This means that these regimes frequently experience political crises, mass protests, or electoral upsets that threaten their survival. When opposition forces grow strong enough, competitive authoritarian regimes face a dilemma—they must either increase repression (risking domestic unrest and international condemnation) or allow genuine competition (risking electoral defeat). This explains why some regimes successfully manipulate democratic institutions for decades while others succumb to democratic movements or elite fractures (Levitsky & Way, 2002, 2010).

While these scholars emphasise how authoritarian regimes can achieve stability through institutional design, others have also focused on a more “actor-centred” strategic game of repression and elite co-optation. Acemoglu and Robinson (2000) argue that the strategic use of repression is critical to the longevity of authoritarian regimes, viewing it through the lens of rational choice and game theory. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that authoritarian rulers must carefully calibrate repression, using it neither too little (which allows opposition to grow) nor too much (which risks backlash or elite defections). In this framework, repression is not simply about crushing dissent but an optimisation problem, where rulers must determine the “optimal” level of coercion to deter rebellion while avoiding excessive instability (Svolik, 2008). A second major concern in this rational choice approach is intra-elite cohesion. Since defection within the ruling elite can lead to coups or internal power struggles, rulers must prevent elite fragmentation by either co-optation or the threat of force. The danger of elite splits is always present, and dictators must take pre-emptive measures to ensure elite loyalty (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000, 2001; Bayulgen et al., 2018; Tanneberg, 2020).

Similarly, Svoblik (2012) presents authoritarian rule as an ongoing strategic game of elite bargaining, repression, and survival. Svoblik's work aligns with the rational choice and elite conflict models of Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), challenging the assumption that institutions alone can sustain non-democratic rule. Svoblik questions the effectiveness of institutions as stabilising mechanisms in authoritarian regimes, arguing that power struggles within ruling elites often override institutional constraints, making these structures contingent on the dictator's will rather than independent sources of stability. He identifies two core dilemmas that autocrats must navigate to maintain power: the problem of authoritarian control and the problem of power-sharing. The problem of authoritarian control refers to how rulers sustain authority through repression, preventing mass uprisings and securing loyalty within the security apparatus. Meanwhile, the problem of authoritarian power-sharing highlights the challenge of managing elite relations and preventing coups, as even loyal insiders can turn against the ruler if power is not carefully distributed (Boix & Svoblik, 2013; Svoblik, 2008, 2012). Thus, the focus is shifted from institutions as stabilisers to the ongoing strategic bargaining between dictators, elites, and security forces, showing that authoritarian survival depends less on formal rules and more on the ruler's ability to maintain dominance over both the masses and the elite. Svoblik (2012) hence identifies two distinct tools: co-optation and repression. To this, Gerschewski (2013) added a third tool, legitimisation, theorising the three pillars of authoritarian stability.

The Three Pillars of Authoritarian Stability: Repression, Legitimation and Co-optation

Gerschewski's (2013) argument in *The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes* builds on and expands neo-institutionalist, rational choice and elite-bargaining approaches by proposing that authoritarian stability rests on three interconnected pillars: legitimisation, repression, and co-optation. Gerschewski (2010, 2013) argues that authoritarian stability is achieved through a combination of strategies targeting different actors: the general population, organised opposition, and ruling elites.

The first pillar, legitimisation, refers to the process by which authoritarian rulers seek public acceptance or at least passive consent. Gerschewski critiques earlier studies that downplayed legitimacy in authoritarian regimes, arguing that even autocrats must justify their rule to maintain stability. Drawing from Weberian legitimacy theory, he highlights that rulers rely on performance-based, ideological, or procedural legitimisation to create a sense of rightfulness (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2018; Gerschewski, 2015, 2018). Hence, legitimisation is a crucial but often overlooked factor in authoritarian endurance—without it, rulers become overly reliant on coercion, which is costly and unsustainable.

The second pillar, repression, serves as the backbone of authoritarianism, preventing opposition movements from gaining traction. However, Gerschewski notes that repression alone cannot guarantee stability, so it must be carefully calibrated. Excessive repression can lead to public backlash, elite defections, and international condemnation, while too little repression allows opposition forces to organise effectively. Gerschewski (2013, 2015) distinguishes between high-intensity repression (e.g., mass arrests and assassinations) and low-intensity repression (e.g., surveillance, media control, and economic restrictions), arguing that successful regimes use a mix of both.

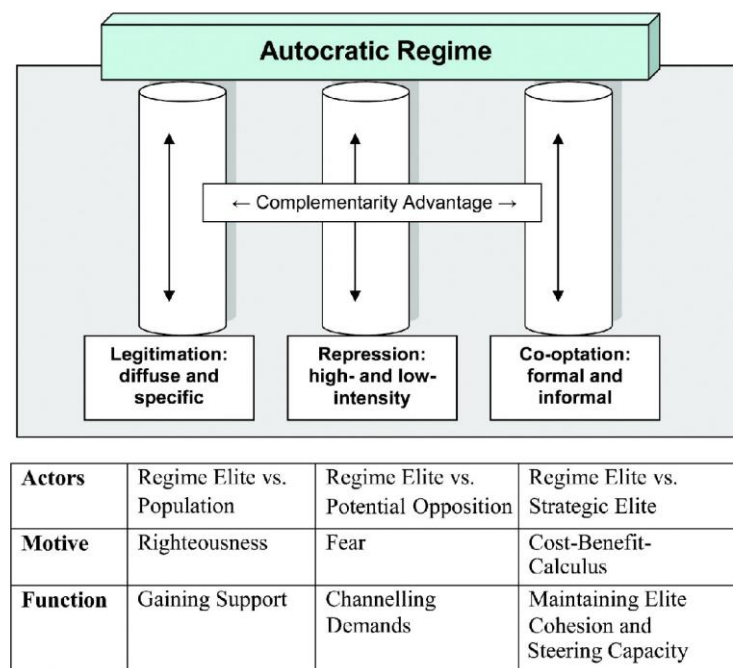
The third pillar, co-optation, focuses on elite management and political inclusion. This pillar emphasises that autocrats must strategically incorporate key elites, opposition figures, and economic actors into the regime to prevent elite fragmentation and potential coups. This is done through patronage networks, party structures, business partnerships, and selective political concessions. Gerschewski (2013) argues that co-optation is particularly effective when combined with institutional mechanisms such as legislatures and controlled elections.

Furthermore, authoritarian stability is not static but an evolving process shaped by reinforcement mechanisms that sustain legitimisation, repression, and co-optation over time. Gerschewski (2013) identifies three interdependent reinforcement processes: exogenous, self, and reciprocal reinforcement, which explain why some authoritarian regimes endure despite economic crises, elite fractures, or popular unrest, while others collapse when they fail to maintain these stabilising mechanisms.

Exogenous reinforcement stems from external resources that sustain authoritarian rule. For instance, foreign military aid and security alliances, such as U.S. support for Egypt or Russia's backing of Syria, bolster repression and shield regimes from international pressure (Gerschewski, 2013; Lewis, 2024). Self-reinforcement arises when regimes become path-dependent, locking themselves into repression, patronage, or legitimisation strategies. For example, Assad's violent repression during the Arab Spring foreclosed the option of de-escalation (Bellin, 2012), while Russia's reliance on oligarchic patronage entrenched elite loyalty but increased systemic corruption (Gel'man, 2016). Reciprocal reinforcement highlights how the pillars of stability interact. Repression deters dissent and stabilises elites; legitimisation reduces the need for coercion; and co-optation integrates rivals (Dukalskis, 2017; Gerschewski, 2013). However, this mutual dependence also constitutes a structural vulnerability because if one pillar weakens, the entire system becomes susceptible to destabilisation. For instance, a crisis in economic legitimacy may compel the regime to intensify repression, yet excessive coercion risks alienating elites and undermining co-optation, thereby exacerbating internal fragmentation. This interconnected fragility helps explain the often abrupt nature of authoritarian collapses, as once a critical stabilising mechanism fails, the resulting crisis can trigger a cascading breakdown of the regime (Gerschewski, 2013).

Gerschewski's framework thus provides a dynamic and interconnected understanding of authoritarian durability, demonstrating that stability depends not on any single mechanism but on a self-reinforcing equilibrium of legitimacy, repression, and co-optation (see Figure 3.1). While exogenous factors such as economic wealth, military alliances, and diplomatic protection can bolster authoritarian stability, they can also introduce external vulnerabilities. Moreover, path-dependent governance structures create long-term rigidity, increasing the likelihood of sudden, rather than gradual, collapse. Most critically, authoritarian regimes do not survive through coercion alone; their resilience depends on the interplay of multiple reinforcing strategies, which must continually adapt to internal and external pressures.

Figure 3.1. The pillars of stability.



Source: Gerschewski (2013)

Factors Impacting Authoritarian Pillars of Stability

Over the last two decades, political science has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving from studying authoritarian regimes primarily as deficient or transitional political systems on a presumed path toward democratisation, to analysing them as distinctive political systems worthy of theoretical attention in their own right. This reorientation has produced rich comparative scholarship on authoritarian institutional design, resilience, and variation, recognising that these regimes operate according to their own political logic rather than simply representing incomplete democratic transitions. In particular, the survival and deepening of authoritarianism has recently received significant scholarly attention, with a focus on factors that contribute to their resilience (Escribà-

Folch, 2013; Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Frantz, 2018a; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Meng, 2021; Paine, 2022; Svolik, 2012; Wright et al., 2015).

A key strand of this literature explores variation in authoritarian durability across regime types. Empirical studies indicate that one-party regimes exhibit greater longevity than military regimes or personalist dictatorships, largely due to their ability to institutionalise power, regulate elite competition, and mitigate succession crises (Geddes, 1999; Levitsky & Way, 2012; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Zeng, 2021). Ruling parties serve as critical instruments of elite management and mass mobilisation, allowing regimes to co-opt opposition, integrate societal elites, and strategically distribute patronage to sustain their rule (Kavasoglu, 2022; Levitsky & Way, 2012; Magaloni, 2006; Meng & Paine, 2022; Reuter & Gandhi, 2011).

Beyond regime type, state capacity plays a crucial role in authoritarian resilience. Research suggests that regimes with effective bureaucratic control, coercive infrastructure, and extractive economic policies are better equipped to suppress dissent and mitigate external shocks (Andersen et al., 2016; Croissant & Hellmann, 2018; Slater, 2010; Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024; Van Ham & Seim, 2018). Likewise, strategic resource management, particularly in rentier states, has been shown to strengthen authoritarian stability by reducing the regime's reliance on taxation and minimising public demands for political accountability (Brooks & Kurtz, 2016; Ross, 2012; Smith, 2004).

Another significant factor shaping authoritarian stability is the origin and power transitions of authoritarian regimes. Levitsky and Way (2012) argue that regimes with strong historical narratives of state-building, national liberation, or revolutionary struggle are often more resilient because they can construct ideological justifications for authoritarian rule. In addition to historical legitimacy, institutionalised succession planning plays a crucial role in authoritarian durability. Regimes that develop clear mechanisms for leadership transitions reduce the risks of elite fragmentation and instability (Hadenius & Teorell, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2016; Wright & Escibà-Folch, 2012).

Additionally, scholars have explored the relationship between economic development and authoritarian persistence. While modernisation theory traditionally posited that economic growth leads to democratisation (Lipset, 1959), contemporary research challenges this assumption, showing that higher levels of economic growth can actually enhance authoritarian stability by increasing state legitimacy and reducing incentives for political opposition (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Przeworski et al., 2000).

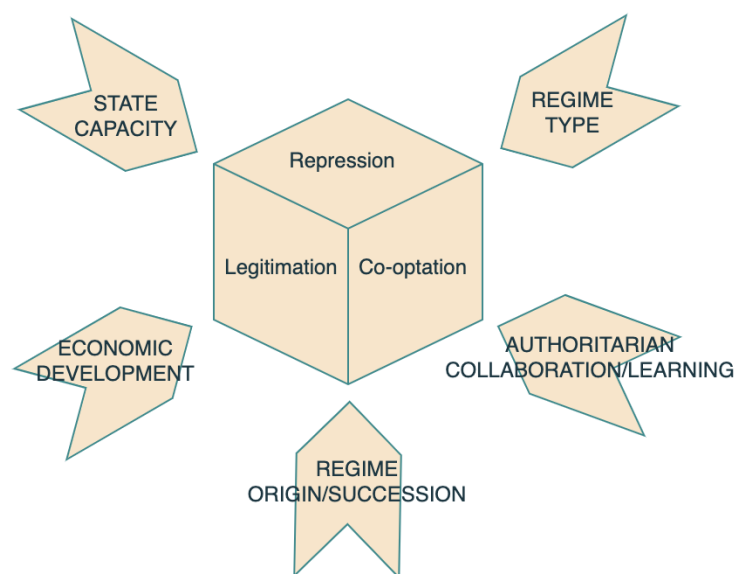
Furthermore, recent scholarship on authoritarian resilience highlights how regimes collaborate and learn from each other to maintain power. This process, known as authoritarian learning, involves authoritarian regimes observing and emulating each other's strategies to suppress dissent and counter democratic influences (Cottiero & Emmons, 2024). Such collaboration enables regimes to adapt to

new challenges, refine repressive measures, and bolster their stability in the face of internal and external pressures.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the three pillars of authoritarian stability and the aforementioned structural factors that influence them, including state capacity, regime type, economic development, authoritarian collaboration/learning, and regime origin/succession. Building on the aforementioned perspectives, the following sections focus on the internal and external dimensions of authoritarian resilience, highlighting their role in strengthening the pillars of authoritarian stability:

1. Economic development: How economic growth sustains authoritarian stability. For instance, wealthier regimes can invest heavily in repressive apparatus.
2. Regime type: How the institutional makeup of a regime impacts its stability. For instance, party regimes may strengthen their legitimation through the facade of elections.
3. State capacity: How administrative strength, resource extraction, and coercive institutions shape authoritarian pillars of stability.
4. Regime origin and succession: How the historical legitimacy and strategic planning ensure regime survival. For instance, revolutionary origins contribute to legitimation through the myth of a founding struggle.
5. Collaboration and learning: How authoritarian regimes cooperate, adapt and borrow strategies from one another to reinforce their pillars of regime stability.

Figure 3.2. Relationship between the pillars and factors that impact them.



Economic Development

The relationship between economic development and political stability has been a central debate in comparative politics, with scholars offering competing perspectives on how economic growth influences regime durability and democratisation. Classic modernisation theory (Lipset, 1959) posits that higher levels of economic development lead to greater demands for political participation, ultimately fostering democratic transitions. However, more recent research challenges this deterministic view, suggesting that economic growth can also reinforce authoritarian resilience by increasing regime legitimacy and reducing pressures for democratisation (Geddes, 1999; Kneuer, 2017; Knutsen, 2021; Lührmann et al., 2018; Morgenbesser, 2017; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997).

Economic growth serves as a critical factor of authoritarian stability, as it enables regimes to deliver public goods, sustain patronage networks, and consolidate elite coalitions, thereby mitigating societal grievances and reducing the likelihood of opposition mobilisation. By fostering material well-being, regimes can deflect demands for political liberalisation, using welfare programmes, infrastructure development, and targeted economic liberalisation to co-opt dissent and reinforce their legitimacy. Additionally, sustained economic expansion enhances the state's coercive capacity, allowing regimes to finance repression, strengthen bureaucratic control, and expand surveillance infrastructure, thereby reducing the probability of democratic transitions (Boix, 2011; Boix & Svolik, 2013; Geddes, 1999; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997).

Unlike democracies, where political accountability is institutionalised through elections, authoritarian governments often rely on economic performance as a substitute for political legitimacy (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2010; Schmidt, 2015; Yang & Zhao, 2018). One of the most direct ways economic growth delays democratisation is through state-led redistribution. Authoritarian leaders use increased revenues from GDP growth to provide public goods and maintain subsidies, which foster reliance on the state (Haber, 2006; Pepinsky, 2009). In China, for example, the Communist Party has leveraged economic expansion to provide housing, healthcare, and employment guarantees, reducing incentives for political activism (Tang, 2016; Zhao, 2013). In rapidly growing economies such as China, Singapore, and the Gulf monarchies, rising GDP per capita has been linked to lower levels of political agitation, as material comfort discourages mass mobilisation (Dickson, 2016; Tsai, 2017). In this way, economic growth not only bolsters performance-based legitimacy but also fortifies the institutional mechanisms that sustain authoritarian rule. It serves as a crucial mechanism through which authoritarian regimes delay public demands for democratic reforms.

Furthermore, economic prosperity alters public perceptions of authoritarian governance, making democratisation appear risky rather than necessary, as the fear of instability, economic downturns, or political uncertainty often outweighs democratic aspirations (Bellin, 2012; Nathan, 2003). Empirical studies on post-Soviet and East Asian economies show that high economic growth correlates with

increased regime support, even in the absence of democratic institutions (Chen & Dickson, 2010; Truex, 2017). This is particularly evident in Singapore, a case discussed in Chapter 7, where a strong economic track record has legitimised the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) despite restrictions on political freedoms (Rodan, 2016). In China, surveys indicate that citizens prioritise economic stability over political reform, largely due to fears that multiparty competition might disrupt the country's rapid development (Gallagher & Miller, 2021; Tsai, 2017).

Economic growth also contributes to authoritarian stability by providing regimes with the financial resources necessary to sustain patronage networks and thus pre-empt dissent (Kawamura, 2016; Sharma, 2007). By ensuring economic benefits flow to both elites and key social groups, regimes can cultivate loyalty while neutralising opposition (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Root & May, 2008). In particular, patronage networks play a dual role—they not only reward elites who have a stake in the regime's survival but also bind potential rivals through selective resource distribution (Albertus, 2015; Magaloni, 2008a). This system is evident in China, where sustained economic stability has reinforced localised patronage structures, ensuring elite cohesion and minimising large-scale social unrest (Lee & Zhang, 2013; Tang, 2016). Similarly, Malaysia's long-ruling Barisan Nasional regime used targeted economic incentives to maintain electoral dominance and suppress political challengers (Pepinsky, 2008).

Moreover, economic growth strengthens the coercive apparatus of authoritarian regimes, allowing them to expand security forces, tighten media control, and restrict civil society activism (Lewis & Sagnayeva, 2020; Naughton, 2008). Greater allocation of financial resources to the military, police, and intelligence services ensures that the state maintains a monopoly on violence and suppresses opposition movements before they gain momentum (Dragu & Gieczewski, 2024; Svolik, 2012). In China, the economic boom in the 1990s and 2000s enabled the government to drastically increase the People's Armed Police and paramilitary forces, which have been used to quell protests, suppress ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, and enforce strict political compliance (Greitens, 2020; Naughton, 2008). Economic growth also facilitates the rise of digital authoritarianism, where regimes use advanced technology to monitor, control, and repress dissent (Gallagher & Miller, 2021; Greitens, 2020). With increased state revenues, regimes can invest in artificial intelligence (AI)-driven surveillance, internet censorship, and big data analytics to track political opponents and restrict free speech (Feldstein, 2019).

Conversely, economic downturns have been linked to political instability, elite defections, and increased likelihood of regime transition. Londregan and Poole (1990, 1996) and Przeworski and Limongi (1997) demonstrate that economic crises can erode state legitimacy, deplete patronage resources, and create windows of opportunity for democratisation or alternative forms of authoritarianism. When authoritarian regimes fail to manage economic shocks, they become more

vulnerable to mass protests, elite fragmentation, and international pressure, increasing the probability of regime change (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016). However, some scholars argue that economic crises do not always lead to democratisation; instead, they may catalyse authoritarian hardening or regime reconfiguration, as seen in cases where economic downturns have led to military coups or leadership purges rather than democratisation (Pepinsky, 2014; Slater, 2010).

Hence, economic growth plays a crucial role in authoritarian resilience, enabling regimes to maintain stability through material prosperity, strategic redistribution, and coercive control. By improving living standards and expanding state benefits, high economic performance mitigates public discontent and reduces pressure for democratic reforms. Beyond shaping public attitudes, economic growth strengthens patronage networks, ensuring elite cohesion while neutralising opposition through selective resource distribution. Additionally, financial surpluses allow regimes to bolster their security apparatus, enhance surveillance, and suppress dissent, reinforcing authoritarian control. However, this reliance on economic performance also creates vulnerabilities, as downturns can erode legitimacy, destabilise elite alliances, and trigger political transitions. Thus, while economic growth sustains authoritarian rule in the short term, its long-term effects remain contingent on a regime's ability to adapt to economic crises and shifting political expectations.

State Capacity

In many circumstances, state capacity is a crucial institutional determinant determining the regime's strength. State capacity refers to the ability of state institutions to effectively implement their goals and policies (Croissant & Hellmann, 2018; Hanson, 2017, 2018; Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024). This is critical to authoritarian resilience because it assists regimes in maintaining order, establishing legitimacy, and navigating internal and external crises, ultimately assuring stability. This extends beyond the immediate control exercised by authoritarian rulers; it is embedded in the enduring structures of the state itself. Unlike regimes, which are inherently transient and subject to political shifts, states possess historical depth, institutional resilience, and the capacity to execute governance effectively. Authoritarian regimes that inherit or cultivate robust state institutions and strong unifying origins exhibit far greater adaptability in the face of crises, allowing them to endure where others collapse (Albertus et al., 2018; Slater, 2010; Slater & Fenner, 2011). Hence, strong state capacity also enables regimes to handle and ameliorate the effects of economic, social, and political crises, which is critical for preventing instability and maintaining the regime's survival (Hanson & Sigman, 2013).

Scholars often focus on three dimensions of state capacity: extractive, coercive, and administrative (Hanson, 2017, 2018; Hanson & Sigman, 2013; Møller & Skaaning, 2014; Seeberg, 2014; Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024). Extractive capacity refers to the state's ability to generate revenue to fund operations such as public services, security, and patronage networks. Coercive capacity refers to a state's power to maintain order and defend its territory by preventing and repressing opposition while also assuring

internal security and deterring threats. Administrative capacity refers to the effectiveness of state institutions in developing and implementing policies across the territory. High administrative capacity allows for the effective implementation of policies and the delivery of public services, which helps regimes gain public legitimacy by demonstrating their ability to govern competently and meet citizens' needs (Hanson & Sigman, 2013, 2021).

Regimes rich in natural resources frequently rely on their extractive capacity and employ revenue from resource sales to bolster state capacity (Ross, 2001; Smith, 2004; Wright et al., 2015). In particular, the institutional strength of a state before the discovery of resource wealth plays a decisive role in shaping the trajectory of authoritarian rule (Smith, 2006). Countries with strong bureaucratic institutions and well-established governance frameworks before experiencing resource booms tend to develop durable authoritarian regimes, as they can effectively manage resource wealth (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2012). Conversely, states with weak institutions before resource discoveries are more likely to experience rentier-based instability, as newfound wealth fuels corruption, elite competition, and political volatility (Haber & Menaldo, 2011; Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012). Weak institutions increase the likelihood of authoritarian instability by intensifying elite competition for resource control (Haber & Menaldo, 2011). When institutional constraints are absent, political leaders prioritise short-term rent-seeking and suppress opposition forces through patronage rather than policy reforms (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012). This dynamic was evident in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, where oil wealth was used to consolidate political power through populist spending programmes and military patronage, but the lack of institutional safeguards led to severe economic crises and authoritarian decay after the commodity boom ended (Corrales & Penfold, 2015). In contrast, Gulf monarchies such as the UAE and Qatar have used their pre-existing institutional strength to build long-term economic stability, mitigating many of the destabilising effects of resource dependence (Gray, 2016; Hertog, 2010). Hence, strong pre-existing state institutions result in a high extractive capacity to channel resource revenues into long-term governance stability rather than short-term elite enrichment.

The extractive capacity for taxation is another fundamental strategy of authoritarian resilience, as it provides regimes with the necessary resources to govern, sustain elite coalitions, and finance social policies that enhance legitimacy while minimising demands for political representation (Gilley, 2009; Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024; Zhang, 2022). Unlike democracies, where taxation is often linked to accountability and representation, authoritarian regimes strategically extract revenue to strengthen state control and maintain stability. A robust taxation system allows regimes to finance essential services, co-opt elites, and deter opposition, ensuring long-term (Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024; Zhang, 2022). In China, for example, the ruling Communist Party has built an extractive apparatus centred on indirect and corporate taxes, minimising direct taxation on individuals to avoid political unrest

while ensuring steady revenue collection (Gilley, 2009). Moreover, the state's ability to selectively enforce tax compliance, where most businesses engage in some level of tax evasion, creates a form of legal repression, allowing the regime to punish disloyal economic actors while maintaining leverage over capitalists who rely on tax exemptions for business stability (Zhang, 2022). This discretionary enforcement reinforces elite dependence on the state, discouraging resistance to authoritarian rule.

Beyond revenue generation, taxation plays a critical role in social policy provision, which bolsters regime legitimacy and reduces grievances that could lead to instability. Authoritarian regimes with high extractive capacity can redistribute resources more effectively, enhancing public goods such as education and healthcare to pacify potential opposition groups (Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that regimes with strong extractive capacity are more likely to expand welfare programmes, as seen in China's fiscal policies that prioritise urban service provision while maintaining a "low equilibrium" in rural areas, where lower taxation corresponds with lower state services and expectations (Gilley, 2009).

However, the effectiveness of taxation in sustaining authoritarian stability is not purely a function of fiscal extraction; rather, it is deeply tied to the regime's administrative and coercive capacities. A competent bureaucracy ensures efficient tax collection and financial management, while coercive institutions enforce compliance and deter tax resistance (Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024). Additionally, while extractive capacity reinforces stability in the short term, it also creates long-term challenges. Overreliance on informal tax arrangements fosters inefficiencies and corruption, while rising economic expectations among the middle class may increase demands for transparency and political participation, potentially destabilising the authoritarian order (Vaccaro & Panaro, 2024; Zhang, 2022). Thus, while taxation strengthens authoritarian resilience by funding state functions and co-opting economic elites, its sustainability depends on the regime's ability to continuously adapt to economic and social pressures without undermining its own legitimacy.

Similarly, a high coercive capacity is fundamental to authoritarian resilience, as strong internal security forces enable regimes to suppress uprisings and control electoral processes. Coercive capacity encompasses two kinds of power: infrastructural power, which is the regime's ability to govern and implement policies, and despotic power, which represents the unrestricted authority of elites to rule without institutional constraints (Mann, 1984). Hence, a high coercive capacity strengthens authoritarian rule by deterring both elite defection through despotic power and mass resistance through infrastructural power.

Because a strong coercive apparatus can suppress mass uprisings, a coercive capacity is often measured through military expenditures and the size of security forces (Cole, 2018). However, a high

coercive capacity encompasses a range of security institutions, including the military, police forces, intelligence agencies, paramilitary units, presidential guards, and internal security services, each playing a distinct yet overlapping role in controlling both mass uprisings and intra-elite threats. Additionally, surveillance and monitoring technologies to control political discourse and track opposition activities are also required to maintain a constant and pervasive system of surveillance and control (Greitens, 2016).

Despite the importance of mass repression, authoritarian rulers historically fear coups more than popular uprisings, as coups remain the most common means by which dictators lose power (Svolik, 2012). To counter this threat, regimes deliberately fragment their security forces, creating overlapping and competing institutions that prevent any single entity from monopolising state violence. This strategy fosters internal divisions by encouraging distrust among different branches, ensuring that no security agency can act independently against the leader (Greitens, 2013). As a result, security institutions operate under parallel chains of command, with redundant structures such as elite paramilitary units or presidential guards counterbalancing regular military and intelligence services. Recruitment within these forces is often loyalty-based, favouring family members or regime loyalists over meritocratic selection. The case of Saddam Hussein in Iraq illustrates this strategic use of fragmented security forces. By maintaining multiple overlapping agencies, including the Iraqi Army, Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, and Mukhabarat, Hussein ensured that no single institution could consolidate power against him (Blaydes, 2020).

Beyond coercive and extractive capacities, a high administrative capacity is a crucial determinant of authoritarian resilience. It enables regimes to implement policies, regulate society, and control elections through bureaucratic institutions rather than overt repression. A regime with high administrative capacity manages elections strategically, using mechanisms such as gerrymandering, media regulation, and voter suppression to maintain dominance while avoiding blatant fraud that could provoke unrest (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013; Seeberg, 2014). Additionally, it efficiently distributes state resources to reward loyalists, co-opt opposition, and sustain elite unity while weakening institutions that could challenge its authority, such as independent judiciaries, legislatures, and the media (Paar-Jakli & Molina, 2024; Zhang, 2023).

Authoritarian regimes exhibit two distinct forms of administrative capacity: Weberian and non-Weberian (Hanson, 2017, 2018). According to Weber (1968), the bureaucracy supporting market capitalism must embody key legal-rational characteristics, including the distinction between public office and private interests, eliminating corruption, functional specialisation, reliance on technical expertise, and merit-based recruitment. Weberian administrative capacity hence refers to a professional, rule-based bureaucracy that delivers public services efficiently and promotes economic development. This system is prevalent in high-functioning authoritarian states such as China and

Singapore, where technocratic governance strengthens legitimacy. These regimes prioritise merit-based bureaucratic recruitment, ensuring competent policy implementation and economic growth, which reduces public dissatisfaction and minimises reliance on coercion. However, these bureaucracies remain politically controlled, ensuring strict loyalty to the ruling party. In the CCP and Singapore's PAP, for example, bureaucrats must adhere to the party's agenda, reinforcing regime stability by balancing governance efficiency with authoritarian control (Ang, 2017; Aschenbrenner et al., 2023; Rodan, 2012; Rothstein, 2015).

In contrast, non-Weberian (corrupt but functional) administrative capacity prioritises patronage and elite loyalty over bureaucratic professionalism. Instead of fostering economic development, these regimes use state institutions as political instruments for election manipulation, selective repression, and rent distribution (Hanson, 2017, 2018). Countries such as Russia and Venezuela exemplify this model, where the state apparatus is designed to limit opposition access to resources, distribute economic benefits to regime loyalists, and manipulate elections through administrative means. While such regimes maintain control, their reliance on corruption and inefficiency undermines long-term stability, increasing the risk of mismanagement, economic crises, and elite fragmentation (Frankenberger & Graf, 2011; Rouvinski & Milanese, 2024).

High-capacity regimes tend to rely on subtle, institutionalised manipulation rather than outright fraud. By controlling media access, influencing voter registration, and directing state resources strategically, these regimes maintain dominance while preserving a facade of legitimacy. This approach allows them to reinforce their rule without provoking widespread dissent, contributing to long-term stability. Conversely, low-capacity regimes lack the bureaucratic sophistication to control elections indirectly. As a result, they resort to blatant vote-rigging, open coercion, and last-minute patronage, tactics that often increase political instability and fuel elite defections (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Schedler, 2002). Weak bureaucracies in such regimes also contribute to economic mismanagement and resource misallocation, further exacerbating regime fragility, as seen in Georgia under the former Soviet foreign minister and president Shevardnadze and various post-Soviet hybrid regimes such as pre-2018 (Velvet Revolution) Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Way, 2005).

Authoritarian Origin and Succession

One of the most consequential pathways to durable authoritarianism is revolutionary origin. Empirical studies suggest that revolutionary regimes last nearly three times longer than their non-revolutionary counterparts, with many enduring for decades despite economic crises, external pressures, and leadership transitions (Lachapelle et al., 2020; Zeng, 2021). This remarkable durability stems from the transformative nature of revolutionary upheavals, which fundamentally reshape state structures,

elite configurations, and security institutions in ways that reinforce authoritarian rule (Levitsky & Way, 2024).

By their very nature, social revolutions dismantle pre-existing power structures and create radically new state institutions (Skocpol, 1979). Unlike military coups or electoral takeovers, revolutions involve mass mobilisation, ideological commitment, and the violent overthrow of entrenched elites, leading to the complete reconstruction of political authority. Surviving such upheaval requires revolutionary regimes to consolidate power rapidly, often through militarised political structures that eliminate opposition and centralise authority (Huntington, 1968; Levitsky & Way, 2013).

Revolutionary states thus emerge with strong ideological legitimacy, organisational discipline, and elite cohesion, which enhance their capacity to withstand domestic resistance and international pressure. The CCP, for instance, developed an intricate party-state structure following its civil war victory in 1949, ensuring long-term stability by integrating the military, bureaucracy, and economic planning within a single-party framework (Walder, 2009). Similarly, the Cuban and Vietnamese regimes built highly centralised governance structures that have sustained their authoritarian rule for decades (Eckstein, 2003; Gainsborough, 2010).

The intense domestic and international opposition that revolutionary regimes face early in their existence further solidifies their resilience. Many undergo civil wars or face external intervention, which reinforces elite cohesion, strengthens coercive apparatuses, and justifies repressive governance under the banner of national security (Lachapelle et al., 2014; Slater, 2010). Surviving these conflicts forces revolutionary regimes to institutionalise durable political-military structures, which suppress mass uprisings, deter military coups, and eliminate alternative power centres, which are often the primary causes of authoritarian collapse (Geddes et al., 2018). For instance, the Islamic Republic of Iran, founded through revolution in 1979, reinforced its grip on power through the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), which solidified the ruling elite's dominance, expanded military influence, and justified harsh repression of opposition forces (Byman, 2013).

However, longevity alone does not equate to resilience in the face of crises. Some regimes persist under favourable conditions but disintegrate when confronted with significant challenges. In many ways, crises serve as a test of true authoritarian robustness (Levitsky & Way, 2012). Even revolutionary regimes, despite their initial cohesion, are not immune to fragmentation. As time passes and the original revolutionary generation fades, their once-unifying struggle loses its binding power. These regimes must adopt new strategies and well-defined succession plans to sustain stability. Mozambique, in 1986, for example, following the death of President Machel, ensured a smooth transfer of power by instituting clear procedures and preparing for leadership transitions in advance (Levitsky & Way, 2012). This proactive approach preserved political continuity. Conversely,

Zimbabwe's failure to establish a formal succession plan created a power vacuum, exacerbating factional tensions within the ruling elite and plunging the country into political instability and the removal of Mugabe in 2017 (Battera, 2023).

Therefore, succession remains one of the most formidable challenges for authoritarian regimes. Power is often highly concentrated in a single ruler or a tight-knit elite, and without institutionalised mechanisms for leadership transition, succession crises can destabilise entire regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Svobik, 2012). Personalist and weakly institutionalised single-party regimes are particularly vulnerable, as their survival is tied to the longevity of a single leader rather than to enduring institutions (Meng, 2021; Svobik, 2012). The collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's rule in Libya after four decades of personalist governance left no viable framework for leadership transition, leading to state disintegration in 2011 (Blaydes, 2020; Dodge, 2012a). In Uzbekistan, where Islam Karimov ruled unchallenged for 27 years, experienced political uncertainty upon his death in 2016 due to the absence of a formal succession structure (McGlinchey, 2016). By contrast, China's CCP institutionalised succession through term limits and collective leadership, enabling smooth transitions from Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin, and later to Hu Jintao in 2003, contributing to the party's continued dominance (Shirk, 2018).

Hence, revolutionary origins significantly enhance authoritarian durability by restructuring state institutions, consolidating elite cohesion, and embedding ideological legitimacy. However, long-term stability depends on institutional adaptability, particularly in managing leadership succession. While early threats often reinforce resilience through militarised governance and suppression of opposition, regimes that fail to institutionalise succession face heightened risks of elite fragmentation and instability. Ultimately, authoritarian survival hinges on historical legitimacy and the ability to navigate internal power transitions and evolving sociopolitical challenges.

Regime Type and Authoritarian Resilience

The durability of authoritarian regimes varies significantly depending on their institutional configurations, elite structures, and leadership dynamics. Regime type shapes the relative emphasis and dependence on each pillar of authoritarian stability, with some regimes relying more heavily on repression, co-optation, or legitimisation than others. Hence, scholars have extensively examined the conditions that sustain authoritarian rule, identifying key regime types and mechanisms contributing to their longevity or collapse. Barbara Geddes' (1999) influential typology of authoritarian regimes—personalist, military, and single party, later expanded to include monarchies and hybrid forms (Geddes et al., 2014), remains a cornerstone in the study of authoritarian stability. Scholars broadly agree that authoritarian regime durability varies by regime type. Military regimes are generally regarded as the most fragile due to their proneness to elite fragmentation and the absence of institutionalised mechanisms to manage intra-elite conflict (Clapham & Philip, 2021; Geddes, 1999;

Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017; Mayer, 2017; McKinlay & Cohan, 1976; Svolik, 2012). In contrast, single-party regimes tend to be more stable, as they facilitate elite co-optation and power-sharing through formal institutions (Dickson, 2016; Geddes, 1999; Levitsky & Way, 2010, 2012, 2016; Magaloni, 2006, 2008a; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Serra, 2013; Zeng, 2021). Personalist regimes, although less exposed to elite infighting due to concentrated authority in the leader, remain vulnerable to sudden collapse when the leader is removed (Aidi, 2023; Baturo et al., 2024; Brunkert & von Soest, 2023; Frantz, 2023; Frantz & Ezrow, 2011b; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2017; Geddes et al., 2018; Hess, 2013). Monarchies, often characterised by hereditary succession and stable elite coalitions, display notable resilience and have been shown to outperform other authoritarian types in terms of longevity (Gerring et al., 2021; Kailitz, 2015; Lawrence, 2014, 2023; Lucas, 2004; Menaldo, 2012; Yom, 2014).

Monarchies

The resilience of monarchical regimes stems from their institutionalised succession mechanisms, strong elite cohesion, and the effective use of symbolic legitimacy. By formalising dynastic succession, monarchies reduce uncertainty in leadership transitions—a common vulnerability in authoritarian systems, thereby enhancing regime predictability and continuity. Stability is further reinforced through the strategic distribution of patronage across royal family members, military elites, and economic actors, facilitating durable ruling coalitions and mitigating elite fragmentation (Hadenius & Teorell, 2007; Lawrence, 2014). Monarchies exhibit a narrow, unified elite whose collective fate is tied to regime survival, discouraging elite defection, and enhancing internal loyalty. This elite cohesion is often legitimated through narratives of divine right, tradition, or national unity, which serve as stabilising ideational frameworks (Bohn, 2023; Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017).

Within this broader regime type, scholars distinguish between dynastic and linchpin monarchies (Barany, 2013; Márquez, 2017; Møller, 2019; Lucas 2014). Dynastic monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, institutionalise intra-family power-sharing, managing elite competition and guarding against external threats. In contrast, linchpin monarchies, such as Jordan and Morocco, function through elite balancing, deliberately playing social, tribal, or political factions against each other to prevent the emergence of a unified opposition (Lucas, 2004). This adaptive strategy has enabled many Arab monarchies to absorb shocks and maintain regime continuity during moments of popular upheaval, notably during the Arab Spring, when several republican autocracies collapsed under mass mobilisation (Ahmed, 2018; Lawrence, 2023; Menaldo, 2012).

Still, monarchical resilience cannot be reduced to cultural legitimacy or resource endowments alone. Yom (2014) conceptualises “monarchical authoritarianism” as an epistemic community—a transnational learning network through which monarchs share survival strategies, coordinate

repression, and calibrate liberalisation to pre-empt dissent. Surviving monarchies are often resource-rich or geopolitically strategic, gaining external support that complements internal cohesion (Gerring et al., 2021). In sum, monarchies cannot persist simply due to tradition, but because they embed legitimacy into institutional and elite structures that insulate them from the vulnerabilities faced by other authoritarian regime types.

Single-Party Regimes

Single-party states are among the most resilient authoritarian regimes due to their institutional depth, elite integration, and structured succession mechanisms (Geddes, 2004; Kavasoglu, 2022; Levitsky & Way, 2012; Magaloni, 2006). These regimes maintain stability through formalised elite bargaining, leadership rotation, and ideological cohesion, reducing the risk of internal power struggles (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). By leveraging pseudo-democratic institutions such as legislatures and ruling parties, regimes can provide a platform for opposition voices, engage in negotiations, and implement selective policy adjustments to co-opt dissent and maintain regime stability (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010).

One of the key advantages of institutionalised power-sharing is its ability to regulate elite competition, preventing conflicts that could lead to coups or internal fragmentation (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) maintained political stability for over 70 years by rotating leadership positions and distributing patronage, ensuring no single faction gained disproportionate influence (Magaloni, 2006; Serra, 2013). Likewise, China's post-Mao leadership introduced term limits and collective decision-making, mitigating the risks of personalist rule and elite divisions (Shirk, 2018; Tsai, 2017). Similarly, Vietnam and Cuba have deeply embedded their ruling parties within state institutions and civil society, minimising elite fragmentation and opposition threats (Gainsborough, 2010; Peeler, 2001). Compared to personalist or military regimes, single-party systems rely more on party cohesion than coercion alone, integrating elites into a broader governance framework that enhances legitimacy (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Svolik, 2012).

However, institutionalised power-sharing does not guarantee indefinite stability. Even well-established single-party regimes face risks from economic crises, generational shifts, and external pressures (Greene, 2007; Schedler, 2013). The PRI's eventual decline in Mexico in 2000 illustrates how institutionalised authoritarianism erodes when economic mismanagement or rising opposition forces challenge elite bargains (Serra, 2013). Similarly, China's moves toward personalist rule under Xi Jinping, marked by the abolition of presidential term limits and a shift away from collective leadership, raise concerns about the long-term regime stability of one-party systems (Shirk, 2018; Tsai, 2017).

Military Regimes

Military regimes are widely regarded as the most fragile form of authoritarian rule due to their lack of political institutionalisation and high propensity for elite fragmentation (Geddes, 2004; Nordlinger, 1977). Unlike monarchies or single-party states, military governments do not typically construct robust ruling parties, ideological frameworks, or mechanisms for civilian governance (Huntington, 1968). Instead, they rely on coercion and military hierarchy, making them particularly vulnerable to economic downturns and popular unrest (Geddes et al., 2018). Military regimes also lack the ideological or institutional mechanisms of legitimation that parties or monarchs often have, making them more likely to relinquish power under pressure (Clapham & Philip, 2021; Svobik, 2012).

A key weakness of military regimes is their internal divisions, as officers often hold conflicting political preferences regarding governance, economic policies, and civilian engagement. Military juntas often experience tensions between hardliners who favour prolonged rule and moderates seeking a return to civilian government (Barkey, 1990; Clapham & Philip, 2021; Geddes, 1999; McKinlay & Cohan, 1976). Empirical studies confirm that military regimes frequently transition to civilian rule through negotiated agreements rather than outright collapse. In Latin America, military rulers in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile exited power through carefully managed transitions to preserve the armed forces' institutional integrity (Lai & Slater, 2006; Mayer, 2017).

Furthermore, military officers tend to view their role in politics as exceptional and temporary. Their primary institutional mission is national defence, and governing is often seen as a necessary but undesirable deviation from their professional role. This orientation creates a built-in preference among many military elites to withdraw from power once crises stabilise (Stepan, 2015). Professional militaries tend to prefer staying out of politics to preserve their corporate interests, organisational autonomy, and professionalism. Long-term involvement in politics risks politicising the military and undermining its cohesion and professional norms, something officer corps generally seek to avoid (Huntington, 1981). Military regimes are often more likely to negotiate exits from power than other authoritarian types, especially when faced with internal crises. The risk of damaging the military's reputation and unity makes many military elites prefer returning to the barracks rather than engaging in prolonged repression or risking civil war (Geddes, 1999). Hence, they are less likely to resist democratisation compared to other authoritarian elites, because the military's long-term interests (such as preserving budgets, prestige, and internal unity) can often be secured without holding executive political power, creating incentives for negotiated transitions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005).

Personalist Regimes

On the other hand, personalist regimes, while sometimes resilient in the short term, are inherently vulnerable due to their dependence on a single ruler. Unlike monarchies or single-party regimes, which institutionalise succession planning, personalist systems centralise power exclusively around the leader (Geddes et al., 2018; Loxton & Levitsky, 2018; Van den Bosch, 2020). The leader often prioritises loyalty over competence, appointing close associates or family members to key positions. While such centralisation can create a facade of stability, it often results in fragile governance structures heavily reliant on the leader's personal networks (Aidi, 2023; Geddes et al., 2018; Guliyev, 2011). The centralisation of power and the emphasis on loyalty over merit can create environments where rent-seeking behaviours flourish, as officials may exploit their positions for personal gain without fear of oversight (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Guliyev, 2011). This systemic corruption can undermine economic performance and erode public trust in the government, contributing to long-term instability. Empirical findings show that authoritarian regimes with a higher personalist concentration are more prone to corruption, which can have detrimental effects on governance and economic development (Jung, 2022).

The absence of institutionalised succession mechanisms can lead to power vacuums and internal conflicts upon the leader's departure, increasing the likelihood of regime collapse. As noted in the literature, personalist dictatorships often lack internal checks and balances, making them unrestrained in their exertion of repression and more prone to instability upon the leader's exit (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Fjelde, 2010; Geddes et al., 2018; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). The lack of institutional constraints in personalist regimes can also lead to aggressive foreign policies or internal repression, as decisions are concentrated in the hands of a single leader. This unrestrained exercise of power can result in international isolation, economic sanctions, or internal unrest, all of which can destabilise the regime. Additionally, personalist leaders may engage in counterbalancing strategies, such as creating parallel military forces loyal to them personally, to prevent coups (Aidi, 2023; Baturu et al., 2024; Frantz, 2023; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014). While intended to secure the leader's position, these strategies can foster divisions within the state's security apparatus, potentially leading to violent power struggles. Studies have found that personalist dictators are more strongly associated with counterbalancing than other authoritarian regime types, reflecting their focus on consolidating personal power (Escribà-Folch et al., 2020). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 when personalist rule is linked with emigration policy.

Thus, the stability of authoritarian regimes is contingent on their institutional design, leadership structures, and elite-bargaining mechanisms. Monarchies and single-party regimes endure due to structured leadership transitions, institutionalised elite cooperation, and broad integration within state and society, hence displaying more reliance on legitimation and co-optation. In contrast, military

regimes are highly unstable, given their reliance on their repressive apparatus and lack of political institutionalisation. Personalist regimes, though sometimes durable in the short term, often collapse abruptly due to their overreliance on individual leaders. They also tend to use heavy repression to prevent elite defection and suppress dissent. However, hybrid personalist regimes that incorporate party-based governance exhibit greater resilience by distributing authority beyond the individual leader, thereby mitigating the risks of abrupt disintegration (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Dickson, 2016; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2017; Geddes et al., 2018; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Zeng, 2021).

Authoritarian Collaboration and Learning

The persistence of authoritarian regimes is increasingly influenced by international authoritarian collaboration and cross-regime learning. While democratic regimes have long engaged in democracy promotion, authoritarian states operate differently, often supporting each other opportunistically rather than ideologically (von Soest, 2015). Unlike democracies, which are bound by shared principles and institutions, authoritarian regimes do not promote authoritarianism as a universal doctrine but cooperate pragmatically to enhance their own survival, mitigate democratisation pressures, and advance geopolitical interests (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Tansey, 2016). This can include economic assistance, military coordination, diplomatic backing, or policy transfer manifesting in two forms: authoritarian collaboration and authoritarian learning. Authoritarian collaboration refers to strategic cooperation among authoritarian states, often through economic, military, and political networks, while authoritarian learning refers to the process of adapting and internalising governance strategies from other autocratic regimes to enhance regime survival (Ambrosio, 2010; Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016).

Authoritarian regimes engage in inter-regime cooperation primarily as a strategy to shield themselves from democratisation waves and external destabilisation. This cooperation is often based on shared political vulnerabilities rather than ideological alignment. Regimes facing internal instability seek support from like-minded regimes to reinforce their institutional capacity to govern, suppress dissent, and consolidate power (Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016; Way, 2016). The 2011 Libyan Civil War, for example, destabilised neighbouring Niger, Chad, and Mali, prompting authoritarian rulers in those countries to strengthen internal security (Lacher, 2013). To counter such threats and maintain regional stability, authoritarian regimes often strengthen alliances and deepen cooperation (Brownlee et al., 2015; Mauk, 2020).

One illustrative case is China and Turkey's growing political, economic, and security collaboration. While China does not explicitly seek to export authoritarianism, its engagement with dominant-party systems and hybrid regimes fosters authoritarian entrenchment through economic incentives and party-to-party exchanges (Yilmaz & Eliküçük Yıldırım, 2020). China's infrastructure-driven development model supports Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party in bolstering economic

legitimacy while insulating itself from Western political pressure. Similarly, Russia's support for Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko demonstrates how authoritarian powers aid embattled regimes to resist external democratisation pressures and prevent spillover effects (Lankina & Libman, 2019).

Authoritarian regimes also form regional and international alliances that serve as protective networks against democratic contagion. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which includes China, Russia, and Central Asian authoritarian regimes, functions not only as a security alliance but also as a forum for promoting governance models that counter Western democratic influence (Ambrosio, 2018; Cooley, 2015). Similarly, the Gulf Cooperation Council monarchies coordinated their response to the Arab Spring, dispatching troops to Bahrain in 2011 to suppress protests that threatened monarchical rule (Brownlee et al., 2015). The underlying logic of such interventions is rooted in the belief that regime failure in one country could embolden opposition movements elsewhere, jeopardising other autocracies in the region (Mauk, 2020).

While authoritarian collaboration enables mutual support, authoritarian learning allows regimes to refine their survival strategies based on observations of both successful and failed autocracies (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017). This learning process involves policy adaptation, repression techniques, and institutional adjustments that strengthen authoritarian resilience. By engaging in authoritarian learning, regimes enhance their resilience against both domestic and international challenges. As Heydemann and Leenders (2011) argue, authoritarian learning strengthens autocratic stability by allowing regimes to anticipate threats, refine repression strategies, and adjust governance structures without necessarily experiencing direct crises themselves (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011).

One of the most striking examples of authoritarian learning occurred in the Middle East before and after the Arab uprisings of 2011. Authoritarian regimes in the region had already been modifying governance structures by tightening media controls, limiting civil society, and adjusting political patronage to counter growing pressures for democratisation (Heydemann, 2014). However, after witnessing the rapid collapse of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, surviving authoritarian regimes in the region quickly adapted by increasing surveillance, restricting political spaces, and pre-emptively cracking down on opposition (Ahmed, 2018). For example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE deployed advanced surveillance systems and cyber-monitoring technologies to curb political activism and prevent mass mobilisation (Lucas, 2020).

Another key example of authoritarian learning is the CCP's response to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Chinese leaders observed that Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost policies facilitated greater civic activism and media freedom, ultimately undermining the Soviet regime (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017). To avoid a similar fate, China tightened its control over non-governmental organisations, restricted independent media, and developed

sophisticated digital authoritarianism techniques to suppress dissent (Yuen, 2015). This proactive authoritarian learning ensured that the Chinese regime did not repeat the Soviet Union's errors in liberalisation, helping the CCP maintain control despite economic reforms (Shirk, 2018).

Regional dynamics and geographical proximity often influence the adaptability of authoritarian regimes. When a neighbouring regime collapses or faces an uprising, nearby regimes engage in reactive authoritarian learning, strengthening institutions and intensifying repression to prevent similar unrest from spreading (Way, 2016). Upheavals in neighbouring authoritarian countries can cause a direct impact due to refugee flows, economic disruptions, and the dissemination of revolutionary ideals. Their response is also shaped by an assessment of their own vulnerabilities, considering factors such as social structure, shared history, and regime type. Comparable political systems or governing patterns may also make regimes feel more compelled to support one another urgently and show solidarity. When a monarchy sees another monarchy collapse, it may see this as a direct danger to its own stability and provide the regime support so that it can maintain its status quo. For example, monarchies in the Gulf responded differently to the Arab uprisings compared to republics. While Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen saw regime change, monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE reinforced their repressive apparatuses and bolstered state spending to neutralise dissent (von Soest, 2015). The Gulf monarchs viewed the collapse of fellow monarchies as an existential threat, prompting coordinated action to sustain their rule. In contrast, they did not intervene as aggressively in failing republics, as those collapses did not directly threaten their governance model (Brownlee et al., 2015).

Similarly, the authoritarian resurgence in post-Soviet states has been characterised by reciprocal learning and strategic adaptation. Leaders in Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan have exchanged methods for managing electoral manipulation, controlling media narratives, and deploying selective repression (Lankina & Libman, 2019). These tactics ensure that even when elections are held, they are carefully managed to reinforce regime legitimacy rather than create genuine political competition.

Thus, the survival of authoritarian regimes is increasingly shaped by cross-national collaboration and adaptive learning. Autocratic leaders actively monitor and learn from regime collapses elsewhere, adjusting their policies to prevent similar outcomes in their own countries. Moreover, through economic cooperation, diplomatic backing, and military alliances, authoritarian states bolster each other against democratisation waves (Ambrosio, 2018; Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016). Cooperation among authoritarian regimes can reinforce their legitimisation pillar in the international arena, while cross-regime learning allows them to strategically calibrate their reliance on repression, co-optation, or legitimisation based on observed successes and failures.

Conclusion

The resilience of authoritarian regimes is actively sustained through the strategic reinforcement of repression, co-optation, and legitimisation strategies—the pillars of authoritarian stability. Each factor explored in this section is critical in maintaining these pillars and shaping how regimes endure internal and external challenges.

Economic development can contribute to the resilience of all three pillars. High economic performance can strengthen performance-based legitimacy (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Tsai, 2017), reducing demand for democratisation by linking regime stability to economic well-being. Wealthier authoritarian states can also invest in elite patronage networks, ensuring loyalty through resource distribution (Boix & Svolik, 2013). High state revenues in developed economies also allow regimes to bolster their regime apparatus by increasing security forces, enhancing intelligence operations, and deploying advanced surveillance technologies to monitor opposition activity (Feldstein, 2019; Greitens, 2016). By ensuring both material dependence and fear-based deterrence, resource-rich authoritarian regimes sustain their rule through a carefully managed balance of co-optation, coercion and legitimisation obtained through demonstrating economic development.

Similarly, a robust state capacity is central to all three pillars. A strong extractive capacity allows regimes to sustain welfare provisions and elite patronage, preempting opposition through strategic redistribution (Ross, 2012; Zhang, 2022). Meanwhile, coercive capacity ensures that dissent is effectively managed through surveillance, policing, and suppression of political opposition (Greitens, 2016; Wright et al., 2013). Alternatively, administrative capacity strengthens legitimisation by allowing regimes to efficiently control electoral processes, maintain bureaucratic efficiency, and co-opt civil society actors under the guise of governance (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013).

Additionally, regime origin and succession planning influence the durability of legitimisation and repression. Revolutionary origins often provide ideological justifications for authoritarian rule, embedding historical legitimacy that strengthens legitimisation (Levitsky & Way, 2012; Skocpol, 1979). However, regimes without institutionalised succession planning may risk internal fragmentation, often resulting in abrupt elite defection and increased reliance on repression (Blaydes, 2020; Meng, 2021).

Similarly, regime type also determines how repression, co-optation, and legitimisation are prioritised and deployed. Single-party regimes institutionalise power-sharing and electoral management, emphasising co-optation and legitimisation through controlled political participation (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Magaloni, 2006). Monarchies rely on dynastic legitimacy and elite coalitions, reinforcing legitimisation through tradition and continuity (Hadenius & Torrell, 2007; Yom, 2014). Military regimes, however, often struggle with elite cohesion, making them more dependent on repression

rather than co-optation (Geddes, 1999; Wright & Escribà-Folch, 2012). While appearing stable in the short term, personalist regimes are highly susceptible to collapse due to their overreliance on individual authority and repression rather than institutionalised co-optation (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2017).

Finally, authoritarian collaboration and learning enable regimes to refine their repression, co-optation, and legitimisation strategies. Through authoritarian learning, regimes adopt and modify successful survival tactics—whether through electoral manipulation (Lankina & Libman, 2019), digital surveillance (Feldstein, 2019), or coercive security measures (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011). Cross-regime cooperation bolsters stability by shielding vulnerable autocrats from external democratisation pressures, reinforcing legitimisation through diplomatic support while strengthening repression through shared security tactics (Ambrosio, 2010; Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016).

Together, these mechanisms function not in isolation but in reinforcement of one another, shaping how regimes balance repression, co-optation, and legitimisation to maintain their grip on power. This discussion provides the foundation for the next chapter, which examines how the pillars of stability can impact the restrictiveness or permissiveness of emigration policy. By understanding the internal logic of authoritarian resilience, we can better analyse how regimes strategically regulate exit to manage dissent, reinforce stability, and project control beyond their borders.

Chapter 4: Pillars of Authoritarian Stability, Personalism and Emigration Policy: Linking Dependent and Independent Variables

This chapter develops the research hypotheses to demonstrate how authoritarian emigration policy can be shaped by the pillars of authoritarian stability and regime type, focusing on the degree to which the regime exhibits personalist characteristics. The first section focuses on the relationship between repression, co-optation, legitimation, and emigration policy, while the second section investigates the role of personalist rule in shaping emigration policy.

Mechanisms Linking Pillars of Authoritarian Stability and Emigration Policy

As depicted in Chapter 3, the survival of authoritarian regimes depends on three fundamental pillars of stability: repression, legitimation, and co-optation (Gerschewski, 2013). I argue that the extent to which a regime relies on each pillar is likely to shape its approach to emigration policy, leading to variation in how emigration is controlled, encouraged, or restricted, as a regime's broader survival strategy determines whether emigration is perceived as a threat or as a tool for reinforcing stability.

This section examines the causal mechanisms linking authoritarian stability to emigration policy frameworks. While I recognise that multiple structural, economic, and geopolitical factors influence emigration regulation, this analysis focuses specifically on how a regime's political durability interacts with its approach to emigration regulation. This logic has already been applied in single-case research. Tsourapas (2018a) adapts Gerschewski's tripartite model to analyse Egypt's labour emigration policy across successive authoritarian regimes. He demonstrates that permissive and restrictive emigration measures served not only as reflections of regime type but also as active policy instruments underpinning regime stability. In Egypt, labour migration to the Gulf States was used as a form of co-optation: Sadat's "Infitah" (open-door) policies encouraged emigration not only as a way of absorbing domestic unemployment, but also to support the economic interests of business elites. At the same time, selective exit restrictions targeted dissidents, intellectuals, and political activists, illustrating how repression operated through control over mobility. Additionally, outward migration was legitimised as part of pan-Arab solidarity under Nasser, while later governments portrayed migration as integral to Egypt's modernisation and global integration (Tsourapas, 2018a). This showed that emigration policy can reinforce all three pillars of authoritarian survival, highlighting its instrumental rather than purely reactive role. Though this thesis seeks to address the impact of the three pillars on emigration policy, reversing the causal direction explored in Tsourapas's study, situating this thesis within this literature underscores how my large-N analysis complements such process-tracing work by testing whether these dynamics generalise beyond the Egyptian case.

However, my objective here is not to claim that a regime's strength is the sole determinant of its emigration policies, but rather to investigate the mechanisms behind emigration control as an extension of authoritarian survival strategies.

To analyse these dynamics, I first discuss how each pillar contributes to authoritarian stability before examining the mechanisms through which the said pillar shapes emigration policy.

Repression

Popular revolt has long posed one of the most significant threats to authoritarian stability, with mass uprisings contributing to the collapse of numerous authoritarian regimes throughout history (Albrecht & Koehler, 2020; Apolte, 2022). To counter this threat, authoritarian rulers have relied heavily on repression as a core survival strategy, using it to silence dissent and deter opposition. However, repression is not a uniform practice; it encompasses a wide spectrum of state coercion, from legal restrictions and censorship to surveillance, intimidation, and outright violence (Davenport & Inman, 2012; King et al., 2013; Ritter & Conrad, 2016).

Scholars have defined repression in ways that capture its scope, purpose, and mechanisms. Ritter and Conrad (2016) describe it as “any realised or threatened limit or coercive action taken by state authorities to control or prevent challenges that could alter the status quo policy or distribution of power” (p. 86). Tilly (1978) emphasises its functional aspect, defining repression as actions that increase the costs of protest (Earl, 2011). From a legal perspective, Davenport and Inman (2012) highlight that repression “deals with applications of state power that violate First Amendment-type rights, due process in the enforcement and adjudication of law, and personal integrity or security” (p. 620).

These definitions collectively illustrate that repression operates through multiple mechanisms. Repression can take the form of legal restrictions, such as protest bans and media censorship, or more covert means, including surveillance, harassment, and unlawful arrests. At its most extreme, repression involves torture, extrajudicial killings, and state-sponsored violence. Regardless of its form, repression ultimately functions as a strategic tool used by authoritarian regimes to deter opposition, suppress mobilisation, and reinforce their grip on power.

Authoritarian regimes, by definition, lack institutional mechanisms for peaceful dissent and political competition. Without electoral accountability or legal constraints, they perceive opposition—whether violent or nonviolent, as existential threats (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Unlike democratic leaders who can address grievances through policy adjustments or electoral competition, autocrats rely on coercion and repression to maintain control. The absence of independent judiciaries, media, and legislatures further enables unchecked state violence, as courts and parliaments, where they exist, are often co-opted and function as extensions of the executive (Frantz, 2018; Svobik, 2012). Without

meaningful oversight, authoritarian leaders can deploy military force, imprison opponents, and engage in mass surveillance without fear of legal repercussions.

Beyond state institutions, civil society also plays a crucial role in constraining political power, but authoritarian regimes actively dismantle it to eliminate sources of resistance. Independent labour unions, human rights organisations, and opposition groups are systematically suppressed to prevent collective action (Howard & Roessler, 2006). State-controlled media further reinforces repression by framing dissidents as threats to national security, foreign agents, or extremists, thereby legitimising coercion and discouraging public sympathy for opposition movements (King et al., 2013). By monopolising the flow of information, authoritarian leaders shape public perception, ensuring that repression appears necessary for maintaining order and stability.

While repression varies in severity, it operates along a spectrum that ranges from legal constraints on opposition to direct physical coercion. Many authoritarian regimes use legal frameworks to suppress dissent while maintaining a facade of legitimacy. For instance, censorship laws restrict independent journalism and online speech, while anti-terrorism legislation allows governments to label activists and opposition parties as “foreign agents” or “terrorists”, justifying arrests and asset seizures (Greitens, 2016; Gunitsky, 2015a, 2015b). AI-driven mass surveillance, internet censorship, and phone tracking further pre-empt dissent before it materialises (Funk et al., 2023). However, when legal restrictions fail to contain opposition, regimes escalate to more direct forms of repression, including arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings (Conrad & Ritter, 2013; Rejali, 2007). In extreme cases, repression extends to mass killings or ethnic persecution, particularly when rulers perceive existential threats to their survival (Bellamy, 2012).

The imperative of political survival drives these repressive strategies. Authoritarian leaders fear that even limited dissent can embolden broader opposition movements, potentially leading to mass mobilisation and regime collapse (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; Davenport, 2007c; Earl, 2011; Escribà-Folch, 2013). As a pre-emptive strategy, repression aims to fragment opposition, disrupt coordination, and deter resistance before it becomes a credible threat (Escribà-Folch, 2013). This logic aligns with rational choice theory, which posits that political actors weigh costs and benefits before taking action (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Wintrobe, 1998). By raising the costs of resistance—through imprisonment, torture, censorship, and surveillance, authoritarian regimes seek to make political opposition prohibitively risky and ultimately futile (Davenport, 2007b; Fearon, 1995). Deterrence theory further supports this dynamic, arguing that when the expected costs of an action outweigh its benefits, rational actors will abstain from engaging in it (Schelling, 1966).

Revolts often emerge from deep-seated grievances such as economic hardship, social inequality, and political exclusion. However, uprisings remain difficult to organise even in highly discontented

societies due to the logistical and strategic challenges of collective action (King et al., 2013; Pfaff & Kim, 2003). Authoritarian regimes exploit these barriers by systematically dismantling the organisational infrastructure necessary for mobilisation. Strict censorship, prohibitions on assembly, and targeted persecution of opposition figures create formidable obstacles to coordination (Tilly, 2003). By restricting access to independent media, criminalising political gatherings, and imprisoning dissident leaders, regimes neutralise opposition before it can gain momentum.

This suppression of collective action reflects broader insights from social movement theory. The collective action problem suggests that individuals are reluctant to participate in resistance when the risks are high and the likelihood of success appears low (Klein & Regan, 2018; Olson, 1965; Tilly, 1978, 2003). Repression exacerbates this dynamic by ensuring that potential opposition movements remain fragmented, disorganised, and unable to coalesce into a unified threat. When dissent does emerge, authoritarian regimes frequently escalate repression rather than make concessions, reinforcing their control through force rather than negotiation (Escribà-Folch, 2013). Even in the absence of active opposition, perceived threats can trigger crackdowns, illustrating that repression is not merely reactive but a sustained feature of authoritarian governance (Davenport, 2007a).

At its core, repression serves a dual function—neutralising immediate threats while preventing future resistance. By systematically dismantling communication networks, leadership structures, and mobilisation capacities, authoritarian regimes pre-emptively weaken opposition movements. The expansion of digital surveillance and predictive policing further enhances the state's ability to detect and suppress dissent before it materialises (Glasius, 2018a; Mantellassi, 2023; Xu, 2021). This repressive apparatus underscores a fundamental characteristic of authoritarian rule—repression is not just a response to opposition, but an integral component of regime survival, shaping authoritarian governance itself (Escribà-Folch, 2013).

Repression and Emigration Policy

One of the primary reasons why highly repressive authoritarian regimes may restrict emigration is the fear that exiled dissidents will form opposition networks abroad, lobby foreign governments, and influence global perceptions of the regime. Larratt-Smith and Leon (2025) argue that regimes tend to view diaspora communities not as passive expatriates but as potential political threats. The risk is that once citizens leave state-controlled environments, they can access independent media, form alliances with foreign political actors, and contribute to anti-regime activism (Adamson, 2020; Oñate & Wright, 2005; Roberts, 2021).

Historical and contemporary examples illustrate this concern. The Soviet Union restricted emigration for most of its existence, fearing that defectors would strengthen Western anti-communist narratives and encourage ideological subversion (Scott, 2023). Similarly, China has imposed strict exit controls

on Uyghurs and Tibetans, recognising that exile communities have been instrumental in exposing human rights abuses and shaping international discourse on Chinese repression (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Many authoritarian regimes often deploy diplomatic pressure, surveillance, and coercion against exiled opposition groups (Horz & Marbach, 2022), demonstrating that emigration does not necessarily neutralise political threats, but can relocate and intensify them.

Beyond political activism, authoritarian regimes also fear that emigration enables external actors to impose economic and diplomatic costs. Exiled communities often push for sanctions, advocate for human rights investigations, and amplify international pressure on authoritarian governments (Adamson, 2020; Tsourapas, 2020, 2023; Yabanci, 2021). For instance, the Chilean diaspora in the 1970s played a critical role in organising resistance to Pinochet's dictatorship, lobbying for economic sanctions and international condemnation (Oñate & Wright, 2005). More recently, Belarusian opposition figures who fled after the 2020 election crackdown have mobilised from Poland and Lithuania, securing EU support for anti-Lukashenko policies (Tsurkan, 2025). This illustrates that emigration can serve as a catalyst for transnational political resistance, creating long-term costs for authoritarian leaders.

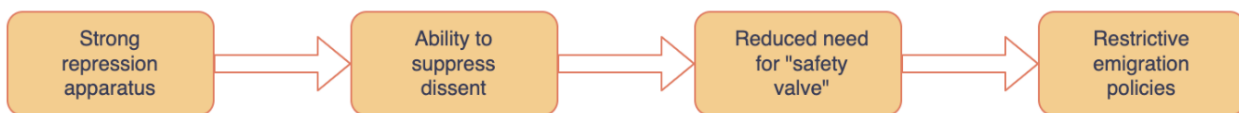
Furthermore, for highly repressive regimes, restricting movement is not just about preventing external opposition—it is also about reinforcing internal control by limiting citizens' autonomy. Authoritarian repression operates on multiple levels: physical coercion, psychological deterrence, and structural constraints that prevent citizens from exercising political agency (Davenport, 2007a). Limiting emigration reinforces all three by ensuring that individuals remain dependent on the state, lack external escape routes, and face legal or physical barriers to mobility.

Surveillance, a cornerstone of modern authoritarianism, plays a key role in controlling movement and restricting emigration. Digital monitoring, AI-driven data collection, and biometric tracking have enabled autocratic governments to track potential emigrants before they attempt to leave. This allows regimes to intervene pre-emptively, revoking passports, detaining individuals, or imposing exit restrictions on families of known dissidents (Funk et al., 2023; Schenkkan & Linzer, 2021; Torpey, 2000). In extreme cases, regimes extend transnational repression beyond their borders, as seen in China's harassment of Uyghur exiles, the abduction of a Rwandan opposition leader, and Saudi Arabia's killing of Jamal Khashoggi (Freedom House, 2021; Slipowitz et al., 2024).

Therefore, the strategic rationale behind restrictive emigration policies in authoritarian regimes is grounded in the idea that states with sophisticated repressive capacities can suppress dissent effectively enough that they do not need to allow opposition figures to leave (see Figure 4.1). Unlike regimes with a weak repression apparatus that may use emigration as a safety valve mechanism, regimes with sophisticated surveillance, legal restrictions, and militarised border controls can see free

movement as a liability. Allowing dissidents to leave risks creating international opposition networks, influencing global perceptions, and undermining regime stability from abroad. Thus, rather than using emigration to export discontent, highly repressive regimes could prefer to neutralise opposition domestically, ensuring that dissenters remain within their coercive reach. Regimes may view emigration as a dangerous externalisation of opposition, allowing dissidents to escape state control, access foreign resources, and mobilise against the regime from abroad when, with a strong repressive apparatus, they can prevent such dissent within their borders. Thus, the restriction of movement itself becomes an essential part of the authoritarian repressive toolkit, reinforcing state control by limiting citizens' autonomy, preventing external threats, and ensuring continued dominance over the population. Therefore, I hypothesise that regimes that rely highly on repressive apparatus impose restrictive emigration policies.

Figure 4.1. Linking high repression to restrictive emigration policy.



Co-optation

Authoritarian regimes maintain power not only through repression but also through co-optation, a strategy that neutralises opposition by integrating potential challengers into the regime (Gerschewski, 2013; Josua, 2016; Meng & Paine, 2022; Nandong, 2022). While repression relies on deterrence and fear, co-optation functions through selective rewards, institutionalised patronage, and incentivisation, aligning key political, economic, and social actors with the ruling elite. By discouraging direct confrontation, co-optation fosters elite reshuffling rather than genuine political transformation, ensuring regime stability (Nandong, 2022; Wolters, 2006). As Pareto (1968) argues, rulers must continuously refresh the ranks of the elite—incorporating new actors while sidelining those who pose a threat. In authoritarian systems, this process is embedded within ruling parties, military patronage networks, and control over economic resources, ensuring that elites remain dependent on the leader's survival (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Kavasoglu, 2021, 2022).

Selectorate theory (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003) provides a useful framework for understanding how authoritarian leaders use co-optation to consolidate power. The selectorate theory explains how political leaders maintain power by distributing resources to key supporters. This theory posits that political survival depends on the size and composition of the “winning coalition”, the subset of the population whose support is necessary for the ruler to remain in power. In authoritarian settings, co-optation serves two primary functions. First, securing elite loyalty by distributing resources and privileges ensures that key supporters remain invested in the regime's survival. Second, it prevents opposition mobilisation by absorbing potential challengers into the system and reducing incentives

for rebellion (Siverson & de Mesquita, 2017). Hence, all political leaders, democratic or authoritarian, depend on a core group of supporters to stay in power. Authoritarian regimes have a small winning coalition within a larger selectorate, meaning rulers rely on private goods (patronage, privileges, and wealth redistribution) to secure loyalty rather than broad public welfare. Hence, rulers can maximise their survival by keeping the winning coalition small, ensuring that only a select group of elites receives benefits, and controlling access to state resources, bureaucratic positions, and military power as tools of patronage. This makes defection costly for elites, as opposing the regime results in losing their privileges (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Gallagher & Hanson, 2013, 2015).

A key mechanism of elite co-optation is institutionalised power-sharing, where authoritarian rulers create ruling parties, advisory councils, or military juntas that give elites a stake in governance while ensuring they remain dependent on the central leader. By granting elites controlled access to political influence, rulers reduce the likelihood of elite defection or coups. This is exemplified by elected authoritarian legislatures, which are institutions where elites are given limited political power through elections, allowing leaders to co-opt them by addressing their interests and reducing internal conflict (Bove & Rivera, 2015; Meng & Paine, 2022). This explains why one-party regimes tend to be more durable than other types, as they provide structured mechanisms for elite co-optation, making defection costlier and less attractive (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Geddes, 1999; Meng & Paine, 2022; Nandong, 2022).

The military, in particular, is a crucial target for co-optation, as it holds the monopoly on force and represents the most immediate threat to an autocrat's survival. Svobik (2012) highlights that military coups remain one of the primary dangers to authoritarian rulers, making it essential for them to secure military loyalty through preferential promotions, financial incentives, and ideological alignment. Some regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and China, create parallel security forces or intelligence agencies to divide military power, ensuring that no single faction within the security apparatus becomes strong enough to stage a coup (Sheng, 2023; Slater, 2010; Stacher, 2007). By embedding the military within patronage networks and ensuring officers benefit personally from the regime's survival, authoritarian rulers reduce the likelihood of internal threats (Bove & Rivera, 2015).

Beyond political elites, authoritarian rulers rely on economic co-optation to integrate business elites and ensure their dependence on the regime. The primary tool for economic co-optation is patronage networks, through which rulers control access to lucrative state resources, business contracts, and financial privileges. This strategy is particularly pronounced in resource-rich regimes, where rulers can distribute oil rents, mining concessions, and monopolistic privileges to favoured elites (Fails & DuBuis, 2015; Geddes et al., 2014; Ross, 2012; Schubert, 2006). By creating an economic structure where wealth is tied directly to political loyalty, authoritarian leaders ensure that business elites have a vested interest in regime stability. Similarly, corruption plays a dual role in economic co-optation.

While corruption is often seen as a liability for governance, in authoritarian regimes, it functions as a mechanism of elite control (Bove & Rivera, 2015; Kreitmeyr, 2020; Wong, 2012). Corruption creates reciprocal dependency—elites who benefit from state-sanctioned corruption are incentivised to protect the system that enables their financial gain. Moreover, corruption serves as a disciplinary tool, as rulers can selectively prosecute elites who display disloyalty while protecting those who remain loyal (Blaydes, 2020; Nisnevich, 2016; Szakonyi, 2025; Wedel, 2001).

A critical mechanism of economic co-optation is state-business collusion, where governments selectively distribute economic opportunities to allies while punishing or excluding potential opposition figures (Chen & Hollenbach, 2022; Matzke, 2019). In Russia, the Kremlin controls the economy by distributing access to key industries—particularly oil, gas, and banking, exclusively to oligarchs who pledge political loyalty (Frye, 2017; Szakonyi, 2025). Similarly, in China, the CCP exerts control over private capital through party cells embedded within major corporations, ensuring that business leaders remain politically compliant (Dickson, 2016; Zhang, 2021).

Additionally, authoritarian regimes face challenges in retaining capital holders and preventing financial outflows in an era of globalisation and capital mobility. Wealthy individuals and business elites can pursue an “exit strategy” by investing abroad or relocating assets, weakening the regime’s economic base. In this context, co-optation becomes essential for securing the loyalty of economic stakeholders. By providing privileged access to lucrative contracts, regulatory advantages, and policy concessions, the state ensures that business elites remain financially tied to the regime (Bove & Rivera, 2015; Kreitmeyr, 2020; Wong, 2012).

While co-optation at the elite and economic levels secures high-level support, authoritarian rulers also engage in societal co-optation to neutralise mass opposition and prevent grassroots mobilisation. This strategy involves the strategic incorporation of opposition groups, social movements, and even independent media into the regime’s framework, ensuring that they function within state-approved limits rather than as independent challengers (Astapova et al., 2022; Pellerin, 2023; Reny, 2021). One of the most effective mechanisms of societal co-optation is the controlled inclusion of opposition parties and civil society organisations. Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) argue that authoritarian rulers create “semi-oppositional” parties and institutions that allow limited dissent while ensuring that genuine political competition remains suppressed. By co-opting moderate opposition figures and integrating them into the political system, rulers reduce the likelihood of revolutionary mobilisation while projecting an image of limited pluralism to domestic and international audiences (Kavasoglu, 2021, 2022; Reny, 2021; Yerkes, 2012). Similarly, religious institutions and labour unions are also frequently co-opted. In Iran, the clerical establishment benefits from state funding and legal privileges, ensuring that religious leaders align their teachings with the regime’s goals (Khalaji, 2011). In China, state-controlled trade unions function as tools of social control rather than genuine labour advocacy

organisations, allowing the government to defuse worker grievances before they escalate into mass protests (Truex, 2016).

In addition to the co-optation of the opposition and civil society, media control is a vital mechanism for shaping public perception and reinforcing regime legitimacy. Rather than outright banning independent journalism, many authoritarian regimes buy off journalists, co-opt media outlets, or create state-sponsored “independent” news platforms that subtly reinforce the regime’s narratives (Gunitsky, 2015b; Guriev & Treisman, 2019; Tsourapas, 2021). This form of “soft censorship” ensures that public discourse remains within acceptable bounds while maintaining the illusion of press freedom (Gleditsch et al., 2023).

Therefore, co-optation is central to authoritarian regime survival, ensuring elite loyalty, economic dependence, and societal compliance. By strategically distributing resources, granting controlled political influence, and embedding elites within patronage networks, autocrats minimise the risk of defection and opposition mobilisation. Selectorate theory highlights how maintaining a small, privileged ruling coalition allows regimes to concentrate benefits among key supporters while limiting broader political participation. Institutionalised power-sharing, military patronage, and economic co-optation further entrench elite dependence, reducing incentives for rebellion. At the societal level, controlled opposition, state-business collusion, and media co-optation prevent grassroots challenges while maintaining a facade of pluralism. Ultimately, authoritarian resilience is a product of strategic integration, ensuring that key actors remain invested in the regime’s stability.

Co-optation and Emigration Policy

Regimes that effectively employ co-optation could be secure enough to implement permissive emigration policies. This could occur because co-optation reduces the risks associated with emigration by incorporating elites, mitigating economic grievances, and strategically managing the movement of citizens. In some cases, emigration even serves as a mechanism for reinforcing co-optation, benefiting the regime rather than undermining it.

In authoritarian regimes where co-optation is effectively implemented, emigration controls become less critical because political opposition is already absorbed into the system. By offering material incentives and institutional inclusion, the regime minimises the need to suppress dissent through coercion (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Siverson & de Mesquita, 2017; Svoboda, 2012; Xu, 2021). Unlike highly repressive regimes, which fear dissidents fleeing abroad to organise resistance, co-optation-based regimes may perceive emigration as a lower threat. The incorporation of political elites, activists, and intellectuals into the ruling framework can ensure that potential opposition is neutralised before it can gain traction.

In this context, policy concessions as a form of co-optation can also extend to emigration privileges. Selected elites or groups may be granted access to international education, employment, or travel in exchange for loyalty. For instance, Kazakhstan’s Bolashak International Scholarship Programme selectively funded postgraduate studies abroad for promising students, cultivating a foreign-educated elite that remained dependent on the regime’s support (Bokayev et al., 2020; Tsourapas, 2021). This policy ensured that educated professionals maintained their political and economic ties to the state while discouraging dissent, demonstrating how strategic emigration policies can reinforce co-optation rather than threaten authoritarian control.

Co-optation is often linked to patronage-driven economies, where resources are distributed selectively among elites (Kavasoglu, 2022; Lewis & Sagnayeva, 2020; Sheng, 2023; Trisko, 2006). In such contexts, labour migration serves as an economic stabiliser, providing a safety valve for domestic unemployment and securing remittance inflows that sustain the economy. When workers seek opportunities abroad, they alleviate job shortages and reduce pressure on the state to create employment. When a significant portion of the population works abroad and sends remittances, the government can reallocate state funds away from social services and toward elite patronage networks. Since remittances reduce public dependence on government welfare, regimes can justify diverting resources to sustain the loyalty of key stakeholders (Ahmed, 2012). By facilitating emigration rather than repressing it, the regimes can thus effectively mitigate domestic pressures without jeopardising regime stability.

Given these dynamics, I hypothesise that authoritarian regimes that successfully employ co-optation will have more lenient emigration policies. This leniency is not a sign of liberalisation but rather a strategic calculation: since the regime has already secured the loyalty of critical stakeholders—political elites, business leaders, and influential social groups, allowing non-essential individuals to emigrate does not threaten its stability (see Figure 4.2). Instead, emigration serves as a safety valve, easing internal pressures while preserving the core power structure.

Figure 4.2. Linking strong co-optation to permissive emigration policies.



Legitimation

Authoritarian regimes cannot rely only on electoral mandates or institutional accountability to justify their rule. Instead, they must actively construct and sustain a narrative of legitimacy to secure compliance and prevent dissent. Legitimation—the belief that a regime has a rightful claim to rule, is not merely an ideological concern but a strategic necessity for long-term stability. When a regime is

perceived as legitimate, opposition is less likely to mobilise, elites remain loyal, and coercion becomes less costly. Conversely, a crisis of legitimacy can trigger elite defection, mass unrest, and even revolutionary collapse. To avoid such threats, authoritarian rulers employ a range of strategies, such as ideology or economic performance, to manufacture consent and consolidate their grip on power (Gerschewski, 2018; Gilley, 2009; Stillman, 1974).

Max Weber's typology of legitimacy—traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational, provides a foundational framework for understanding how authoritarian regimes justify their rule (Weber, [1922] 1978). While democratic governments primarily derive legitimacy from legal-rational authority grounded in institutional accountability and electoral processes, authoritarian states must rely on a more fluid and often hybridised approach. Traditional authority, rooted in historical continuity, religious legitimacy, or cultural foundations, enables regimes to frame their rule as a natural extension of past governance structures. Charismatic authority, by contrast, is centred on the personal appeal and leadership of a ruler who claims exceptional vision or historical destiny, often reinforced through mass mobilisation and propaganda. Although ostensibly based on codified laws and bureaucratic institutions, legal-rational authority is frequently manipulated to entrench power without genuine political competition (Bernhard et al., 2020; Tannenberg et al., 2019; Weber, 1978).

However, these forms of legitimacy rarely function in isolation. Rather, they intersect and evolve in response to internal and external pressures, often incorporating ideological narratives to reinforce state control (Zhu, 2011). Many authoritarian regimes construct legitimacy by integrating elements of nationalism, economic performance, and security provision, aligning their claims to rule with the expectations and grievances of their populations (Gerschewski, 2018; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2017; Tannenberg et al., 2019).

Among these narratives, security stands out as a particularly powerful source of authoritarian legitimacy. The Hobbesian social contract, which emphasises security over political participation, remains a core justification for authoritarian rule. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes argued that individuals in a state of nature marked by chaos and violence would willingly surrender their freedoms to an all-powerful sovereign in exchange for order and stability. Many authoritarian regimes explicitly or implicitly invoke this logic—China under Xi Jinping frames centralised control as necessary for social harmony and economic progress, while Russia under Vladimir Putin portrays strong leadership as essential to preventing national disintegration, often referencing the instability of the 1990s as evidence (Gray, 2023; Maier, 2014; Noesselt, 2018). Military juntas, such as those in Myanmar, claim legitimacy by positioning themselves as stabilisers in times of crisis, reinforcing the Hobbesian notion that an authoritarian ruler is preferable to anarchy. However, Hobbesian legitimacy is contingent on the regime's ability to deliver stability—if an authoritarian leader fails to suppress

unrest or maintain economic growth, their legitimacy erodes, potentially triggering elite fragmentation or mass rebellion (Ferrara, 2003; Lawson & Seidman, 2000).

While Hobbes provides a foundation for authoritarian stability, Rousseau's concept of the general will offers an alternative ideological justification. Rousseau, in *The Social Contract* (1762), argued that a legitimate government expresses the "general will", that is, the true interests of the people, even if they do not recognise those interests themselves. Authoritarian regimes have frequently appropriated this idea, claiming to embody the collective good while suppressing dissent as a threat to national unity. The Soviet Union under Stalin framed mass purges and repression as necessary to advance the "historical necessity" of socialism, while Nazi Germany under Hitler invoked the idea of collective national destiny, eliminating political opposition under the pretence of racial and ideological purity. Similarly, Maoist China justified the Cultural Revolution as an effort to purge "counter-revolutionary" elements, even though it led to widespread suffering. The key vulnerability of this form of legitimacy is that it allows the state to define what constitutes the "true" will of the people, leading to an authoritarian paradox—if the government determines that the people's supposed interests have changed, it must continuously reshape its ideological narrative to justify repression (Aziz & Qadir, 2023; Bërdufi & Dushi, 2015; Feldmann & Mazepus, 2018).

Unlike the Hobbesian and Rousseauian models, Lockean social contract theory (*Two Treatises of Government*, 1698) presents a conditional form of legitimacy, which authoritarian regimes selectively adapt to justify their rule. Locke (1698) argues that governments derive legitimacy from their ability to protect life, liberty, and property, making state authority contingent on delivering tangible benefits to citizens. Many contemporary autocracies exploit this principle by substituting political legitimacy with economic performance, asserting that political restrictions are necessary for prosperity and stability (Feldmann & Mazepus, 2018; Gerschewski, 2013; Levitsky & Way, 2002). Under Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore exemplified this model, maintaining strict political control while legitimising governance through economic success and public order (Barr, 2014). Similarly, Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE restrict political participation but sustain legitimacy through high living standards and extensive welfare provisions (Hertog, 2010). Turkey under Erdogan has deployed this framework opportunistically—initially presenting authoritarian measures as temporary safeguards for democracy before shifting toward a permanent security-based legitimacy as opposition intensified (Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016). However, the inherent weakness of performance-based legitimation is its dependence on sustained economic stability. When economic conditions deteriorate, the regime's claim to legitimation becomes fragile. Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro exemplifies this vulnerability: once the economic collapse eroded living standards, mass discontent surged despite continued repression (Corrales, 2020). Thus, while economic performance can bolster authoritarian legitimacy in the short term, it remains an unstable foundation for long-term political survival.

Weber's typology of legitimacy intersects with these theoretical perspectives, revealing how authoritarian regimes strategically transition between different sources of legitimation over time. Traditional legitimacy, rooted in history, religion, and cultural continuity, has long underpinned monarchies and theocratic states. Saudi Arabia's ruling family derives authority from its custodianship of Islam's holiest sites, reinforcing its claim through religious symbolism (al-Rasheed, 2010). Similarly, Iran's theocracy legitimises its rule through the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), which grants political authority to religious scholars (Arjomand, 2009). However, traditional legitimacy is inherently static and struggles to adapt to modern governance challenges, necessitating supplementary forms of justification (Dogan, 2013; Zhu, 2011).

As traditional legitimacy erodes, many authoritarian regimes shift toward charismatic legitimacy, where leaders cultivate mass devotion and centralise power around personalist rule. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao relied on highly orchestrated cults of personality, portraying themselves as infallible embodiments of national or ideological destiny (Brunkert & von Soest, 2023; Eatwell, 2005). Similarly, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela employed populist rhetoric to position himself as the protector of the poor against elite interests, sustaining his authority through direct appeals to the masses (Corrales & Penfold, 2015). However, charismatic legitimacy is also unstable—it is tied to the leader's persona, making regimes vulnerable when the leader loses credibility or fails to deliver on promises (Guriev & Treisman, 2020; Hoffmann, 2015; Kneuer, 2017).

To ensure long-term survival, some authoritarian regimes transition toward legal-rational legitimacy, where bureaucratic institutions codify power, reducing dependence on individual rulers (Wang, 2022; Wasserman Mitchell, 2024). China's post-Mao transition under Deng Xiaoping exemplifies this shift, as the CCP moved away from personalist rule toward a structured, meritocratic authoritarianism (Shambaugh, 2008). Similarly, Russia, under Vladimir Putin, maintains a facade of legal-rational legitimacy through elections and constitutional mechanisms, even as political opposition is systematically dismantled (Gel'man, 2015). These regimes reinforce their durability by embedding authoritarian control within institutional frameworks, demonstrating how legitimacy is not static but strategically adapted to changing political contexts (Hoffmann, 2015; Kneuer, 2017).

Despite their adaptability, authoritarian regimes face an inherent legitimacy dilemma; unlike democracies, where legitimacy is periodically renewed through elections and institutional mechanisms, authoritarian rulers must continuously manufacture and reinforce their legitimacy to prevent decay. This requires a delicate balance, as relying too much on coercion without legitimacy breeds instability, while depending solely on performance legitimacy makes the regime vulnerable to external shocks. Ultimately, as Stillman (1974) argues, legitimacy is not static but an evolving process of justification. Therefore, the survival of authoritarian regimes depends not only on their ability to

enforce power but also on their capacity to construct, adapt, and sustain the belief that their rule remains justified in the eyes of those they govern (Gilley, 2009; Kneuer, 2017).

Legitimation and Emigration Policy

Authoritarian regimes that derive stability primarily from legitimation face a fundamental challenge when confronted with emigration—the potential erosion of their carefully constructed narratives, ideological foundations, performance metrics, and overall perception of their legitimacy. They must continuously ensure that they meet the expectations tied to these factors to maintain their grip on power. In these regimes, actions such as repression or curtailing rights are often justified as necessary to maintain stability. However, emigration may expose the failure of these actions, suggesting that the regime’s legitimation is not as secure as portrayed and undermining the necessity of such measures.

One of the mechanisms by which emigration can threaten this legitimation is by exposing citizens to alternative political systems, economic conditions, and freedoms in democratic states, undermining the regime’s ideological foundations. Miller and Peters (2020) argue that even short-term exposure to democratic environments provides individuals access to independent media, political pluralism, and economic opportunities, realities that contrast sharply with the controlled political discourse and restricted civil liberties of authoritarian rule. As a result, emigrants may undergo ideological disaffection, rejecting the regime’s legitimacy and transmitting their revised perceptions through transnational networks, return migration, and digital communication (Glasius, 2018a; Lenard & Straehle, 2012; Miller & Peters, 2020). These processes create a diffusion effect, whereby exposure to external realities fuels domestic scepticism, challenging the regime’s monopoly over truth and authority.

A critical component of authoritarian legitimation is leadership mythology, where rulers are elevated beyond mere political figures to embody national destiny and moral authority (Baturu et al., 2024; Brunkert & von Soest, 2023; Dukalskis, 2017). North Korea’s Kim dynasty exemplifies this phenomenon, with state propaganda portraying the ruling family as possessing superhuman wisdom and benevolence, constructing a closed ideological system that positions the leader as indispensable to national survival (Dukalskis & Joo, 2021; Lee, 2010). Such narratives, embedded in education, media, and cultural institutions, reinforce an insular worldview, preventing citizens from considering political alternatives. However, when individuals emigrate and encounter alternative historical narratives and political discourses, these fabrications are unravelled, leading to a crisis of legitimacy. The stark discrepancy between state propaganda and observed reality weakens the credibility of official discourse, encouraging both emigrants and their domestic networks to question the fundamental basis of authoritarian rule (Tsourapas, 2021).

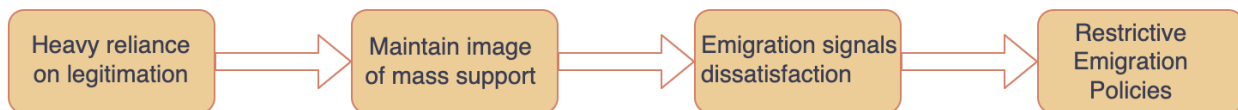
Beyond ideological control, the public sphere in authoritarian regimes is carefully managed to prevent challenges to official narratives. Regimes construct a controlled discursive environment through censorship, restrictions on political assembly, and suppression of opposition, ensuring that legitimacy claims remain unchallenged within domestic borders (Dukalskis, 2017). However, emigration undermines these controls by allowing individuals to engage in political discourse outside the regime's jurisdiction (Tsourapas, 2020). In exile, dissidents gain platforms for independent political mobilisation, connecting with international advocacy networks and engaging in remittance-based political activism. This dynamic weakens the regime's ability to monopolise legitimacy claims, creating external ideological pressures that reverberate domestically through digital activism and underground political movements.

For regimes that rely on performance-based legitimacy, emigration may present an equally profound threat. Many authoritarian rulers justify their grip on power not through economic performance, arguing that political restrictions are necessary trade-offs for national development and prosperity (Gerschewski, 2013). In such regimes, legitimacy is closely tied to state-managed economic narratives, wherein economic success, whether real or exaggerated, is positioned as proof of governance competence (Dukalskis, 2017). Some regimes manipulate economic data to project an illusion of prosperity, while others frame temporary sacrifices (such as political repression or restricted freedoms) as essential for long-term development goals (March, 2013). However, emigration disrupts these narratives by providing citizens firsthand exposure to alternative economic models, revealing inconsistencies between official rhetoric and external reality. Over time, emigrants' experiences circulate back into domestic society, eroding public trust in the regime's economic legitimacy and fostering dissatisfaction that could escalate into mass discontent. Even when economic legitimisation is strong due to a robust economy, the regime must continually maintain economic stability to sustain this form of legitimisation. Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro exemplifies this fragility—as the economy collapsed, once-loyal supporters lost faith in the regime's economic promises, fuelling both mass migration and domestic political unrest (Corrales, 2020). Hence, given the destabilising potential of emigration for legitimisation-dependent regimes, such governments have strong incentives to impose restrictive emigration policies. If emigration is left unchecked, returning citizens, transnational activists, and exiled dissidents may introduce external critiques that undermine the ideological coherence on which these regimes depend.

To clarify, this analysis does not evaluate the success of a regime's legitimisation strategies, such as whether Singapore's economic performance constitutes genuine legitimacy, but rather examines the extent to which a regime relies on legitimisation as its primary mechanism of stability. A key distinction here is that legitimisation is not merely passive support but an active strategy that authoritarian regimes must constantly reinforce. Mass emigration threatens their credibility by signalling dissatisfaction,

undermining their claim to legitimization (see Figure 4.3). While it may seem that regimes that deliver on their legitimization claims could allow greater freedom of movement, I argue that those most dependent on legitimization may have strong incentives to restrict emigration to protect their narrative because the narrative is contingent on the delivery of these claims. For instance, performance-based regimes, such as those relying on economic success, risk credibility loss if large numbers of citizens choose to leave despite apparent material prosperity. They may also seek to prevent the outflow of skilled workers or citizens whose departure might undermine the economic conditions that support its legitimacy. Therefore, I hypothesise that authoritarian regimes that rely predominantly on stability from legitimization may impose restrictive emigration policies not because they lack legitimacy but because allowing unrestricted exit risks exposes the fragility of their legitimacy claims.

Figure 4.3. Linking high legitimization reliance with restrictive emigration policies.



Summary and Conclusion

This section has attempted to advance our understanding of how authoritarian regimes can strategically navigate emigration policy as an extension of their broader survival strategies. Building on the pillars of authoritarian stability—repression, co-optation, and legitimization, it elucidates the causal mechanisms through which regimes determine whether to restrict, control, or permit emigration. Rather than treating emigration policy as a byproduct of economic or geopolitical factors alone, this analysis foregrounds the political logic underpinning authoritarian emigration governance, demonstrating that decisions on population movement are deeply intertwined with the regime’s core control mechanisms.

A key novelty of this analysis lies in its theorisation of emigration not as an isolated phenomenon but as a variable directly shaped by a regime’s internal stability strategies. Under different structural vulnerabilities, authoritarian rulers calibrate emigration policies based on whether they perceive emigration as a destabilising force or a strategic asset. Highly repressive regimes, where stability hinges on coercion, may impose restrictive emigration policies to prevent dissidents from mobilising abroad and undermining the regime from exile. By contrast, regimes that derive stability from co-optation may be more permissive, using emigration as an economic and political safety valve to manage internal pressures. Finally, regimes that rely on legitimization, whether through ideological narratives or economic performance, may also impose emigration restrictions, fearing that exposure to alternative governance models could erode their carefully cultivated claims.

Mechanisms Linking Degree of Personalism and Emigration Policy

Personalism as a Regime Type

In personalist regimes, power is concentrated in a single leader, where access to office and rewards depend entirely on the ruler's discretion (Geddes, 1999). This centralisation of authority aligns with Weber's concept of patrimonial authority, where governance operates through personal loyalty rather than institutional frameworks, as well as Linz's (2000) notion of "sultanism", an extreme form of rule unconstrained by ideology or formal checks and balances. Unlike military or single-party regimes, where power is at least partially distributed among ruling elites, personalist regimes revolve around the individual leader's will, often overriding institutional norms and legal frameworks. Hence, the key to defining a personalist regime is the way decision-making is structured—either the leader holds enough authority to disregard the opinions of other members of the ruling elite, or while they may not be able to disregard the other members as a group, they hold greater power than any of the individual members and even several of the members combined (Baturu et al., 2024).

By the 21st century, personalist rule has become one of the most prevalent forms of authoritarianism. In their 2014 dataset release, GWF estimated that personalist regimes comprised approximately 43% of all non-democratic governments, reflecting a broader shift toward person-centred despote, or combined with, the rise of electoral authoritarianism (Geddes et al., 2018). Hence, personalist regimes have transitioned from being a niche subject to the dominant form of non-democratic regimes today. The geographical diversity of the prevalence of personalist rule is challenging the notion that personalism is inherently tied to specific cultural traditions, such as *caudillismo* in Latin America or *sheikhism* in the Arab world (Baturu et al., 2024). This rising prevalence has fuelled renewed scholarly interest in understanding how personalist rulers consolidate power and ensure regime survival over time (Frantz, 2018).

Personalist rule is defined by several core characteristics: the ruler's unchecked discretion, the dominance of informal power networks, and the absence of meaningful institutional constraints. While some regimes maintain formal institutions such as legislatures or ruling parties, these entities serve as mere extensions of the leader's will, lacking real autonomy (Linz, 2000). Therefore, scholars distinguish personalism as a unique category of authoritarianism with its own internal logic and consequences (Frantz, 2018a; Geddes, 1999). At its extreme, highly personalist regimes such as the Duvaliers' Haiti or Turkmenistan under Niyazov feature cults of personality, governance by decree, and the near-total subjugation of institutions to the ruler's personal power (Bohr, 2004). In these regimes, authority is highly centralised, with the leader dominating the military, state apparatus, and, if present, the ruling party (Geddes et al., 2018). Key positions are filled with loyalists who owe their status directly to the ruler, ensuring decision-making remains personalised and unpredictable (Frantz, 2018). Constitutional limits, such as term restrictions, are frequently abolished or ignored, allowing

leaders to extend their rule indefinitely (Linz, 2000). Rather than operating through legal frameworks, governance depends on patron-client networks, where power flows through personal relationships rather than formal rules (Jackson & Rosberg, 1984). The ruler distributes favours, financial resources, and government positions to a small clique of trusted supporters, often drawn from family, close friends, or ethnic and regional allies. Politics in such systems revolves around securing access to the ruler's patronage, fostering a climate of favouritism and nepotism. Over time, bureaucracies and security forces are systematically purged of independent actors, ensuring that only loyalists remain in positions of influence (Jackson & Rosberg, 1984). Personalist regimes are also generally resistant to elite fragmentation, with their stability often lasting until the leader's natural death or incapacitation (Huntington, 1991).

To maintain control, personalist rulers must suppress dissent and eliminate potential challengers. Geddes (1999) observes that such leaders actively repress factions within the ruling elite, preventing any individual from amassing enough influence to pose a threat. Military officers, high-ranking party officials, and economic elites who appear too powerful often face demotion, exile, or execution. Historical examples include Stalin's purges and Saddam Hussein's repeated eliminations of rivals. Moreover, quantitative research confirms that personalist dictatorships frequently engage in elite purges, systematically removing perceived threats to maintain the ruler's dominance (Svolik, 2012). This strategy deters coups and cultivates paranoia, fostering an environment of fear and mistrust among elites (Jackson & Rosberg, 1984).

Although personalist regimes may retain formal institutions such as legislatures or courts, these bodies primarily serve to legitimise the leader's rule rather than constrain it. Many rulers deliberately undermine legal and institutional norms by bypassing judicial processes, ruling through emergency decrees, or appointing unqualified loyalists to key positions (Linz, 2000). Over time, this weakens the state's institutional capacity, transforming governance into a personalised system where decisions are unpredictable and based on the ruler's preferences rather than established procedures. Therefore, personalist regimes have a high concentration of personal power and dominate through weak institutions, entrenched clientelism, and the state functioning as an extension of the ruler's personal domain (Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2017; Loxton & Levitsky, 2018; Márquez, 2017; Shirk, 2018). The nature of a ruler's power, its exercise and legitimation, political institutionalisation, the composition of elite support, and the extent of executive corruption are all part of a personalist ruler's playbook. A regime must exhibit a strong concentration of these features to be classified as personalist (Baturo et al., 2024).

These characteristics have profound impacts on how personalist regimes function. Under personal rule, a single leader has the unchecked power to make unilateral policy decisions, including launching an attack on another state without opposition. This unpredictability makes it difficult to explain or

anticipate the often abrupt and dramatic shifts in policy that occur in such regimes (Baturu et al., 2024). Hence, policymaking tends to be erratic, as decisions are driven by the leader's immediate interests rather than long-term strategic planning. For instance, the abrupt and often arbitrary policy shifts in Gaddafi's Libya or Trujillo's Dominican Republic exemplify how personalist rule fosters instability. Weak institutions mean that corruption and policy failures face little resistance until crises emerge. Since the regime's survival hinges on the ruler's continued dominance, governance prioritises maintaining loyalty through rewards and repression over economic development or public service provision. As Jackson and Rosberg (1984) observed, in personalist regimes, formal governance is secondary to securing access to the leader's patronage network, leading to an atmosphere of political intrigue and conspiracy.

Additionally, economic performance in highly personalist regimes is often poor (Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, 1999; Geddes et al., 2018; Timoneda, 2024; Wright, 2008). Because decision-making is shaped by the leader's political survival rather than economic rationality, these regimes may experience short-term booms followed by severe busts. Studies comparing economic growth across authoritarian regimes indicate that single-party regimes have higher growth than personalist regimes, which tend to underperform due to short-term policymaking, corruption, and misallocation of resources (Knutsen, 2021). Unlike more institutionalised regimes that can pursue long-term development strategies, personalist rulers prioritise expenditures that secure their position, such as bolstering security forces or funding vanity projects (Brunkert & von Soest, 2023; Grundholm, 2020; Sen et al., 2018). When external revenue sources such as commodity exports or foreign aid decline, these regimes often face severe financial crises. Geddes (2004) notes that personalist regimes are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks; when financial resources dwindle, and the ruler can no longer buy elite loyalty, regime collapse often follows. Historical cases, such as the fall of Suharto amid the 1997 Asian financial crisis or the overthrow of Serbia's Milosevic following economic collapse, underscore the precariousness of personalist rule. Similarly, in Kazakhstan, by the late 1990s, Nazarbayev's heavy reliance on and overly optimistic expectations of short-term gains from energy exports at the expense of other sectors of the economy raised concerns about the potential for severe social and political instability. The economic shocks of the early 1990s, followed by stagnation at the decade's end, also fuelled widespread dissatisfaction with the regime (Hess, 2013). Hence, in the long run, chronic mismanagement and policy unpredictability deter investment and perpetuate economic stagnation (Chang & Golden, 2010; Knutsen, 2021).

While all authoritarian regimes face challenges to their survival, personalist regimes exhibit distinctive instability patterns. On the one hand, these rulers often maintain long tenures by concentrating power and eliminating rivals. Many of the longest-serving autocrats, such as Gaddafi (42 years), Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma (38 years), and Trujillo (31 years), fit the personalist model

(Geddes et al., 2018). By resisting internal splits and suppressing opposition, they delay transitions that might otherwise bring about regime change. However, unlike military regimes that may voluntarily cede power or single-party regimes that institutionalise succession, personalist rulers cling to office until forced out (Frantz, 2018). Since power is concentrated in one individual, succession crises are common. Whether due to death, a coup, or an uprising, the leader's exit often triggers a regime breakdown. The lack of institutionalised succession mechanisms also frequently results in factional infighting, as seen in Spain following Franco's death or in Malawi after Hastings Banda's rule (Geddes et al., 2018). This inflexibility gives personalist regimes brittle stability—they persist as long as the leader remains in control but often collapse abruptly when removed. If ruling parties exist in personalist regimes, they typically do not endure beyond the leader's demise (Meng, 2020). Additionally, personalist rulers are more prone to reckless decision-making, particularly in foreign policy. Research shows that these regimes are more likely to initiate conflicts, as seen in Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait or Russia's intervention in Ukraine (Frantz, 2018b). Ultimately, personalist rule fosters internal repression, economic mismanagement, and external aggression, making these regimes among the most volatile forms of authoritarianism.

Moreover, personalist rulers' reliance on repression increases the likelihood of violent transitions. Without institutionalised pathways for reform, these regimes often respond to opposition with brute force, making them more likely to end in bloody upheaval than other autocratic forms (Svolik, 2012; Van den Bosch, 2021). Studies confirm that greater personalisation of power makes dictators more vulnerable to removal when mass mobilisation occurs. This pattern is evident in cases such as the violent overthrow of Ceausescu in Romania in 1989 and Gaddafi in Libya in 2011. However, in the absence of mass mobilisation, higher levels of personalisation strengthen their grip on power (Grundholm, 2020). This leads to a vicious cycle where the ruler increases levels of violent repression to prevent mass mobilisation, which may increase the likelihood of violent transitions.

In summary, personalist regimes concentrate power on a single leader, weakening institutions and prioritising loyalty over governance. This fosters repression, corruption, and erratic policymaking, making these regimes both resilient and fragile. While personalist rulers often maintain long tenures through coercion and patronage, their grip on power is inherently unstable as succession crises, economic mismanagement, and mass uprisings frequently lead to abrupt and often violent regime collapse. Ultimately, personalist rule is both a source of authoritarian resilience and a catalyst for its eventual downfall.

Personalist Regimes and Emigration Policy

Authoritarian literature suggests that as power becomes more centralised, rulers increasingly rely on coercion and legal restrictions to maintain control (Escribà-Folch et al., 2020; Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Geddes et al., 2018; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). Since political power is concentrated in one

individual or a small elite in personalist regimes, any loss of control poses an existential threat to the ruler. To prevent opposition from organising or escaping repression, these regimes often impose restrictions such as political participation, and access to information (Svolik, 2012), and hence can include restrictions on freedom of foreign movement. As discussed, personalist regimes lack strong institutional mechanisms for power-sharing, making them more reliant on brute force and restrictions to ensure their political survival (Frantz, 2018).

One of the main reasons why highly centralised regimes may impose restrictive emigration policies is their need to prevent elite defections and external opposition. Restrictive exit policies are often used to prevent dissidents from leaving and organising against the regime from abroad. Autocrats fear exiled elites or opposition figures will gain international backing or mobilise diaspora resistance movements, as seen in cases like Cuba and North Korea (Adamson, 2020). These could be reasons to impose harsh exit restrictions, fearing that emigration could empower external opposition movements and delegitimise the regime internationally.

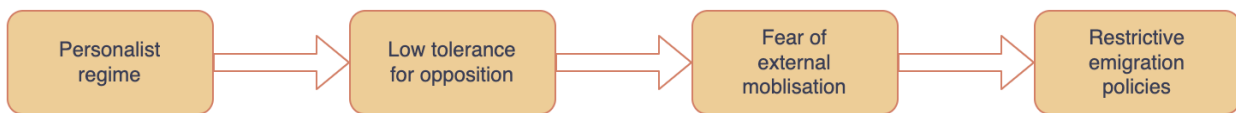
Highly personalist regimes are often characterised by weak institutions because rulers deliberately undermine formal checks and balances (Linz, 2000). This creates an unpredictable political environment where the leader tends to rely on tight restrictions to maintain control. Personalist rulers distrust independent institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and even ruling parties (Geddes, 1999). Since there are few institutional safeguards, regime stability depends on constant monitoring and coercion. This results in harsh censorship laws, restrictive press policies, and travel bans to limit political discourse (Kendall-Taylor et al., 2017). For example, in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, the deepening of personalist rule coincided with increasing restrictions on political opposition, censorship, and emigration policies (Loxton & Levitsky, 2018). The erosion of institutional constraints in these regimes makes policy unpredictability a defining feature, requiring heightened restrictions to prevent potential instability.

Furthermore, personalist authoritarian regimes frequently construct cult-like or mythological personas around their leaders, portraying them as infallible figures with unparalleled wisdom, strength, or even divine qualities (Geddes et al., 2018; Linz, 2000). This carefully curated image is reinforced through state propaganda, controlled media, and ideological indoctrination, ensuring that the population remains isolated from alternative sources of information that might challenge the regime's legitimacy (Levitsky & Way, 2010). However, as discussed in the Legitimation section, (p. 85) emigration poses a fundamental threat to this illusion by exposing citizens to external political and economic realities that starkly contrast with the regime's carefully maintained narrative (Tsourapas, 2021).

When individuals leave a highly personalist regime and experience greater political freedoms, economic opportunities, and open discourse abroad, they will likely reassess and reject the state-sponsored myths they were previously subjected to (Hoffmann, 2005). Moreover, returnees or diaspora communities may actively disseminate counter-narratives, eroding the leader's legitimacy domestically (Svolik, 2012). This can explain why many personalist regimes impose strict exit restrictions, fearing that exposure to alternative political and social models could undermine the leader's constructed persona and incite domestic discontent (King et al., 2013). The fragility of personalist rule is thus exacerbated by migration, as emigration deprives the regime of skilled individuals and accelerates the erosion of ideological control that sustains its mythological foundations.

Personalist authoritarian regimes exhibit an acute preoccupation with maintaining absolute control and preventing dissent, often perceiving even minor opposition as existential threats to their rule (see Figure 4.4). Therefore, this leads to a pervasive climate of political paranoia, where the regime employs extensive repression to eliminate any potential challenge to its authority, which may lead to restrictive emigration policies. Hence, I hypothesise that personalist regimes, characterised by a high concentration of power, are more likely to adopt restrictive emigration policies.

Figure 4.4. Linking personalist regime to restrictive emigration policies.



Summary and Conclusion

This section provided a theoretical framework for understanding how personalism in authoritarian regimes may impact emigration policy as an extension of their survival strategies. The centralisation of power, coupled with institutional erosion and reliance on repression, creates a unique set of incentives for personalist rulers to impose restrictive emigration policies.

The key argument is that personalist regimes will likely restrict emigration as a proactive strategy to contain elite defection, prevent external opposition, and sustain the leader's carefully constructed image. Personalist rulers fear that emigration may enable defectors to organise dissident movements abroad, undermining the regime's control from outside its borders.

Furthermore, this analysis sheds light on how personalist regimes' reliance on ideological myth-making and cults of personality is likely to increase their sensitivity to emigration. Unlike other authoritarian regime types that may be able to absorb limited opposition through institutional mechanisms, personalist rulers perceive alternative political narratives, especially those encountered

by emigrants abroad, as direct challenges to their legitimation. These regimes attempt to prevent ideological contamination that could erode domestic support by restricting citizens' ability to leave.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This research employed a large-N statistical analysis, offering distinct advantages for examining patterns and relationships across various cases. First, large-N studies enable scholars to identify complex patterns and aggregate trends that may remain obscured in case-based approaches. Second, quantitative methods facilitate the systematic analysis of variable relationships, distinguishing consistent associations from random variation (Goertz & Haggard, 2023).

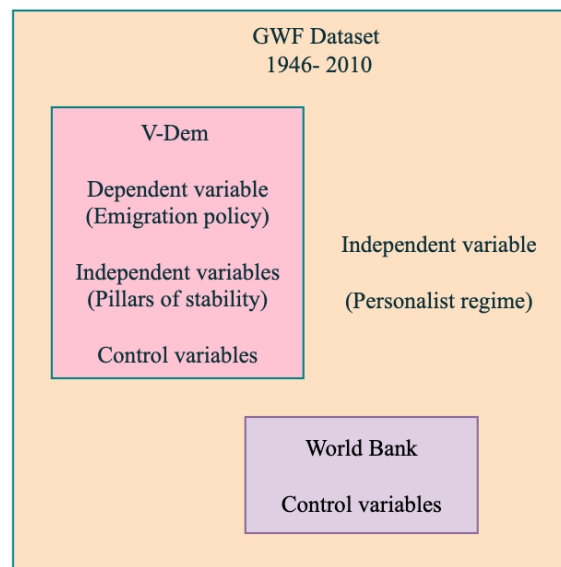
The analysis was conducted using Python libraries, a versatile tool for working with structured data. These libraries are a collection of pre-written code that provides efficient data structures that resemble a table with rows and columns, making them highly intuitive for handling datasets commonly used in social sciences. The libraries enable tasks such as importing datasets, cleaning data by handling missing values or inconsistencies, and transforming data by filtering, grouping, or aggregating variables. Additionally, Python libraries support statistical and descriptive analyses, allowing researchers to generate summary statistics and visualise data distributions (Brooker, 2020; McKinney, 2022).

For this research, which relies on panel data compiled from multiple sources, Python provides an optimal platform for integrating and cleaning data efficiently. The flexibility of Python's libraries, such as *pandas* for data manipulation, ensures that the preprocessing pipeline is streamlined and reproducible. Additionally, Python's statistical packages, such as *statsmodels* and *linearmodels*, allow for the robust estimation of fixed effects and other panel data techniques, whereas packages such as *seaborn* and *matplotlib* aid in creating visualisations of complex relationships (Cutler & Dickenson, 2020; McKinney, 2022). This versatility and functionality make Python a better choice for this data analysis than applications such as SPSS, which do not have the same flexibility and customisability for modelling and large-scale data handling (Brooker, 2020).

Research Design

Two primary datasets underpinned this research: the 2014 GWF dataset on regime transitions and breakdowns and the 2024 V-Dem database. The GWF dataset serves as the foundation, defining the country-year observations and identifying authoritarian regimes. From this base, I integrated V-Dem data for dependent and independent variables (including controls). I also use the World Bank (2024) database for controls. To ensure consistency, I filtered the V-Dem and World Bank datasets to include only observations corresponding to authoritarian regimes in GWF, then merged them by country and year. This process produced a structured panel dataset, as shown in Figure 5.1, combining regime-type classifications from GWF, measures for dependent and independent variables from V-Dem, and demographic indicators from the World Bank.

Figure 5.1. Visual representation of the constructed panel data.



Timeframe and Sample

This research covers the period from 1946 to 2010, drawing on a global sample of 280 authoritarian regimes episodes across 120 countries as identified in the GWF dataset (see Appendix C). The 1946–2010 period represents a pivotal era in the study of political regimes, characterised by the consolidation, transformation, and adaptation of authoritarian governance in response to global political shifts. This timeframe encompasses the Cold War (1947–1991), a defining geopolitical struggle that shaped the ideological and institutional trajectories of both democratic and authoritarian regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The Cold War’s bipolar structure incentivised regime stability through superpower backing, fostering authoritarian resilience via external support (Gunitsky, 2014). With the Cold War’s end, the subsequent wave of democratisation (often termed the “Third Wave” ; Huntington, 1991a) triggered significant reconfigurations within authoritarian states. Rather than fully democratising, many regimes adopted hybrid or competitive authoritarian models, strategically blending democratic elements with autocratic control (Schedler, 2006). Hence, this period presents a particularly compelling context for studying authoritarianism.

Beyond political transformations, this period also witnessed intensified globalisation, which had paradoxical effects on authoritarian governance. On the one hand, economic liberalisation and increased interdependence exerted pressure on regimes to adopt institutional reforms, often as a prerequisite for trade agreements or foreign investment (Baccini & Chow, 2018; Hankla & Kuthy, 2013). On the other hand, globalisation provided authoritarian rulers with new tools for regime survival, such as access to international capital, surveillance technologies, and strategies of

“autocratic legalism”⁴ that allowed them to maintain control while projecting an image of liberalisation (Corrales, 2015; Scheppele, 2018). The expansion of global markets also enabled authoritarian regimes to sustain economic growth without political liberalisation. In this context, the regulation of emigration is a critical arena where authoritarian regimes navigate the dual pressures of global openness and domestic control.

Hypotheses

To revisit, the following hypotheses will be examined in this research:

H1a. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on repression as a pillar of stability are likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

H1b. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on co-optation as a pillar of stability are likely to impose permissive emigration policies.*

H1c. *Authoritarian regimes that rely highly on legitimisation as a pillar of stability are likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

H2a. *Personalist authoritarian regime types are more likely to impose restrictive emigration policies.*

H2b. *Regimes with a high concentration of power on a leader are more likely to implement restrictive emigration policies.*

Data Sources

GWF Dataset

The GWF dataset forms the foundation of this analysis, providing a comprehensive classification of authoritarian regimes across 280 regime cases. The unit of analysis is the regime-year,⁵ focusing exclusively on authoritarian regimes and transitions leading to authoritarian rule. Unlike earlier datasets (discussed below) that primarily focused on democratic transitions, GWF provides a fine-grained account of autocratic rule, tracking regime emergence, breakdowns, and autocracy-to-autocracy transitions with precision. It distinguishes between regime breakdowns that lead to democratisation and those that result in another form of authoritarian rule, for example, from a

⁴ Autocratic legalism is defined as the process by which elected leaders manipulate electoral victories, constitutional mechanisms, and legal frameworks to advance an illiberal agenda while maintaining a facade of democracy. It occurs when intolerant majoritarianism and plebiscitary leadership are disguised as democratic rule, allowing autocrats to erode liberal constitutionalism from within the system rather than through overt authoritarian takeovers (Scheppele, 2018).

⁵ The data is structured at the country-year level; however, since the dataset exclusively includes cases where countries were under authoritarian rule during the observed time period, the unit of analysis is more accurately defined as regime-year.

personalist regime to a party regime (Geddes et al., 2014a). This distinction is particularly crucial for this thesis, which also focuses on the regime type of personalist versus non-personalist.

Beyond its temporal and geographic scope, GWF is distinguished by its rigorous documentation and methodological transparency. Each coding decision is backed by historical narratives and cross-referenced with alternative datasets, such as Polity and CGV, ensuring accuracy and scholarly credibility. It also includes a *gwf_disagree* flag, highlighting cases where its classifications diverge from other sources, making it an adaptable resource for researchers (Geddes et al., 2014a).

GWF Dataset for Personalist Regime Type

Beyond serving as the foundation for this research, I used GWF's classification of regimes to operationalise personalist regime type as an independent variable, examining whether such regimes impose restrictive emigration policies. This inquiry requires a data source that clearly differentiates personalist regimes from others, a methodological challenge for multiple reasons. One of the primary difficulties is that regimes rarely fit neatly into discrete categories, and their classification varies significantly across frameworks. Broadly, regimes are categorised in different databases using either continuous or categorical approaches, each with distinct analytical implications.

Continuous classifications assess democracy along a spectrum, capturing incremental shifts in regime characteristics. These measures are particularly useful for tracking transitions towards or away from authoritarianism. For instance, Freedom House scores countries on a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free), aggregating multiple indicators of civil and political rights. These scores are then grouped into three categories: free, partly free, and not free (Freedom House, 2024). Similarly, the Polity Project employs a scale ranging from -10 (least democratic) to +10 (most democratic) to evaluate the degree of democracy (Marshall et al., 2019). The V-Dem project takes a multidimensional approach, assessing democracy across five principles: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian democracy (Coppedge et al., 2024b).

While these frameworks provide valuable insights into the democratic-authoritarian continuum, they classify authoritarianism only in relation to democracy (e.g., more or less democratic) and do not distinguish between specific authoritarian regime types, obscuring the institutional and coercive variations that differentiate authoritarian regimes. For instance, they fail to capture typological distinctions, such as whether a regime is military, personalist, or party-based. Therefore, scholars studying specific regime types often find these continuous scales inadequate for analysing the mechanisms and characteristics unique to different forms of authoritarianism. Since this research requires a typological distinction specifically in identifying personalist regimes, continuous classifications are unsuitable. Therefore, a categorical framework is essential as it enables the identification of personalist regimes and facilitates comparative analysis with other regime types.

However, regime typologies vary in scope and methodological approach, necessitating a critical assessment of their applicability to this research.

Typology of Authoritarian Regimes

As discussed in Chapter 3, Linz's (1975) seminal work introduced a foundational classification of non-democratic regimes, distinguishing between totalitarian and authoritarian systems. Totalitarian regimes, Linz argued, possess a monistic but not monolithic centre of power, an exclusive and intellectually elaborate ideology, and intensive mobilisation. In contrast, authoritarian regimes are characterised by limited political pluralism, an absence of an elaborate guiding ideology, weak political mobilisation, and a leader or small group exercising power within formally ill-defined limits (Linz, 2000).

Building on this, Huntington (1965) developed a framework that categorised political systems based on the interplay between social mobilisation and political institutionalisation, highlighting their combined impact on regime stability. He identified four broad categories: civic polities, where high levels of institutionalisation and controlled mobilisation ensure stability; corrupt systems, where weak institutions fail to channel societal demands effectively; contained polities, dominated by institutions that suppress mobilisation; and primitive systems, which lack both institutionalisation and mobilisation, often descending into instability. Later, Huntington (1991b) refined this framework to classify authoritarian regimes into one-party regimes, military regimes, racial oligarchies, and personal dictatorships. While influential, Huntington's typology has limitations; its categories, such as "racial oligarchies" are historically bounded and lack the institutional and analytical precision of more recent frameworks that account for hybrid regimes.

Expanding on these earlier frameworks, Linz and Stepan (1996) introduced a more nuanced classification of non-democratic regimes, incorporating post-totalitarianism and sultanism alongside traditional authoritarian and totalitarian categories. They characterised post-totalitarian regimes as evolving from totalitarian ones, marked by a decline in ideological fervour and reduced mobilisation while retaining significant authoritarian controls. Sultanistic regimes, in contrast, were defined by extreme personalism, where a ruler's discretion superseded institutional norms. While this framework enriched the understanding of authoritarian dynamics, like Huntington's, it did not adequately account for hybrid regimes that blend democratic institutions (e.g., elections, opposition parties) with authoritarian control. Many modern regimes, such as competitive authoritarian systems, defy clear categorisation within this model, as they employ a combination of semi-democratic tools to maintain power.

Geddes (1999) made a foundational contribution to the study of authoritarian regimes by shifting the analytical lens toward internal power dynamics and elite politics. Geddes introduced a triadic

classification—military, single-party, and personalist regimes, based on how power is organised and exercised within the regime. Geddes’ approach emphasised that different types of authoritarian rule are underpinned by distinct elite structures and incentive systems, which in turn shape regime durability, susceptibility to coups, and patterns of leadership succession. This internalist perspective was novel in its systematic comparison of authoritarian subtypes using empirical data, and it laid the groundwork for theory-driven, testable hypotheses about regime behaviour and breakdown.

Recognising the growing hybridity of political systems, subsequent typologies sought to capture the evolving nature of authoritarian rule. Elections became the norm in the post-Third Wave world, yet democracy did not necessarily follow. Many regimes use elections as a tool of legitimation while simultaneously restricting political competition through unfair electoral practices, institutional manipulation, and the repression of opposition forces. Diamond (2002) introduced the concept of hybrid regimes, identifying electoral authoritarian regimes as those that conduct regular elections but fail to meet the standards of being fully free or fair. Levitsky and Way (2002) built on this concept with their “competitive authoritarianism” model, describing regimes where elections are formally competitive but fundamentally unfair due to media restrictions, electoral fraud, and repression. They further distinguished between electoral authoritarian systems, in which ruling parties manipulate elections to maintain power, and hegemonic-party systems, where opposition parties are effectively excluded from the political landscape.

Later, Geddes et al. (2014) expanded on Geddes’ (1999) framework in the GWF dataset, incorporating monarchies and refining hybrid regime classifications. Similarly, Cheibub et al. (CGV) (2010) developed a typology based on the nature of ruling elites, distinguishing among military dictatorships, monarchies, and civilian dictatorships. Their framework, notable for its simplicity and emphasis on observable governmental features, has been widely applied in comparative authoritarianism research. Further contributions to hybrid regime classifications include Hadenius and Teorell’s (2007) institutional approach, later expanded by Wahman et al. (HTW) (2013) to incorporate hybrid regime categories. Another significant classification is the Regimes of the World (RoW) framework by Lührmann et al. (2018), which assesses political systems based on degrees of democratic practice, categorising them as closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies.

Selecting Typology: Why GWF?

Compared to other regime typologies, the GWF framework offers significant analytical advantages by capturing key variations in authoritarian governance essential for understanding regime behaviour and durability. Unlike the CGV typology (Cheibub et al., 2010), which classifies regimes as military, monarchic, or civilian, GWF introduces a crucial distinction between party-based and personalist rule—two forms of civilian authoritarianism that differ fundamentally in terms of elite structure,

decision-making processes, and patterns of leader survival. Similarly, while frameworks such as RoW and HTW are valuable for tracking regime trends over time, their emphasis on electoral characteristics and regime outcomes overlooks the internal power distribution among elites. As a result, they fail to account for personalism, a defining feature of many authoritarian regimes. For example, RoW's focus on electoral inclusivity offers limited insight into the informal power dynamics or institutional manipulation that underpin authoritarian control. In contrast, the GWF typology explicitly theorises and measures these dynamics, making it uniquely suited to research on authoritarian consolidation and leadership strategies. Given these conceptual and empirical strengths, the GWF (2014) framework—as operationalised in the GWF dataset, provides the most appropriate foundation for this study.

Limitations of Using the GWF Classification

The limitation of using the GWF classification mainly arises from the need to balance conceptual precision with practical usability, ensuring that researchers can work with manageable classifications while still capturing key differences in regime types. The GWF has two types of classification in its dataset: one that granularly classifies regimes into hybrids, such as party-personal-military,⁶ and second, a broader four-category classification that collapses the hybrid regimes into four categories to enable quantitative analysis. The four-category classification in the GWF dataset is as follows:

gwf_party	Binary indicator of <i>party</i> regime type (groups party-based, party-personal, party-military, party-personal-military, oligarchy, and Iran 1979-2010).
gwf_personal	Binary indicator of <i>personalist</i> regime type.
gwf_military	Binary indicator of <i>military</i> regime type (groups military, military-personal, indirect military).
gwf_monarchy	Binary indicator of <i>monarchy</i> regime type.

Source: Geddes et al. (2014, p. 16)

A key issue with this classification system is that when a personalist-hybrid regime exists, it is coded as a non-personalist regime. Hybrid regimes, by definition, embody multiple sources of power, making their classification inherently ambiguous. For example, Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf in the 2000s is coded as military-personal in the granular classification of the GWF dataset. Its placement within the four-category classification should depend on the dominant institutional feature. If emphasis is placed on the continued role of the officer corps in governance, it might be grouped under military. However, if Musharraf's personal consolidation of authority and weakening of collective military decision-making are prioritised, it could justifiably be categorised as personalist.

⁶ See Geddes et al. (2014, p. 16).

Such cases expose the difficulty of applying rigid classification rules to regimes where institutional control is contested or dynamic.

Ultimately, while collapsing regime types enhances comparability and statistical robustness, it also risks oversimplifying the institutional dynamics of authoritarian governance. To address this limitation⁷, I incorporate the presidentialism index from the V-Dem database alongside GWF's binary classification of personalist regimes to better capture the concentration of power. This approach allows for a more nuanced assessment of personalist elements within a regime, ensuring they are measured with greater precision (see the Operationalisation of Variables section for details).

Varieties of Democracy Database

This research also draws on the V-Dem dataset (Version 14, 2024) to operationalise variables for pillars of authoritarian stability, social and economic control variables, as well as the dependent variable of emigration policy. V-Dem is one of the most comprehensive resources for measuring democracy and its components across the globe. It employs a unique combination of expert-coded evaluations and factual data to construct over 470 indicators from over 4,000 country-specific experts (Coppedge et al., 2024b). To ensure data reliability, V-Dem employs Bayesian measurement models that account for coder uncertainty and bias alongside cross-coder reliability measures to maintain consistency. It also uses anchoring vignettes, where experts evaluate hypothetical scenarios alongside real cases to standardise coding thresholds. Additionally, empirical priors, based on historical trends and external data, refine estimates in cases with limited or conflicting information (Coppedge et al., 2024c). The V-Dem dataset is highly relevant for studies of authoritarianism, as it captures key aspects of how regimes exercise control, maintain legitimacy, and restrict freedoms. Details on the variables selected for pillars of authoritarian stability and other independent variables are discussed in the Operationalisation of Variables section.

V-Dem Indicator for Emigration Policy

Due to the lack of comprehensive cross-national data on formal emigration policies, I used V-Dem's freedom of foreign movement variable to operationalise emigration policy. While it does not directly capture policy details such as dual citizenship policies or passport costs, it serves as a valid proxy by reflecting de facto restrictions on outward mobility. The variable measures a country's citizens' ability to move between borders without restrictions from state authorities on an ordinal scale of 0–4 (see Appendix A). This approach is also justified by the intrinsic link between policy instruments and their measurable outcomes—emigration policies ultimately manifest as constraints on individual mobility rights. I discuss this further in the upcoming section (p. 104). In the absence of data on

⁷ Frantz et al. (2021) developed a personalism index based on the GWF dataset. However, since it relies on the same underlying framework, I incorporated V-Dem's indicator to enhance comprehensiveness and mitigate the limitations of GWF's coding. See Frantz et al. (2021).

emigration policies, this approach allows for a more consistent and empirically grounded assessment of restrictions on outward mobility.

Data Constraints in Emigration Policy Research

Migration databases typically prioritise immigration, reflecting the policy concerns of destination countries, while indicators of emigration are sparse and underdeveloped. Existing datasets that include emigration-related metrics often suffer from limited temporal and geographic coverage, excluding longer timespans and regions. This data gap restricts the ability to conduct rigorous comparative analyses or examine long-term trends, leaving important questions about the drivers and mechanisms of emigration policies understudied.

Two major biases lie in all migration policy databases and indices: immigration (as opposed to emigration) and the Global North. Out of 67 sets of indicators and indices on migration policy, indices predominantly cover OECD and European countries, while African, Asian and Latin American countries are less covered. The focus is also on selection, admission and settlement aspects, as these datasets are focused on immigration policies (Solano & Huddleston, 2021). For instance, one of the most comprehensive indices, MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index), covers 38 countries, but mostly in Europe and North America, and measures policies specific to integration, such as labour market mobility, education and political participation (Huddleston et al., 2015). Similarly, the IMPALA database primarily focuses on OECD countries and only covers immigration-centric policies (Beine et al., 2016). Other larger databases of migration policy, such as IOM's Global Migration Data Portal and datasets such as IMPIC (Helbling et al., 2017), also only contain indicators that measure aspects of immigration policies. Additionally, these indices tend to cover only a few years and focus on contemporary rather than historical policies. The average coverage is 11 years, with a significant number of indices covering only one year (Solano & Huddleston, 2021, 2022).

There are only two primary datasets that include emigration policy indicators: DEMIG (Determinants of International Migration) (De Haas et al., 2015) and IMISEM (Every Immigrant is an Emigrant) (Pedroza & Palop-García, 2025). IMISEM is notable for being the first dataset to bridge both emigration and immigration dimensions of migration policy, offering 828 indicators across 32 polities from Europe, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Pedroza & Palop-García, 2025). However, its temporal design is cross-sectional, with data collected only for the period from 2017–2019, rendering it unsuitable for longitudinal analyses such as this research, where adopting a long-term perspective is essential for analysing how regime dynamics shape emigration policies. Another dataset, EMIX (Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017), examines emigrant and diaspora policies in the Latin America and Caribbean region, specifically targeting measures implemented for individuals who had already left their home countries, with data collected for 2015 and 2017.

A noteworthy tool for studying emigration policies is the EXIT Index (Pedroza & Palop- García, 2025), which measures and compares emigration policies across countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. It categorises policies into two components: restrictions, such as exit bans, quotas, or fees, and encouragement measures, including financial incentives, social benefit portability, or pro-emigration campaigns. While conceptually valuable, the EXIT Index relies on IMISEM and provides only a cross-sectional snapshot for 2017, limiting its applicability for examining historical trends or policy evolution.

Another significant database is the DEMIG Policy database, which offers a comprehensive overview of migration policy changes, including emigration policies, by tracking shifts in restrictiveness and their effects on migration flows across 45 countries (De Haas et al., 2015). While its inclusion of exit policies and disaggregation of policy measures provide valuable insights into the evolution of migration governance, it measures policy change rather than the structure or content of emigration policies themselves. This limits its utility for this research, which focuses on policy variation based on the degree of restrictiveness and permissiveness. Additionally, most countries in the database are from the Global North, with only a handful of cases of authoritarianism. Given these constraints, the dataset does not align with the analytical needs of this research, as the focus of DEMIG is on the frequency or direction of policy amendments and democratic countries.

Therefore, in light of these restrictions, V-Dem's freedom of foreign movement variable was selected to operationalise emigration policy. More broadly, proxy variables are a recognised methodological approach in social sciences, particularly when direct measurement of policies or institutional behaviours is impractical.⁸ Similarly, in policy evaluation, proxy variables allow researchers to examine the effects of regulatory reforms when direct measures are limited.⁹ For this research, it also provides an additional advantage of consistency, as most independent variables used are also derived from V-Dem. Since all variables are derived from the same dataset and follow a uniform methodological framework, this choice ensures coherence and reliability in the analysis.

However, employing a proxy variable such as this to measure emigration policy requires careful acknowledgement of its limitations to maintain methodological transparency. While this approach offers valuable insights, it is important to recognise that the primary limitation of using freedom of

⁸ See studies such as: Dickinson, H. O., Hrisos, S., Eccles, M. P., Francis, J., & Johnston, M. (2010). Statistical considerations in a systematic review of proxy measures of clinical behaviour. *Implementation Science*, 26(5), 20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-20>

Montgomery, M. R., Gragnolati, M., Burke, K. A., & Paredes, E. (2000). Measuring living standards with proxy variables. *Demography*, 37, 155–174.

⁹See Bastianin, A., Castelnovo, P., & Florio, M. (2018). Evaluating regulatory reform of network industries: A survey of empirical models based on categorical proxies. *Utilities Policy*, 55, 115–128.

foreign movement as a proxy for emigration policy is that it does not explicitly measure legal frameworks.

Reconciling Freedom of Foreign Movement with Emigration Policy

To justify using the freedom of foreign movement variable as a proxy for emigration policy, it is essential to understand how this indicator emerged within the V-Dem framework, which is itself rooted in Dahl's (1971) conceptualisation of polyarchy. Dahl's theory of polyarchy defines democracy in terms of two broad dimensions: public contestation (the degree of permissible opposition and competition) and inclusiveness (participation of citizens). Crucially, public contestation requires a set of civil liberties, such as freedoms that enable citizens to express dissent, obtain information, form organisations, and generally act without fear of punishment (Coppedge et al., 2019). V-Dem's approach to measuring democracy is explicitly built upon Dahl's institutional framework, but it extends beyond Dahl's core elements to capture a broader range of civil liberties, including freedom of movement.

Admittedly, "freedom of foreign movement" is a broad condition and not a specific policy instrument. It does not capture nuances such as the exact legal basis of restrictions (e.g., a constitutional clause versus administrative regulation). This does raise a validity concern—are we truly measuring what we claim to measure? It is therefore important to clarify that this research focuses on capturing emigration policy *in practice*, understood as the degree of restriction a regime imposes on its citizens' ability to leave the country. The V-Dem variable directly reflects that: it ranges from 0 (almost no one can leave; high state-imposed barriers to exit) to 4 (almost no state-imposed barriers).¹⁰ This correspondence suggests a high content validity for this research.¹¹ Given that the theoretical interest of this research lies in the regime's permissiveness versus the restrictiveness of a policy, the measure is justifiable. In fact, its breadth is a strength in contexts where policy is implemented through both formal and informal means.

The V-Dem variable does not tell us the exact legal mechanism, such as exit visa requirement or a travel ban list a regime uses, but rather the combined end result of all mechanisms. The inability to separate these mechanisms is a modest drawback for my use case, but not a fatal flaw. This means that the results should be interpreted with care. A low freedom of foreign movement score indicates a restrictive emigration environment, which could emanate from law, practice, or both. It is important to be cautious not to over-interpret it as "there is a harsh law" without corroborating evidence. However, from a functional standpoint, this civil liberty-based measure captures what the policy

¹⁰ See Appendix A.

¹¹ Rather than analysing migration flows (the actual movement of people), this research concentrates on the politics of emigration policy, specifically the formal frameworks regulating the right to exit. This distinction is important, as migration flows may respond to a range of push factors, some of which (e.g., economic conditions) are controlled for here, and the central concern lies in how authoritarian regimes structure the possibility of leaving.

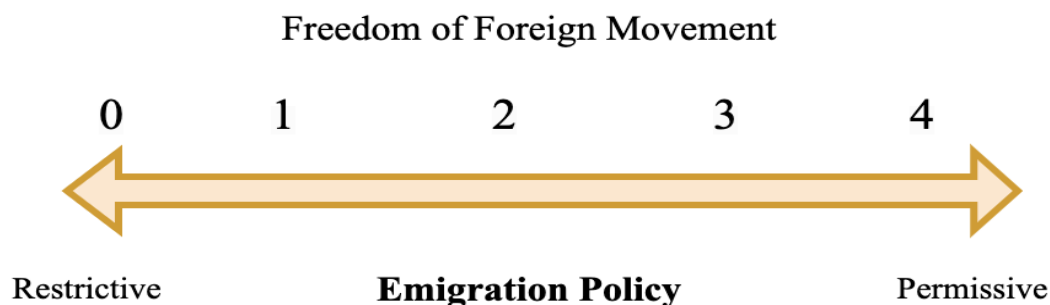
intends to achieve. Authoritarian emigration policies are designed to condition people's ability to leave; the V-Dem indicator observes whether those conditions take effect. Thus, while policy and liberty measures can be distinct, they are tightly linked as repressive policy manifests as curtailed freedom. In regimes where laws exist but are not enforced (or vice versa enforced without clear laws), focusing on this variable is arguably a better gauge of the regime's true stance. Still, one must remain aware that what this proxy captures is the *overall restrictiveness of exit*, not the regime's more nuanced strategic deployment of emigration controls, where "permissiveness" of emigration can be used as a purge or safety valve. It cannot adequately capture the cases where regimes employ differentiated policies at the same time across distinct groups, for example, by encouraging the departure of dissidents or marginalised groups while preventing the exit of skilled professionals, political elites, or military personnel. In such cases, emigration functions less as a general restriction on liberty and more as a targeted purge mechanism. Because the V-Dem indicator reflects the aggregate openness of foreign movement, it may understate these selective or symbolic practices. An additional note of caution is also warranted in treating freedom of movement as a straightforward proxy for "exit." As several scholars highlight, authoritarian regimes often rely on selective, symbolic, or hidden forms of exit control that may not be captured by formal legal restrictions (Fitzgerald, 2006; Isaacs, 2022; Michel et. al., 2023; Schwenken 2018; Tsourapas, 2018; Vergalli, 2011). For example, travel permits may be technically available but distributed in discriminatory ways, or bureaucratic hurdles may function as informal barriers. Conversely, regimes may deliberately encourage outmigration in moments of political tension, turning permissive emigration into a form of repressive purge. Such practices complicate the measurement of exit, since indicators of freedom of movement may suggest openness even when the regime is using emigration strategically to neutralise dissent. Recognising these limitations is necessary to understand the use of the freedom of foreign movement variable as an indirect proxy for emigration policy.

Therefore, while this variable does not directly measure emigration policy in a legalistic sense, it is a methodologically sound and theoretically justified proxy because it reflects the actual degree of state-imposed movement restrictions central to authoritarian emigration control strategies (see Figure 5.2).

In sum, while freedom of foreign movement is not a perfect substitute for direct emigration policy measures, it serves as the most viable and empirically grounded option given the constraints of existing emigration policy data. Its ability to account for both formal legal barriers and de facto enforcement practices makes it particularly well-suited for studying emigration controls in authoritarian regimes, though its inability to capture selective, strategic, or purge-oriented uses of emigration should be borne in mind when interpreting findings. While no single indicator can capture every facet of a regime's policy, this proxy effectively balances conceptual alignment and empirical measurability. By applying it carefully and buttressing it with the above precautions, it can be

confidently used to operationalise emigration policy in a manner that is both rigorous and relevant to the realities of authoritarian rule.

Figure 5.2. Conceptual alignment of the variable.



Limitations of V-Dem

The V-Dem dataset provides a rigorous and innovative approach to quantifying complex democratic attributes by blending empirical data with expert assessments. Its primary strengths include comprehensive global coverage, methodological transparency, and sophisticated reliability measures incorporating multiple coders and Bayesian statistical modelling.

Nevertheless, researchers must exercise caution due to several inherent limitations. First, reliance on expert coders introduces potential biases. Although V-Dem mitigates ideological and geographic biases by selecting in-country experts and screening for overt political affiliations (Coppedge et al., 2024c), subjective judgements inevitably persist, particularly in politically sensitive contexts or where coders share similar ideological leanings. Despite Bayesian aggregation techniques intended to correct individual coder bias, some degree of subjectivity will remain embedded within the data.

Second, ensuring consistent interpretation and application of coding criteria across countries and over time is inherently challenging. While V-Dem employs detailed codebooks, multiple coders, and inter-coder reliability tests, complete uniformity in interpreting scales is unattainable. Divergences among coders may result in increased uncertainty, particularly for indicators characterised by lower coder agreement. Such variability necessitates caution when interpreting indicator values with wide uncertainty intervals or sparse coder input.

Third, V-Dem's reliance on Bayesian item response theory modelling introduces technical constraints. The hierarchical priors underlying these models assume relative consistency in coder interpretations of scales, which may oversimplify actual differences. Moreover, the latent continuous scores produced by Bayesian models do not necessarily translate intuitively into real-world meanings. Differences between scores are not always uniform, as equal numerical intervals can represent qualitatively different magnitudes of change across the scale (Coppedge et al., 2024b). Additionally,

the complexity of Bayesian models might reduce transparency, especially for users without advanced statistical training.

Thus, while V-Dem remains an invaluable resource for comparative research, scholars must remain mindful that the dataset's scores are intersubjective, probabilistic estimates shaped significantly by methodological and modelling choices.

Operationalisation of Variables

Dependent Variable: Emigration Policy

As discussed, the freedom of foreign movement (v2clfmov) variable from V-Dem was used as a measure of emigration policy for my research as it captures the extent to which citizens can travel and emigrate without interference from public authorities, making it an indicator of state control over emigration (Pemstein et al., 2024, pp. 190–191). The variable's design reflects a continuum of state control, ranging from severe restrictions, such as bans or punishments for transgressors, to full freedom of movement, which maps onto the degrees of emigration policy variation this study aims to analyse. The assessment of the degree of freedom of foreign travel is made on an ordinal scale (converted to interval by the measurement model by V-Dem)¹² from 0–4 (see Appendix A).

Independent Variables (IV): Pillars of Authoritarian Stability

IVI: Repression

To conceptualise repression, I used Dag Tanneberg's (2020) definition of political repression as “an instrumental policy to prevent or diminish challenges to authority” (p. 14). This was because he notes two forms in which repression manifests: restrictions and violence. Tanneberg (2020) defines restrictions as curtailing freedoms of expression and association to weaken organisational capacity for dissent and violence as disregarding physical integrity rights through actions such as torture and arbitrary detentions aimed at instilling fear and suppressing resistance.

To operationalise repression, I utilised physical violence index (v2x_clphy) and political civil liberties index (v2x_clpol) from V-Dem to capture both restrictive and violent forms of repression. The physical violence index assesses the absence of physical violence committed by government agents against individuals and is estimated by averaging two indicators: freedom from torture and freedom from political killings. The political civil liberties index evaluates the absence of governmental constraints on political liberties, such as freedom of expression and association and is formed by point estimates drawn from a Bayesian factor analysis model including the indicators such as government censorship efforts including harassment of journalists, media self-censorship, freedom of discussion for men and women, freedom of academic and cultural expression, party ban, barriers to parties,

¹² See Coppedge et al., 2024b; 2024c

opposition parties autonomy, CSO entry and exit and CSO repression (Coppedge et al., 2024b). Both are made on an interval scale of 0–1, from low to high and higher values indicate more freedom. I took the average of both indices and created an index called Freedom from Repression.

IV2: Legitimation

I adopted Tannenberg et al.'s (2019) conceptualisation of legitimation as a set of claims made by rulers to justify their authority and secure compliance from the governed. Rooted in a Weberian perspective, legitimation is understood as a relational process requiring both the articulation of justificatory claims by rulers and their acceptance by the governed (Tannenberg et al., 2019, pp. 4–6). The framework identifies four primary strategies of legitimation: performance legitimation, where regimes highlight achievements such as economic growth, poverty reduction, security, and governance; rational-legal legitimacy, which relies on legal norms and constitutional processes to validate authority; charismatic leadership, portraying leaders as heroic or morally exceptional figures; and ideological justification, which promotes specific ideologies such as nationalism or socialism to underpin legitimacy (Tannenberg et al., 2019, pp. 8–10).

To operationalise these strategies, I employed four variables from the V-Dem dataset as conducted by Tannenberg et al. (2019). The variables I used were performance legitimation (v2exl_legitperf), which measures the regime's reliance on achievements, rational-legal legitimation (v2exl_legitratio) that captures references to legal norms, person of the leader (v2exl_legitlead) that assesses portrayals of extraordinary leadership qualities, and ideology (v2exl_legitideol) that evaluates the promotion of ideologies as a basis for authority. Each variable uses a scale from 0 ("not at all") to 4 ("almost exclusively") on an ordinal scale, converted to interval by the V- Dem measurement model¹³, allowing for systematic analysis of how regimes construct and sustain legitimacy (Pemstein et al., 2024; Tannenberg et al., 2019). I took an average of these four interval variables and created an index called Legitimation. Higher values represent more reliance on legitimation.

The aggregation of these variables serves two primary purposes. First, it enhances parsimony, reducing analytical complexity and improving the feasibility of comparative research by consolidating disparate but related dimensions into broader, more analytically tractable categories. Second, it accounts for the dynamic nature of legitimation strategies, which are not necessarily static over time. Authoritarian regimes often adapt and recalibrate their sources of legitimacy in response to shifting political, economic, and social conditions. A regime that initially relies on charismatic legitimation may, over time, transition toward legal-rational legitimation, especially after the leader's demise. For example, after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini established a theocracy, where legitimation was rooted in his charismatic religious authority and revolutionary leadership.

¹³ See Coppedge et al., 2024b; 2024c

Following his death in 1989, Iran transitioned toward a more institutionalised theocracy, where power became embedded in legal-rational structures such as the Guardian Council and Assembly of Experts, shifting legitimisation from personal charisma to bureaucratic and religious legalism (Khodadadi, 2024). Aggregating variables thus allows for a more flexible analytical framework that captures these temporal shifts in legitimisation strategies while maintaining conceptual clarity.

IV3: Co-optation

I conceptualised co-optation following Josua's (2016) framework, which defines it as a strategy employed by authoritarian regimes to maintain stability by integrating individuals or groups into the regime's framework. Co-optation is described as "all measures by ruling elites with the aim of strengthening and/or widening the societal base of a regime by giving relevant individuals or societal groups a stake in the status quo" (Josua, 2016, p. 35). This strategy can take two main forms: strengthening the regime base, which involves consolidating loyalty among existing supporters through material benefits, political privileges, or influence, and is more sustainable due to established trust; and widening the regime base, which incorporates new groups by addressing grievances or offering concessions but carries higher risks, including alienating existing supporters or failing to build sustainable trust (Josua, 2016, pp. 35–36). Co-optation often relies on both formal and informal mechanisms, such as patronage and clientelism, to mitigate dissent and ensure stability by giving strategically significant actors a vested interest in the regime's continuity (Magaloni, 2008b).

To operationalise co-optation, I employed the Clientelism Index (v2xnp_client) from V-Dem, which measures the extent to which political competition is structured around clientelistic relationships—defined as the contingent distribution of resources in exchange for political support. This index is constructed by aggregating key indicators, including vote-buying, the relative emphasis on particularistic versus public goods provision, and whether party linkages are programmatic or clientelistic. These components capture both elite-targeted co-optation, which serves to strengthen regime loyalty, and mass-oriented co-optation, which involves widening the base through vote-buying. The index is measured on an interval scale with reversed scores, where higher values indicate greater reliance on clientelistic practices (Sigman & Lindberg, 2017, 2019).

Independent Variables: Regime Type

IV4: Personalist Regime

To identify personalist regimes, I relied on the regime typology provided by the GWF dataset, which offers two classification schemes: a descriptive typology that includes hybrid regimes (e.g., party-personal or military-party hybrids), and a binary categorisation, which assigns regimes into four distinct types—monarchic, military, party-based, and personalist, where regimes are coded either 0

or 1 for each category. For this study, I adopted the binary categorisation and used the variable `gwf_personal` for personalist regime.

IV5: Presidentialism

To enhance the measurement of personalism and address potential coding limitations in the GWF dataset discussed previously, I incorporated the presidentialism index from V-Dem, which quantifies the concentration of executive power in authoritarian regimes. The index is constructed using reversed point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model, where higher scores indicate greater presidentialism. It aggregates indicators of executive constraints, including respect for the constitution, non-legislative oversight mechanisms, legislative autonomy, control over resources, and investigative power, judicial independence and executive compliance with judicial rulings. Additionally, it incorporates electoral management body autonomy assessing the extent of presidential influence over election administration (Pemstein et al., 2024; Sigman & Lindberg, 2017, 2018).

Appendix A includes details of how the aforementioned variables (before my aggregation) have been measured and coded by V-Dem to aid readability.

Independent Variables: Control

IV6: GDP per Capita

GDP per capita is a proxy for economic development and state capacity, which are key determinants of regime behaviour and institutional quality in authoritarian contexts. Higher GDP per capita is often associated with stronger institutions and international engagement, potentially influencing freedom of movement policies. Authoritarian regimes with greater economic resources may have more capacity to implement movement restrictions but may also face greater external pressure to align with international norms (Alemán & Woods, 2014; Boix, 2003; Geddes, 1999), such as liberalising mobility. Including GDP per capita is important to ensure that the observed relationship between regime apparatus and freedom of movement is not confounded by economic development. V-Dem's variable `e_gdppc` is used for this, which is a "point estimate from the latent variable model of GDP per capita based on a number of sources" (Coppedge et al., 2024b, p. 396).

IV7: Total Fuel Income per Capita

Natural resource production per capita captures the extent of a country's reliance on resource rents, which can significantly shape the strategies of authoritarian regimes. Resource-dependent regimes often centralise power to control resource wealth and suppress dissent (Caselli & Tesei, 2016; Ross, 2001), which may include restricting movement to prevent emigration or opposition coordination. By including resource rents as a control variable, the analysis accounted for the influence of the "resource curse" on both regime type and freedom of movement. For this, I used the variable

e_total_fuel_income_pc from V-Dem, which is the real value of petroleum, coal, and natural gas produced per capita (Haber & Menaldo, 2011).

IV8: Population Density

Population density reflects demographic pressures that authoritarian regimes must manage, which can influence internal and external mobility policies. A well-established conclusion in the study of state repression is that governments in more populous countries tend to be more repressive due to the increased need to regulate and manage the behaviours of a larger population. (Alemán & Woods, 2014; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Davenport, 2007a; Fjelde, 2010). Conversely, lower density could allow more relaxed policies. Including population density ensures that movement restrictions attributed to regime type and its pillars of stability are not confounded by demographic challenges. For this study, population density from the World Bank's World Development Indicators was used.

IV9: Rate of Urbanisation

Urbanisation is a critical factor influencing authoritarian regimes as urban areas facilitate collective action and increase the potential for organised dissent or uprisings. Higher levels of urbanisation may elevate the demand for greater political freedoms and democratic governance over authoritarian rule. Urbanisation can also foster the development of civic networks and institutions, empowering citizens to advocate for institutional improvements and societal reforms (Glaeser et al., 2018). The variable e_miurbani from V-Dem was used, which is the ratio of urban population to population (Coppedge et al., 2024b).

Table 5.1 below presents the variables used in the analysis, including the dependent variable (emigration policy), the core causal variables based on the pillars of authoritarian stability; regime type and additional control variables. It also outlines the expected direction of their effects, scale of measurement, and data sources. V-Dem interval variables are on a scale of either -4 to 4¹⁴ or 0 to 1 (Coppedge et al., 2024b). They are mentioned in the table below.

¹⁴ See pages 34 and 35 from V-Dem Codebook: https://v-dem.net/documents/38/V-Dem_Codebook_v14.pdf

Table 5.1. Summary of all variables.

Variable	Variable type	Component/ description	Expected effect on emigration policy	Scale	Source
Dependent variable					
Emigration policy	Dependent	Freedom of Foreign Movement	–	Ordinal (0-4), converted to interval (-4 to 4)	V-Dem
Independent (Causal)					
Freedom from repression	Independent	Physical Violence Index, Political Civil Liberties Index	Positive	Interval (0-1)	V-Dem
Legitimation	Independent	Performance Legitimation, Legal-Rational Legitimation, Person of the Leader, Ideology	Negative	Interval (-4 to 4)	V-Dem
Co-optation	Independent	Clientelism Index	Positive	Interval (0-1)	V-Dem
Personalist regime	Independent	Rule through single leader with minimal power-sharing	Negative	Binary (0 or 1)	GWF
Presidentialism	Independent	Concentration of power on one individual	Negative	Interval (0-1)	V-Dem
Independent (Control)					
GDP per capita	Independent (Control)	Estimate of GDP per capita combining multiple sources of data	Positive	Ratio	V-Dem
Total fuel income per capita	Independent (Control)	Real value of petroleum, coal, and natural gas produced per capita	Positive	Ratio	V-Dem
Population density	Independent (Control)	People per square kilometre	Negative	Ratio	World Bank
Urbanisation	Independent (Control)	Ratio of urban population to population	Positive	Ratio	V-Dem

Model

When constructing a statistical model, applied researchers must ensure it is unbiased, consistent, and efficient. However, an equally critical objective is to develop a practical and relevant model. A model serves its purpose most effectively when its interpretation directly addresses the research question under investigation (Kropko & Kubinec, 2020). Given this need for both rigour and applicability, I employed a fixed-effects model to examine how repression, legitimation, co-optation, and regime type (personalist versus non-personalist) shape emigration policy using panel data. This modelling

approach was selected for several reasons. First, fixed effects absorbed all time-invariant characteristics of each country, eliminating bias from omitted factors that do not change over time (Allison, 2009a). Omitted variable bias occurs when a regression model excludes a relevant explanatory variable that is correlated with both the dependent variable and at least one included independent variable. By giving each country its own intercept, fixed effects account for unobserved attributes such as geography, colonial history, long-standing institutions, or political culture that could otherwise confound the results. In essence, the model “uses each country as its own control”, differencing out any constant traits. This means that fixed factors (e.g., a country’s location or historical legal traditions) are held constant implicitly and cannot drive the observed relationship between the independent variable and emigration policy. This improves causal identification compared to pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) or random effects, where such omitted factors could distort results (deHaan, 2021).

Second, fixed effects strengthen causal inference by focusing on within-country variation (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015). The estimator effectively compares each country to itself over time rather than comparing different countries to one another. This is a more “foolproof” strategy for causal analysis in observational data because each country serves as its own baseline. Any factor that did not change in a given country cannot be the cause of a change in that country’s emigration policy. Thus, we can more confidently attribute policy shifts to repression, legitimization, co-optation, or regime-type changes. In practical terms, a fixed-effects model asks, when a country’s level of repression increases or decreases, does its emigration policy change accordingly, all else equal? This within-country logic mimics a controlled experiment, improving the reliability of causal interpretation (Mummolo & Peterson, 2018). Thus, by narrowing the analysis to changes over time within the same country, we reduce bias from cross-national differences and get closer to the true causal impact of authoritarian stability strategies on emigration policy.

Additionally, given my hypotheses and data structure, simpler panel models would be problematic. Pooled OLS, which ignores any country-specific effects, would force a single regression line through all country-year observations as if they were independent. This would clearly introduce heterogeneity bias as any time-invariant country differences would end up in the error term and could bias coefficient estimates (Coakley et al., 2006). Essentially, pooled OLS assumes no unobserved differences between, for example, Egypt and North Korea, and the result would likely be overstated or misleading correlations driven by cross-country differences rather than true within-country effects. While random-effects models at least acknowledge country-specific intercepts, they impose a strict (and likely false) assumption that the unobserved country effect is uncorrelated with the explanatory variables (e.g., repression, legitimization). In an authoritarian context, that assumption does not hold—countries that resort to high repression or extensive co-optation often have particular historical or

social traits (e.g., revolutionary pasts, natural resources, economic levels) that may also affect emigration tendencies. If observable controls do not fully capture those traits, they end up in the country effect and correlate with our regressors, violating the RE assumption. In such cases, the RE estimator yields biased coefficients because it attributes some of the effects of omitted factors to our variables of interest (Allison, 2009a; Mummolo & Peterson, 2018).

The Hausman test directly evaluates this by comparing fixed effects and random effects estimates. In this analysis, the Hausman test strongly rejected the null of no difference, indicating that regressors were correlated with the country effects (See Appendix B). In other words, it signalled that the random-effects model's assumption of no correlation was violated, so we must prefer the fixed-effects model. This is consistent with theoretical expectations; it would be hard to argue that factors such as legitimization are randomly assigned across countries independent of all country-specific attributes. Moreover, even if the Hausman test were insignificant, that may simply mean insufficient power, not proof that zero correlation truly exists. Given the stakes of bias, the safer approach in almost all comparative political studies, especially with authoritarian regimes, is to use fixed effects when in doubt (Allison, 2009a; deHaan, 2021).

For instance, Brunkert and von Soest (2023) used a country-year panel of 164 countries to link legitimization strategies with declines in democratic constraints using country and year-fixed effects models. Similarly, Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2014) also employed fixed-effects panel regressions to examine how establishing nominally democratic institutions alters an autocrat's use of repression. Wright et al. (2015) also analysed a panel of autocracies to test how oil wealth affects regime stability, noting that "once models allow for unit (country) effects, oil wealth promotes autocratic survival" (p. 287) suggesting that failing to use fixed effects (i.e., relying only on cross-country variation) could underestimate oil's true stabilising effect.

Aside from these, many other panel studies of authoritarian politics have used similar methods. For example, some researchers use fixed-effects subnational data. Xu (2021), for instance, exploited variations in digital surveillance rollout across Chinese countries to show that enhanced surveillance leads to more targeted repression and reduced co-optation. Hence, across the literature, fixed-effects panel approaches are popular for testing how changes in authoritarian strategies such as holding elections, expanding welfare spending, and allowing limited pluralism impacts outcomes such as protest, regime longevity, or institutional change.

Model Specification

A standard panel model can be expressed as:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \beta X_{it} + u_{it}$$

Where y is the dependent variable, X is the vector of explanatory variables, β is the vector of coefficients to be estimated, and α is a constant term. The subscripts i and t index the individual (e.g., a country) and time (e.g., years). The error term is u_{it} , which captures unexplained variation, measurement errors, or influences from omitted variables. In panel data, unobserved heterogeneity is common, meaning that each individual i has unique characteristics that do not change over time. We can model this using individual-specific fixed effects:

$$y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta X_{it} + u_{it}$$

where α_i captures time-invariant characteristics of individual i . Since α_i is constant over time, we can remove it using the within transformation (i.e., demeaning the data). After computing the individual mean over time for each variable and subtracting the mean from the original equation, we obtain:

$$y_{it} - \bar{y}_i = \beta(X_{it} - \bar{X}_i) + (u_{it} - \bar{u}_i)$$

Where $\bar{y}_i$, $\bar{X}_i$ and $\bar{u}_i$ are the individual means for each variable. This transformation removes α_i , eliminating the omitted variable bias.

Handling Missing Data

Less than 2% of the data for key dependent and independent variables were missing, as V-Dem had already addressed most missing values through its imputation procedures, which vary across indicators. Given that the remaining missingness was minimal and appeared randomly distributed, I applied mean imputation within each panel.

For control variables with more than 5% missing data and recognising the limitations of mean imputation, I also conducted a robustness check by running the model on a restricted sample covering the years 1980–2010, the period with the least missing data. The results from this restricted sample, presented in Chapter 6, served as a sensitivity analysis to ensure that missing data does not bias the findings.

Diagnostic Tests

Implementing a fixed-effects panel regression requires additional considerations to ensure robust and credible results. It is standard to use clustered (robust) standard errors by country in panel analyses with FE. Clustering accounts for the non-independence of observations within each country (e.g., serial correlation or other forms of autocorrelation in errors over time). By clustering on country, we allow the error terms to be arbitrarily correlated within each country's time series, which produces more reliable confidence intervals (Cameron & Miller, 2015). This guards against underestimating standard errors due to within-country error patterns (e.g., if a country's policy changes are part of a

slow-moving trend, clustering will handle this). In my 1946–2010 country-year data, I had a long time dimension per country, so clustering by country was essential for valid inference.

Beyond clustering standard errors by country, I conducted additional diagnostic tests to ensure model robustness. I conducted the Durbin-Watson test to check for serial correlation, as errors in panel data often exhibit temporal dependence within countries (Drukker, 2003). The Breusch-Pagan test assessed heteroskedasticity, and Pesaran's CD test assessed cross-sectional dependence, ensuring that global trends not captured by year-fixed effects did not bias standard errors (Pesaran, 2004). To correct for these, I used Newey-West standard errors (Newey & West, 1987). I also assessed multicollinearity by first examining the correlation matrix, which provided pairwise correlations between the independent variables. Lower correlation values suggested a reduced likelihood of multicollinearity. Additionally, I calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each variable in the models to measure how much an independent variable inflated the variance of the estimated coefficients. A VIF close to 1 indicates minimal multicollinearity concerns, whereas values exceeding 10 (although some researchers use lower thresholds) can signal a potential issue. These results are included in Appendix B.

In addition to country FE, many models include year-fixed effects to capture shocks or global trends that affect all countries in a given year (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015). Including time-fixed effects would control for any period-specific influences (for example, the post-Cold War liberalisation waves, oil crises, or global migration treaties) that might simultaneously push emigration policies in all countries up or down. By absorbing common time shocks, we can ensure our coefficients for variables reflect deviations net of global trends. For example, if 1991 saw many countries liberalise emigration due to the Soviet collapse, year-fixed effects would soak up that effect. This can improve models by not attributing such universal shifts to the country-level independent variables. Python allows for the inclusion of year dummies using factor variables without manually creating dummies.

In sum, a fixed-effects panel regression with proper refinements provides a rigorous and robust framework for examining how authoritarian stability strategies and regime type influence emigration policy over time. By adhering to these best practices, we can maximise the credibility of results and ensure that our conclusions about emigration policy are well-founded on empirical evidence rather than artefacts of omitted variables or model misspecification.

Illustrative Cases

While regression analysis is a powerful tool for identifying statistical associations between emigration policy and the mechanisms of authoritarian stability, it is inherently limited in capturing complex causal processes, strategic decision-making, and context-specific dynamics. To address this, I incorporated illustrative cases that provide insights into the processes linking repression, legitimization,

co-optation, and personalist regime type to emigration policy. Rather than serving as full case studies, these examples help trace the pathways through which authoritarian regimes could implement various types of emigration policy, offering “causal process observations” (Mahoney, 2012) that clarify whether the statistical relationships reflect genuine causal dynamics. This component builds on the statistical results by filling in gaps in the causal story, demonstrating how the observed relationships could align with theoretical expectations rather than being artefacts of omitted variables or spurious correlations. In doing so, this approach strengthens the explanatory power of the analysis, ensuring that the correlation identified in the regression is meaningfully connected to the theorised mechanisms of authoritarian stability.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that warrant careful consideration. First, as previously discussed, the analysis relies on expert-coded datasets that are inherently subject to measurement bias due to the reliance on expert assessments, which may introduce subjectivity and inconsistencies across coders (Adcock & Collier, 2001). This reliance could potentially affect the validity and comparability of the indicators used, particularly for nuanced constructs such as co-optation and legitimisation, which may vary in their interpretation across contexts. Nevertheless, these datasets remain the most comprehensive sources available for studying these phenomena, as the V-Dem, in particular, attempts to account for this.

Second, the temporal scope of this study—focusing on authoritarian regimes from 1946—2010, excludes significant recent developments. In particular, the rise of digital authoritarianism has introduced new tools, such as AI-driven surveillance, cyberattacks, and phishing campaigns targeting dissidents (Mantellassi, 2023; Shahbaz, 2018), which have transformed the strategies of authoritarian regimes in ways that are not captured in the datasets used. Extending the timeframe to incorporate these contemporary trends would provide a more comprehensive understanding of authoritarian rule and emigration policies. Nevertheless, this study provides important insight into post-war and early globalisation dynamics.

Third, while V-Dem’s multiple imputation techniques and the mean imputation I applied help mitigate data gaps, imputation serves as an approximation rather than a perfect substitute for complete, high-quality data. Although these methods enhance the precision of estimates by reducing bias from missing values, they do not fully eliminate the uncertainty associated with imputed observations (Allison, 2009a). Consequently, while imputation improves data coverage and analytical robustness, results should be interpreted cautiously, acknowledging the limitations inherent in estimating missing values rather than relying on observed data.

Finally, while effective in identifying personalist regimes, the binary coding used for regime typologies imposes rigid binary distinctions that may obscure the complexity of hybrid regimes and the fluidity of regime transitions. This approach risks oversimplifying cases that exhibit characteristics of both personal and non-personal rule, failing to capture the nuances of power dynamics, institutional evolution, and strategic adaptations over time. As a result, it may underrepresent the gradual shifts and blended regime types that define many hybrid regimes. Nevertheless, the approach is still effective for large-scale analyses such as this.

These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of the findings and suggest directions for future research. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the quantitative analysis.

Chapter 6: Results

This chapter presents the findings of the quantitative analysis undertaken to determine whether the characteristics of authoritarian regimes, specifically, the pillars of stability and personalist regime type, and their relationship to emigration policy align with the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 4. This analysis is divided into two main sections. First, the descriptive analysis provides an overview of the dataset, including its distribution, spread, and variability. Second, the explanatory analysis builds on these descriptive insights by estimating coefficients, examining statistical significance, and evaluating overall model fit. These results will be discussed in relation to the central hypotheses introduced earlier, thereby highlighting how they either support or challenge the theoretical propositions outlined in Chapter 4. This chapter also lays the foundation for a more elaborate discussion of country cases in Chapter 7. I used the ordinal values of emigration policy to aid visualisation and explanation, whereas interval values were used for descriptive statistics and regression.

Descriptive Results

The dataset comprised 4,460 country-year observations spanning 120 unique countries, all categorised as authoritarian regimes, over the period 1946–2010. To understand how much variation in emigration policy can be described by the pillars of stability and the personalist type of regime, I used violin plots to visualise the data. Violin plots are a visualisation technique that merges the advantages of box plots with kernel density plots. Each “violin” represents the underlying data distribution via a smooth, mirrored density curve on either side, while horizontal lines highlight important summary statistics (such as the median and interquartile range). A “fat” portion of the violin indicates a higher concentration of data points in that range, whereas “thin” segments signify fewer observations and, thus, a lower density. The density tails of the violins may extend slightly beyond the observed data range due to kernel smoothing, which estimates the distribution’s shape beyond the minimum and maximum values.

These violin plots are visualisations that isolate the relationship between independent variables and emigration policy for simplicity. They are not designed to represent the full, complex interplay of factors influencing emigration policy but are useful for visualising the role of the independent variables alone. The explanatory results will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship, but these serve as initial reference points for analysis.

Emigration Policy

Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of the ordinal values of emigration policy. On this scale, 0 represents the most restrictive emigration policy, where public authorities do not respect the right to freedom of

movement, citizens are rarely permitted to travel abroad, and severe punishments are imposed on transgressors or their families. Conversely, 4 represents the most permissive policy, characterised by full governmental respect for the freedom of foreign movement, with no restrictions on the ability of citizens to travel, emigrate, or repatriate.

A detailed frequency analysis of the ordinal emigration policy scores reveals significant variation across the dataset. Almost only 9% of the cases have the most restrictive emigration policies with no freedom of foreign movement. Conversely, 19% of cases have the most permissive policies. As expected, the most observed emigration policy scores were policies reflecting selective restrictions that were not on the extremes of no freedom or full freedom.

To summarise the distribution of the dependent variable, Table 6.1 presents descriptive statistics for the interval measure of emigration policy.

Figure 6.1. Percentage distribution of emigration policy (Ordinal).

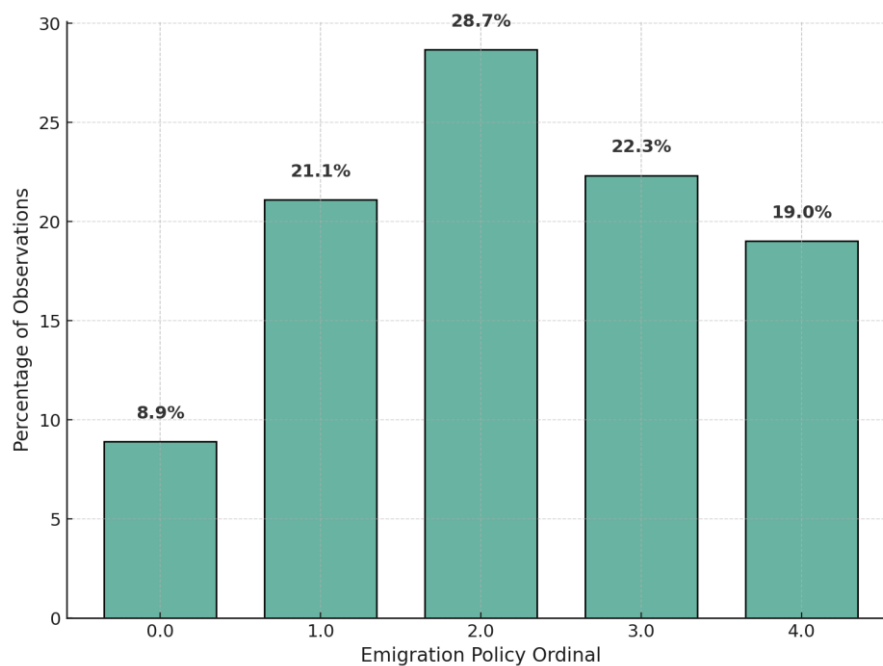


Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics for emigration policy (Interval; values -4 to 4).

Emigration policy	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	SD
	-0.371	-0.298	2.672	-3.87	1.359

Repression

Figure 6.2 (next page) displays the distribution of the freedom from repression values across emigration policy levels. As freedom from repression increases, the corresponding distribution of emigration policy scores become increasingly skewed towards permissive values of emigration policy.

Lower values of freedom from repression are concentrated at lower levels of emigration policy. This suggests that restrictive emigration policies are more common in highly repressive regimes. These restrictive policies with low values of 0 and 1 tend to occur in regimes where freedom from repression is not only low but also tightly distributed, indicating a consistent pattern of restrictive emigration policies in regimes in highly repressive regimes.

In contrast, as freedom from repression increases, there is a notable shift toward more permissive emigration policies (ordinal values of 3 and 4). These higher emigration policy levels are not only associated with greater median levels of freedom but also display broader variability in the distribution of freedom from repression. This result may suggest that while permissive emigration policies are more likely to be implemented in less repressive regimes, such policies can also exist in contexts with diverse levels of repression. The increasing variability at higher ordinal levels implies that less repressive regimes accommodate a wider spectrum of policy choices than highly repressive regimes. To summarise the distribution of the independent variable freedom from repression, Table 6.2 presents descriptive statistics for the interval measure of freedom from repression.

Figure 6.2. Violin plot of freedom from repression by emigration policy (Ordinal).

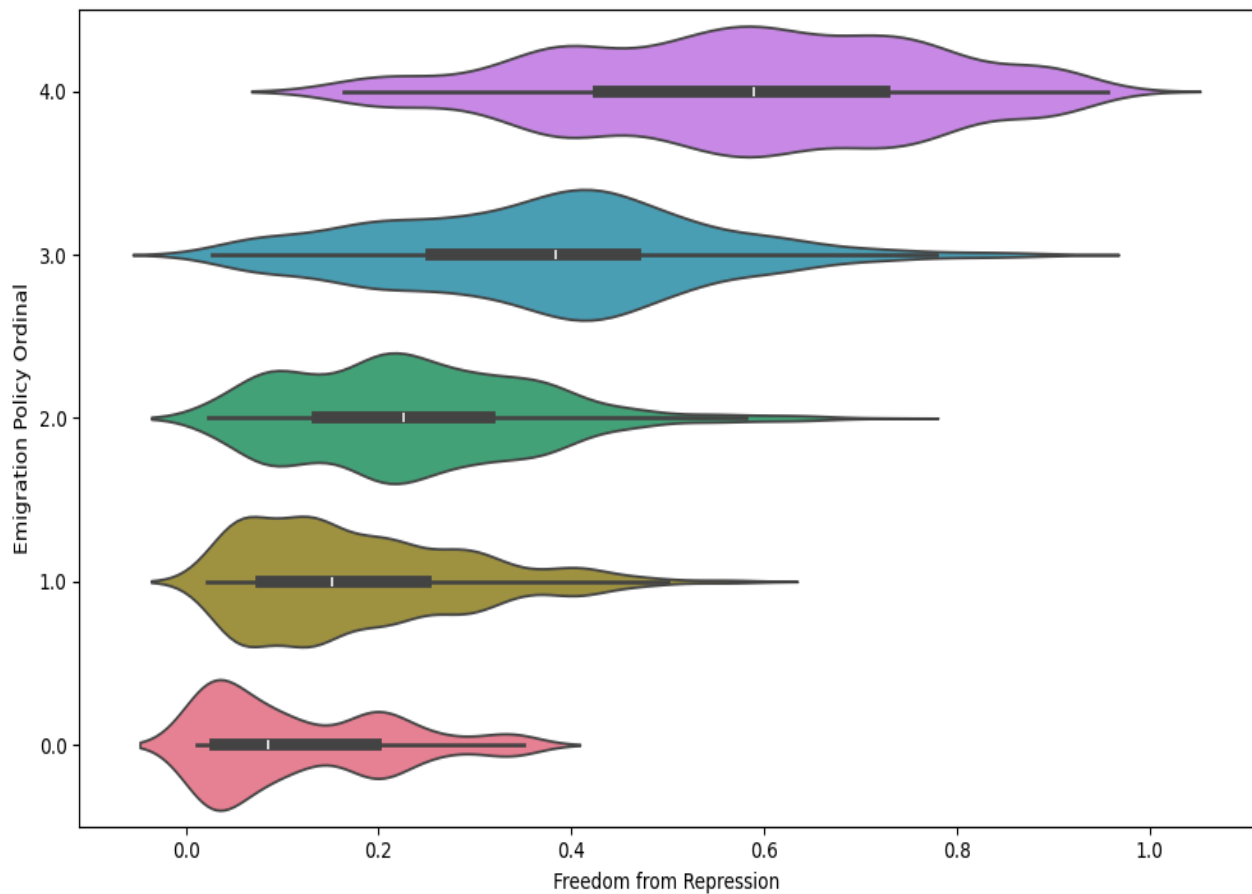


Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics for freedom from repression.

	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	SD
Freedom from repression	0.309	0.271	0.957	0.011	0.209

Legitimation

Figure 6.3 shows the distribution of legitimation across different levels of ordinal values of emigration policy. The plot reveals a nuanced relationship. Emigration policy scores of 0 and 1—the most restrictive categories—are more tightly clustered at moderate-to-high levels of legitimation. In particular, the distribution for score 0 is narrow and skewed rightward, indicating that restrictive exit policies are most common in regimes with moderate levels of legitimation, but are less present in contexts where legitimation is either extremely low or extremely high. This suggests that some authoritarian regimes may invoke legitimacy-based narratives while simultaneously restricting exit.

In contrast, at more permissive emigration policies, particularly at scores 3 and 4, the distribution of legitimation can be seen to be more evenly spread. Regimes that allow greater freedom of exit do so across a broader spectrum of legitimation levels—from those that have high legitimation values to those with low legitimation values. The relatively wide and balanced violins at these levels may be

suggesting that permissive emigration policies are not strongly conditioned by legitimization. To summarise the distribution of the independent variable legitimization, Table 6.3 presents descriptive statistics for the interval measure of legitimization.

Figure 6.3. Violin plot of legitimization by emigration policy (Ordinal).

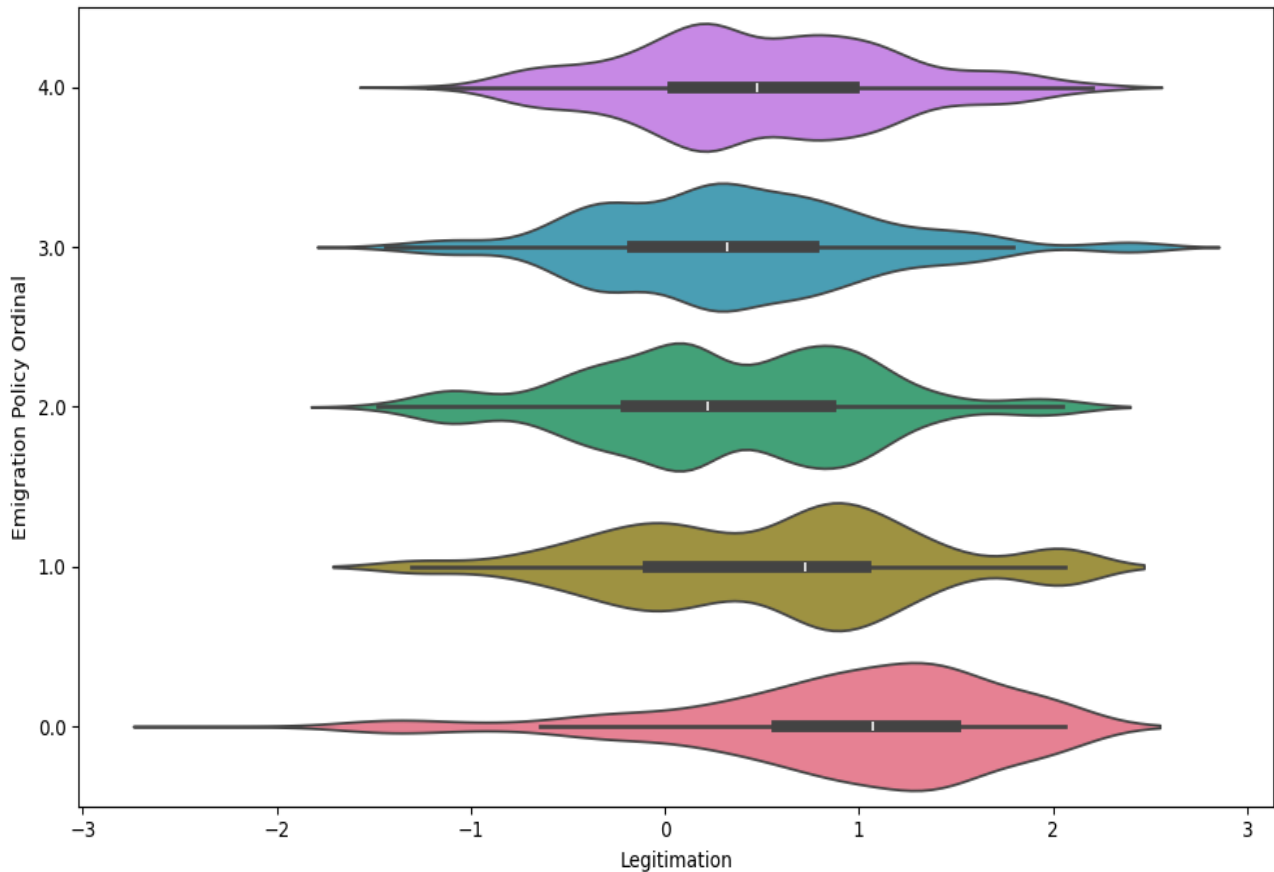


Table 6.3. Descriptive statistics for legitimization.

Legitimation	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	SD
	0.466	0.486	2.500	-2.252	0.754

Co-optation

For the co-optation variable, Figure 6.4 shows that restrictive emigration policies (scores 0 and 1) are more commonly observed in regimes with low levels of co-optation. The distribution for emigration policy score 0, in particular, is concentrated at the lower end of the co-optation scale. As co-optation increases, emigration policy outcomes become more varied and more permissive. At mid-to-high levels of co-optation, the distribution of emigration policy scores shifts upward, with scores 2, 3, and 4 becoming more frequent.

What stands out particularly is the broad distribution of emigration policy at moderate co-optation levels, where all five policy categories are represented. This indicates that permissive emigration policies can coexist with both low and high levels of co-optation, suggesting that co-optation plays a less deterministic role in shaping more permissive emigration policies. To summarise the distribution of the independent variable co-optation, Table 6.3 presents descriptive statistics for the interval measure of co-optation.

Figure 6.4. Violin plot of co-optation by emigration policy (Ordinal).

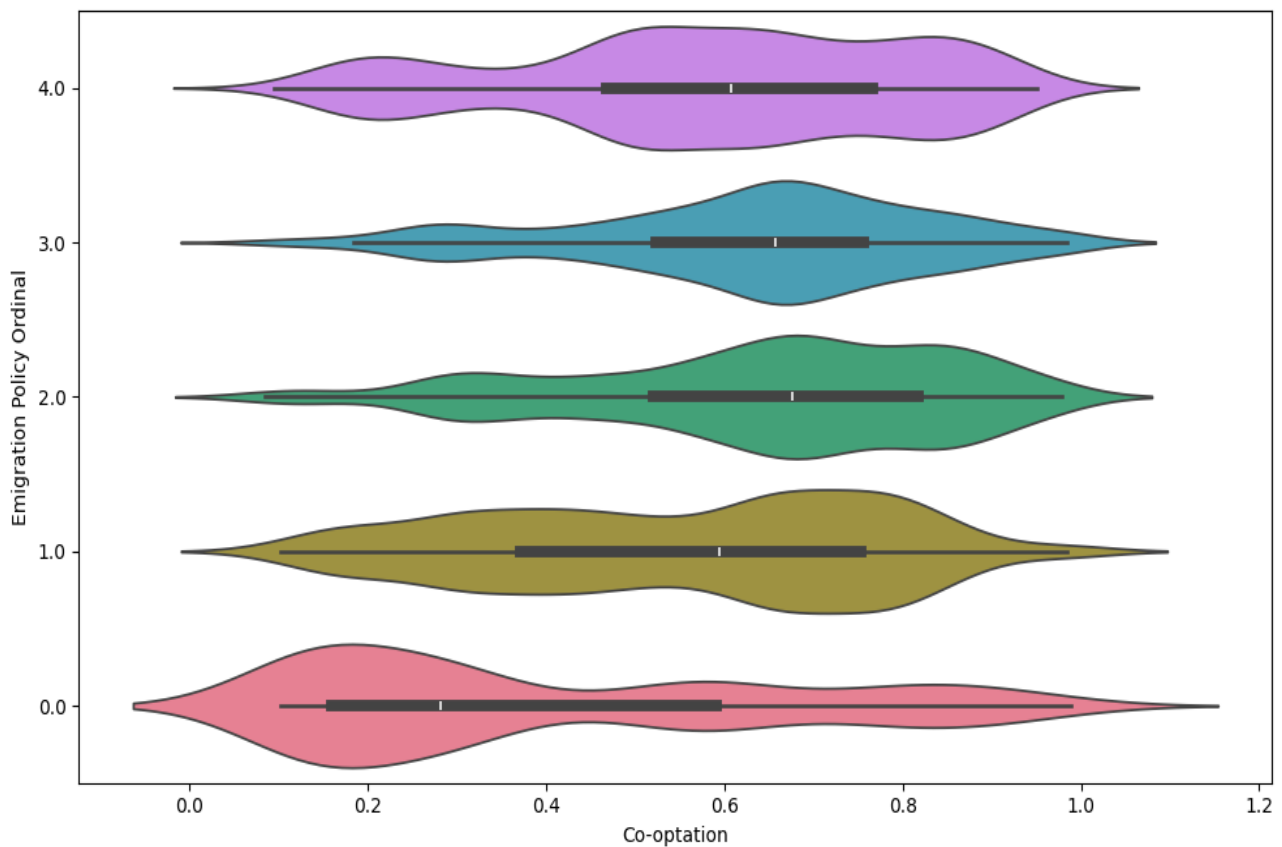


Table 6.4. Descriptive statistics for co-optation.

Co-optation	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	SD
	0.589	0.635	0.989	0.084	0.228

Initial Insights

The descriptive analysis shows that highly repressive regimes could be more likely to adopt restrictive emigration policies. In contrast, regimes with lower repression tend to adopt more permissive emigration policies, but these contexts show more variability, indicating that permissive policies can exist across a wider range of repression levels. In other words, permissive policies seem to be associated with lower levels of repression, but the relationship becomes less predictable as the emigration policies increase in permissiveness.

Descriptive analysis suggests that regimes with very high reliance on legitimisation strategies and very low legitimisation could enforce restrictive emigration policies, suggesting a non-linear, plausibly U-shaped relationship. However, as legitimisation decreases or becomes more neutral, emigration policies tend to become more permissive. Furthermore, the relatively wide and balanced violins at higher emigration policy levels suggest that permissive emigration policies may not be strongly conditioned by legitimisation.

Similarly, low reliance on co-optation is associated with more restrictive emigration policies, while as co-optation score rises, emigration policy becomes more varied. However, higher co-optation appears to align with less restrictive or moderately permissive policies. Hence, while regimes relying on higher co-optation seem to be more flexible with their emigration policy, though skewing towards permissiveness, low co-optation mostly manifests restrictive emigration policies.

The analysis reveals an alignment between two authoritarian pillars and restrictive emigration policies—higher reliance on repression and lower co-optation consistently associates with greater movement restrictions. In contrast, permissive policies are far less predictable. While lower levels of repression and higher levels of co-optation are generally linked to permissiveness, the variability at these levels suggests broader, context-specific factors may shape permissive policies. This contrast highlights a fundamental asymmetry—restrictive policies follow a clearer logic tied to regime stability, whereas permissive policies reflect the strategic flexibility and adaptability of authoritarian governance.

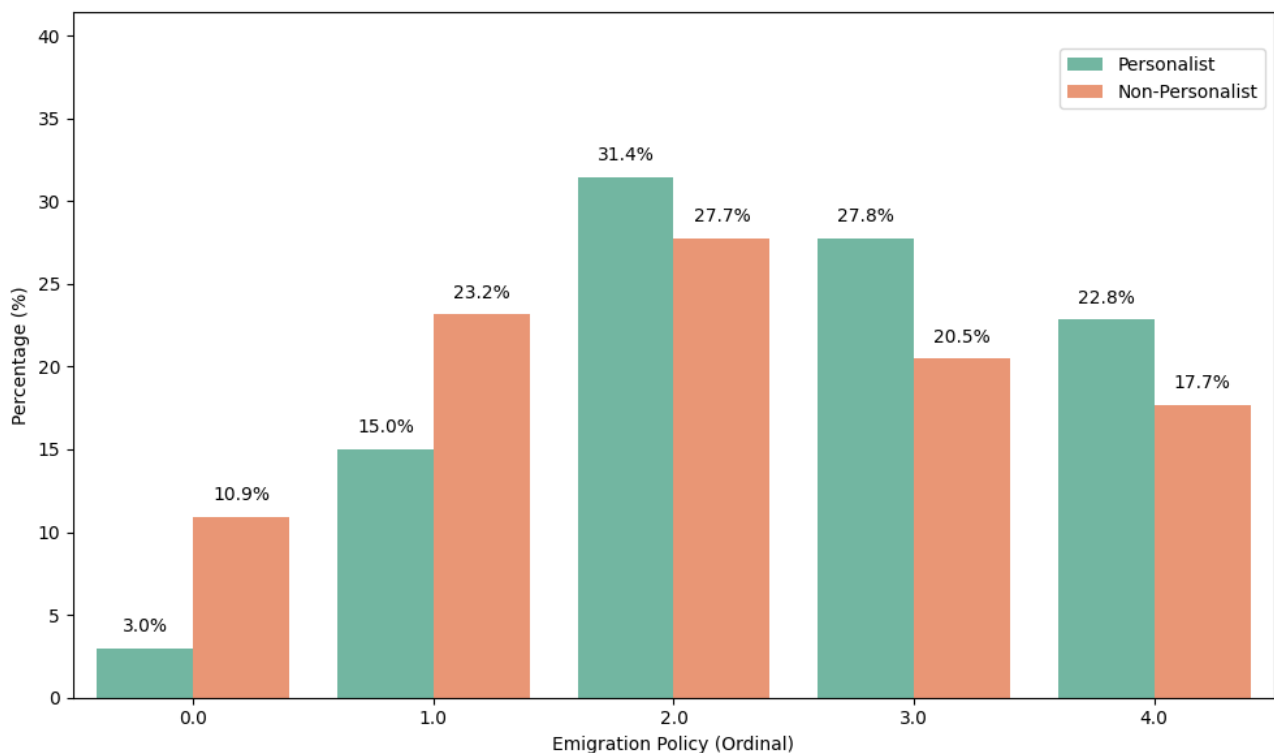
Regime Type- Personalist versus Non-Personalist

Personalist regimes (coded “personal” by GWF) comprise approximately 25% of the dataset, whereas non-personalist regimes (coded “party”, “military” or “monarchy” by GWF) dominate the dataset. This distribution however, must be interpreted with caution. As outlined in Chapter 5, regime classification under the GWF framework is inherently subjective, reflecting coding decisions made at the discretion of its authors. The forced categorisation of hybrid regimes into discrete regime types introduces significant conceptual and empirical limitations. For instance, North Korea, a paradigmatic example of a highly personalist dictatorship, also has a strong party apparatus, making it more accurately characterised as a personal-party hybrid. However, within GWF’s four-category schema, it is coded as a party regime, despite its high degree of personalism. Similarly, while Fidel Castro’s Cuba operated as a one-party state, the regime was underpinned by Castro’s charismatic leadership, functioning as a personal-party hybrid. Although GWF classifies it under the party category throughout the time period of the dataset, Castro’s strong personalist tendencies suggest that it could plausibly be coded under personalist, especially during the 1960s. Hence, while necessary for analytical parsimony, these coding decisions obscure the fluidity and internal dynamics of hybrid regimes, reinforcing the trade-offs inherent in large-N comparative regime classification.

Taking this limitation into account and examining the distribution of emigration policy values across these regimes, we can see that most personalist regimes adopt moderate-to-permissive emigration policies. Figures 6.5 illustrates the percentage distribution of personalist and non-personalist regimes and their distribution across ordinal values of emigration policy. Emigration policy score of 2 (emigration is “somewhat respected by the public authorities and the right to travel for leading political opponents or particular social groups is occasionally restricted but ordinary citizens only met minor restrictions” [Appendix A]) is the most common suggesting that many personalist regimes allow for controlled emigration. Only 3% of personalist regimes completely restrict emigration, and 15% of the personalist regimes “systematically restrict the right to travel” (Appendix A) with a score of 1. Hence, the GWF data shows that personalist regimes appear to use permissive emigration policies more often than restrictive ones.

The distribution of ordinal values of emigration policy is more balanced across non-personalist regimes as coded in GWF. Moderate restriction of score 2 remains the most common, similar to personalist regimes. However, a more restrictive policy at score 1 with ~23% is more frequent than in personalist regimes. Score 0 (~10.9%) is also significantly higher than personalist regimes (~3%).

Figure 6.5. Percentage distribution of emigration policy (ordinal) in personalist versus non-personalist regimes.



Presidentialism

Figure 6.6 illustrates the distribution of values of the presidentialism index, which measures the concentration of power on a leader, across different levels of ordinal emigration policy values. The highest density of values for emigration scores 0 and 1 are concentrated near the highest value of presidentialism. This suggests that more restrictive emigration policies are more common in highly presidential regimes. At emigration policy 0 (the most restrictive policy), the violin plot is very narrow at lower presidentialism values and wider at high presidentialism values (~ 1). There is very little variation in presidentialism at this level, suggesting that strongly presidential regimes implement the most restrictive emigration policies.

The distributions at levels 2, 3, and 4 of emigration policy scores show much more spread, suggesting that moderate and permissive emigration policies can be found in regimes with high and low presidentialism levels. At the most permissive level of emigration policy score 4, the distribution of presidentialism is broad and even, showing that permissive emigration policies can be found in regimes with both high and low level of presidentialism. Hence, permissive emigration policy seem to be less influenced by presidentialism, but restrictive emigration policies are clearly more common in regimes with high levels of presidentialism.

The descriptive statistics also show that the average presidentialism score is relatively high (~ 0.7), indicating that most authoritarian regimes have a high degree of power concentration on one individual. This further calls into question the distribution of personalist and non-personalist regime categorisation by GWF, as GWF identifies only 25% of regimes as personalist, whereas the presidentialism score (measured on a 0–1 scale), indicates a mean value exceeding the midpoint. To summarise the distribution of the independent variable presidentialism, Table 6.5 presents descriptive statistics for the interval measure of presidentialism.

Figure 6.6. Violin plot of presidentialism by emigration policy (Ordinal).

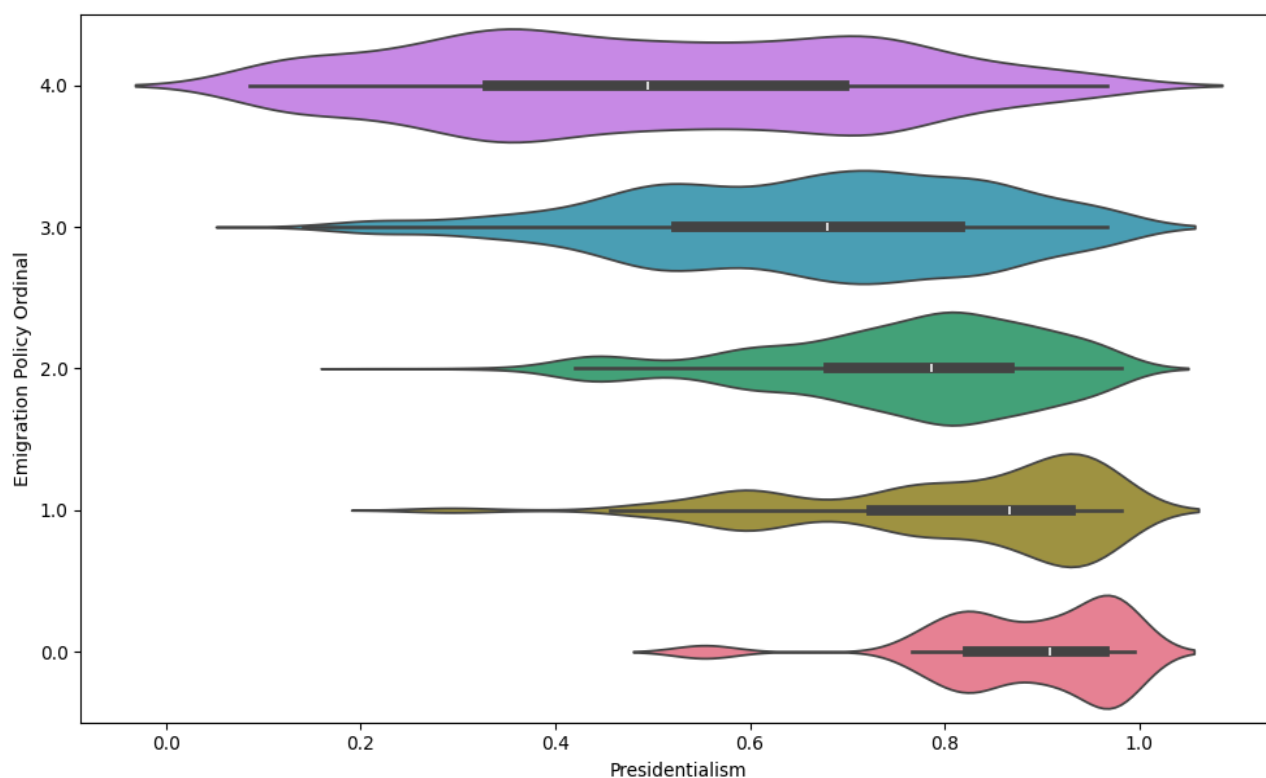


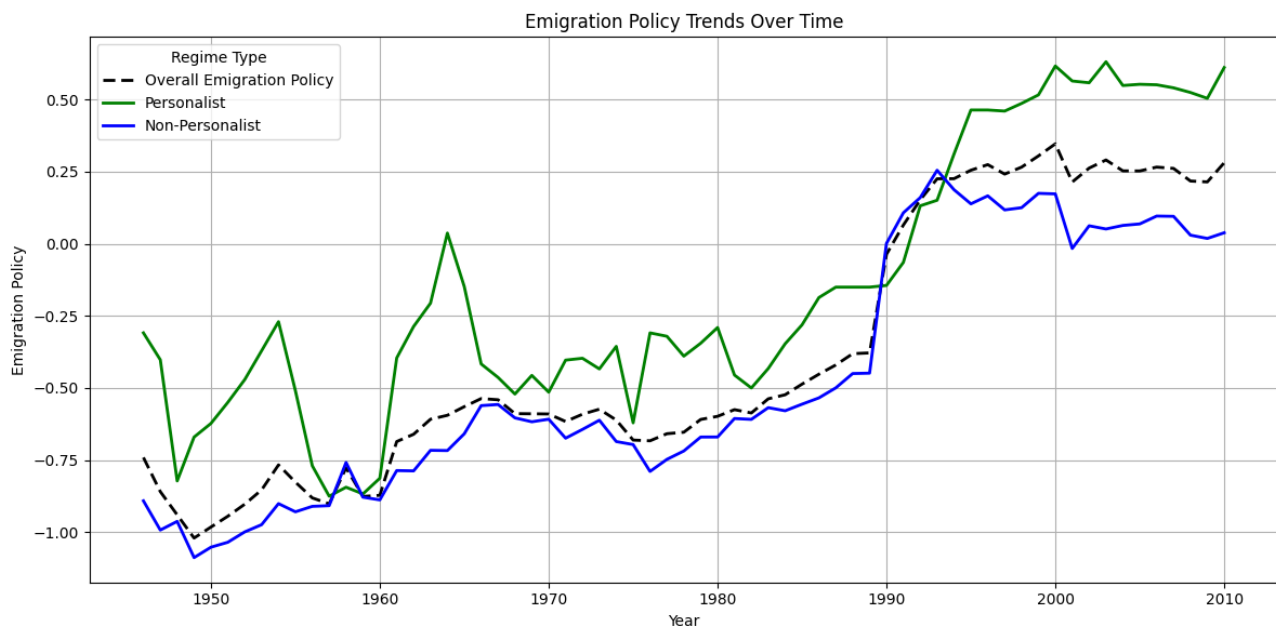
Table 6.5. Descriptive statistics for presidentialism.

Presidentialism	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	SD
	0.708	0.758	0.995	0.086	0.207

Emigration Policy Trends

Figure 6.7 displays the temporal evolution in average emigration policy (interval values) from 1946–2010, distinguishing between personalist regimes, non-personalist regimes and the overall emigration policy, calculated as the mean value of all emigration policy observations in the dataset. The dashed line depicts the overall trajectory of authoritarian emigration policy, while the green and blue lines represent personalist and non-personalist regimes respectively. Emigration policies, on average, are seen to be more permissive over time.

Figure 6.7. Trends in emigration policy (1946–2010).



This trajectory broadly aligns with major global political transformations, including post-colonial state formation in the 1960s and 70s, the systemic pressures of the Cold War, and the subsequent liberalising wave following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early post-war period through the 1960s, emigration policy remained relatively restrictive. Authoritarian states imposed restrictions for security, ideological, or labour retention reasons (Dowty, 1988). Newly independent post-colonial states also often curtailed exit to consolidate nation-building and prevent elite or skilled migration (Massey, 1999).

A slow but steady upward movement towards permissive emigration begins in the early 1980s, reflecting the global softening of emigration controls. This shift aligns with structural adjustment reforms, rising global economic interdependence, and the growing importance of migrant remittances (Sadiq & Tsourapas, 2021). Emigration began to be reframed not solely as a threat, but as a strategic tool for external engagement and economic gain, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

The 1990s mark a more pronounced liberalisation, as the end of the Cold War removed some of the ideological justifications for exit control, and international norms around human rights—including the right to leave one’s country—became more entrenched in global discourse (Escribà-Folch & Wright, 2015). As more states transitioned to market economies and sought international legitimacy, especially those formerly aligned with the Soviet bloc, emigration policy grew more permissive.

Throughout the timeline, there is divergence in emigration trends between personalist and non-personalist regimes. Personalist regimes shows higher average emigration policy that non-personalist regimes. However, this should not be taken as evidence of systematically more liberal personalist rule. Rather, as my analysis demonstrates, this apparent trend reflects limitations in regime

classification. Specifically, the GWF dataset identifies only about 25% of authoritarian regimes as personalist, despite descriptive statistics showing a mean presidentialism score of ~ 0.7 —indicating that most authoritarian regimes in the sample exhibit a high degree of power concentration in a single executive figure. This discrepancy is critical. A closer look at the distribution of presidentialism scores across emigration policy levels (see Table 6.5 and the violin plots in Figure 6.6) reveals that restrictive emigration policies (scores 0 and 1) are overwhelmingly concentrated in regimes with high presidentialism scores, often approaching 1. This suggests that power concentration, rather than nominal regime type, is more closely associated with restrictive emigration control.

These findings suggest that while Figure 6.7 appears to show personalist regimes as slightly more permissive over time than non-personalist regimes, this is likely an artefact of classification, not of actual institutional behaviour. Many regimes coded as non-personalist may nonetheless operate with a high degree of executive centralisation, a dynamic that the four-category coding in GWF does not fully capture. Therefore, the observed liberalism in personalist regimes in this figure is best interpreted as a coding artefact—a reflection of misclassification or definitional gaps—rather than a substantive contradiction of the theoretical expectation that higher power concentration (i.e., personalism or presidentialism) is associated with greater exit restriction.

In sum, the temporal trends in emigration policy suggest that authoritarian regimes have generally liberalised emigration over time, particularly post-Cold War. However, the link between emigration policy and power concentration is stronger than the one between emigration policy and regime type as currently coded, calling for more nuanced classification of hybrid regime types in future large-N research.

Explanatory Results

Table 6.6 presents fixed-effects regression results on the full sample of cases, with emigration policy as the dependent variable. The models examine the relationship between regime type (personalist with presidentialism to address the concentration of power on a person), pillars of stability—repression (variable freedom from repression), co-optation and legitimation with economic factors and demographic variables as controls and emigration policy.

Table 6.6. Fixed effects regression models explaining emigration policy (Interval)

Dependent variable: Emigration policy	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9 (Restricted sample) 1980–2010
Personalist	0.1982* (0.0406)	-	0.3567* (0.0383)	-	-	-	-	0.2652* (0.0665)	0.3590* (0.0614)
Presidentialism	-0.9705* (0.1922)	-	-3.5198* (0.2037)	-	-	-	-3.4634* (0.2020)	-	-0.6033* (0.1942)
Legitimation	0.1957 (0.0541)	0.1798 (0.0591)	-	-	-0.0826 (0.0713)	-	-	-	0.1097 (0.0336)
Freedom from repression	2.9418* (0.1953)	3.4804* (0.1376)	-	3.2972* (0.1101)	-	-	-	-	3.1743* (0.0942)
Co-optation	0.5840* (0.1998)	0.5216* (0.2314)	-	-	-	0.8840* (0.1549)	-	-	0.1529* (0.1638)
GDP per capita	0.0144* (0.0025)	0.0148* (0.0025)	0.0233* (0.0053)	0.0172* (0.0032)	0.0347* (0.0088)	0.0327* (0.0075)	0.0239* (0.0054)	0.0334* (0.0082)	0.0082* (0.0009)
Fuel income per capita	-0.000009382* (0.000001776)	-0.00001046* (0.000001976)	-0.00001629* (0.000004098)	-0.00001256* (0.000002065)	-0.00003244* (0.000008156)	-0.00003046* (0.000007076)	-0.00001616* (0.000004027)	-0.00003193* (0.000007876)	-0.000008429 (0.0000009294)
Urbanisation rate	-0.1373 (0.1934)	-0.1923 (0.1966)	-0.3127 (0.2157)	-0.3212 (0.2250)	-0.3239 (0.1680)	-0.3389* (0.1489)	-0.4689 (0.2515)	-0.1613 (0.1305)	0.5146 (0.3465)
Population density	-0.0003* (0.00005268)	-0.0003* (0.00005487)	-0.0003* (0.00007512)	-0.0004* (0.00005922)	-0.0004* (0.00009487)	-0.0004* (0.00008327)	-0.0003* (0.00007912)	-0.0004* (0.00008444)	-0.0003* (0.00004905)
Constant	-1.0657* (0.2666)	-1.8080* (0.2191)	2.0616* (0.1743)	-1.3266* (0.0374)	-0.3473* (0.0903)	0.1515 (0.1211)	2.1604* (0.1873)	-0.5006* (0.0607)	-1.2175* (0.1515)
R squared	0.5637	0.5478	0.3776	0.5355	0.0325	0.0486	0.3566	0.0419	0.6392
N	4460	4460	4460	4460	4460	4460	4460	4460	2265

* $p < .05$, standard errors in parentheses.

Model 1 serves as the primary specification, incorporating the full set of independent and control variables. The results are largely consistent with theoretical expectations, with most variables demonstrating statistical significance in the hypothesised directions. Models 2 to 8 incorporate each key independent variable separately. Model 9 uses a restricted time period of 1980–2010, as this period has the least missing values in the dataset.

Beginning with the pillars of authoritarian stability, the Freedom from Repression index, which is the composite measure capturing both the absence of state-sanctioned physical violence and the extent of government restrictions on political liberties, exhibited a statistically significant positive coefficient (2.95). This result suggests a robust relationship between repression and emigration policy, indicating that regimes reliant on coercive stability mechanisms are significantly more likely to adopt restrictive exit policies. Additionally, co-optation yielded a positive and statistically significant coefficient (0.58), implying that regimes that integrate opposition groups and elites into their governance structures tend to implement more permissive emigration policies. These findings align with existing scholarship on authoritarian stability, reinforcing the notion that reliance on repression often necessitates stricter population controls, whereas co-optation may serve as a substitute for coercion, reducing the need for emigration restrictions.

Conversely, legitimisation did not achieve statistical significance in this model, suggesting a more complex or non-linear relationship with emigration policy. One possible explanation is that legitimisation, as an aggregated measure encompassing diverse strategies, such as ideological appeals or performance-based legitimacy, pulls emigration policy in different directions. It could also be that the variation in legitimisation strategies within countries, (for example, from ideology to legal-rational) was too small to be captured by the aggregated variable. Alternatively, its effects may be non-linear, contingent on contextual factors or mediated by other variables.

Regarding regime type, the results present an interesting contrast. Personalist regime type exhibited a small positive coefficient, indicating that personalist regimes may be more permissive in their emigration policies. However, presidentialism demonstrated a statistically significant negative coefficient (-0.94 in Model 1), suggesting that presidential regimes tend to impose more restrictive emigration controls. The apparent contradiction between these two findings may stem from the subjectivity inherent in regime classification, particularly in distinguishing between personalist and personalist-hybrid regime types. As discussed in Chapter 5, coding decisions in datasets such as GWF may obscure the extent of personalism in some regimes. For instance, North Korea is coded as a non-personalist (party) regime despite being a personal-party hybrid with strong personalist characteristics. Moreover, in Models 3 and 7, the coefficient for presidentialism increases in magnitude (-3.51), suggesting that when isolating the effect of concentrated executive power, the association with restrictive emigration policies becomes even stronger. This provides further empirical support for the

argument that personalist authoritarian regimes, by virtue of their highly centralised decision-making structures, are more likely to impose restrictive exit policies as a means of political control. The greater consistency and magnitude of the presidentialism coefficient across alternative model specifications casts further doubt on the robustness of the personalist regime finding.

Alternative specifications were estimated by selectively removing independent variables to assess the robustness of these results and address potential multicollinearity. For instance, Model 4 isolates the effect of freedom from repression by removing other key independent variables, and Model 6 isolates the effect of co-optation also by removing other key variables. The results across these models remain largely consistent with the main specification, indicating that multicollinearity is not a substantial issue. Further diagnostic tests, including VIF and correlation matrices, are presented in Appendix B, confirming that multicollinearity does not significantly distort the regression estimates.

Among the economic and demographic control variables, the results suggest a limited but statistically significant role in shaping emigration policy. GDP per capita was positively associated with emigration permissiveness, reinforcing the argument that wealthier states are more likely to allow greater mobility. Fuel income per capita, by contrast, was negatively associated with permissiveness, consistent with theories of rentier state authoritarianism, which posit that resource-rich regimes, particularly those reliant on oil revenues, have both the means and the incentives to restrict emigration to control human capital and prevent political opposition abroad. Urbanisation did not achieve statistical significance, suggesting that while demographic pressures may influence migration dynamics at the societal level, they do not appear to systematically shape state-imposed emigration restrictions in this dataset.

Summary and Implications

This regression analysis aimed to statistically test the relationship between the pillars of authoritarian stability, personalist regime type and emigration policy. The results here suggest that highly repressive regimes are more likely to adopt restrictive emigration policies, whereas regimes with high levels of co-optation are likely to adopt more permissive policies. However, establishing a direct statistical relationship between legitimation and emigration policy has proven more challenging. This could be because the effects of legitimation are mediated, lagged or context-specific in relation to the type of legitimation a regime adopts, or a complex relationship is there that cannot be captured by linear models. Similarly, while the type of personalist regime showed a positive correlation with emigration policy, this result may be influenced by the subjective coding of regime types. In contrast, presidentialism, which directly measures the concentration of power in a single leader, emerged as a more robust predictor of emigration policies, with higher levels of presidentialism consistently associated with more restrictive emigration controls. These findings underscore researchers' need to

exercise caution in drawing definitive causal inferences from statistical analyses. Rather than serving as conclusive evidence, these results should be interpreted as indicative patterns that warrant further theoretical refinement and empirical investigation, especially based on research with this type of data. Future research should build upon these findings, employing complementary methodological approaches, such as case studies, process tracing, or alternative modelling techniques, to elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving the observed relationships.

The subsequent chapter situates these findings within the broader landscape of authoritarian regimes globally, providing a comparative analysis to contextualise the observed patterns and deepen our understanding of the political dynamics shaping emigration policies.

Chapter 7: From Numbers to Narratives: Case Insights into the Quantitative Findings

In this chapter, I build on the findings from Chapter 6 by analysing illustrative cases from a diverse range of countries to provide empirical grounding for the results. The first section examines the three pillars of stability and their relationship with emigration policy, highlighting how different stability mechanisms influence emigration policies. The second section explores the link between personalist regimes and emigration policy, assessing how the concentration of power in a single leader shapes emigration control strategies.

Pillars of Authoritarian Stability

This section discusses the findings from the quantitative analysis presented in Chapter 6 by highlighting three key observations concerning the pillars of authoritarian stability and the emigration policy of non-democratic regimes.

First, repression correlated with stricter emigration policies, as highly repressive regimes may impose emigration restrictions to prevent dissent and maintain control. Governments that rely highly on coercion often fear that allowing free movement could enable opposition figures to organise abroad, leading them to implement restrictive emigration policies as part of their repressive apparatus.

Second, co-optation is associated with more permissive emigration policies. Regimes that integrate opposition figures and elites into the political system may have reduced need for restricting emigration. By absorbing political challengers into state structures through patronage, appointments, and economic incentives, these governments minimise the risk of external opposition movements, making emigration restrictions less necessary.

Third, the relationship between legitimisation and emigration policy may be non-linear. Regimes prioritising legitimisation strategies and those that govern with minimal legitimacy-seeking efforts can both maintain restrictive emigration policies.

These findings point to overarching tendencies rather than rigid causal laws, as authoritarian regimes exhibit considerable variation in how they apply different strategies to control or enable exit. While the data indicate that high levels of repression often coincide with stricter exit controls, a notable example of a highly repressive regime that implemented a relatively lenient emigration policy is Cuba under Fidel Castro, particularly during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. Despite maintaining strict internal controls and suppressing dissent, the Cuban government permitted a mass exodus of citizens during this period. Over approximately five months, around 125,000 Cubans departed for the United States, often with the government's tacit approval (Stephens, 2021). This policy shift was, in part, a strategic

move by the regime to expel dissidents and alleviate internal pressures (Hoffmann, 2005). Similarly, co-optation appears to correlate with more permissive emigration policies, yet this permissiveness rarely applies uniformly. In countries such as China, co-opted elites and political insiders often enjoy extensive freedom of movement, whereas non-elites or disfavoured groups may still face barriers (Thibault, 2024). This duality highlights how co-optation can selectively relax restrictions for loyalists while preserving constraints for the broader population, thereby simultaneously mitigating external opposition and reinforcing unequal control.

Moreover, the absence of a linear relationship between legitimation and exit restrictions underscores the complexity of legitimising strategies themselves. Authoritarian rulers may rely on different types of ideological, performance-based, or minimal legitimation efforts—each exerting distinct pressures on emigration policy. For example, a highly ideological regime might tighten borders to preserve the purity of its doctrine, whereas another regime that touts economic success might allow citizens greater mobility as a testament to its confidence and openness. At times, however, a state might demonstrate minimal interest in establishing legitimacy yet still restrict emigration for various strategic reasons. The different forms of legitimation were aggregated due to the potential for regimes to shift from one legitimating strategy to another over time—however, such transitions may be infrequent or gradual, potentially limiting their detectability within the temporal resolution of the dataset.

These intricacies—whether in terms of pushing dissenters out, selectively allowing insiders to travel, or managing different forms of legitimacy, highlight the sheer number of moving parts that shape emigration policy. As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint a universal model of how repression, co-optation, and legitimation dictate emigration policies. Instead, the interplay of these variables emerges differently across contexts, regime priorities, and historical moments, suggesting that future research should also continue to disentangle the particular mechanisms at work within individual cases. Consequently, these observations should be understood as indicative trends rather than definitive causal claims, encouraging further research to capture the diverse ways regimes combine repression, co-optation, and legitimation in practice.

To explore these dynamics further, this section presents illustrative cases: the Dominican Republic as an example of how repression correlates with emigration policy, Kyrgyzstan as a case of co-optation influencing emigration policies, and Mozambique and Singapore as examples of the complex relationship between legitimation and emigration policy.

These four cases offer a deliberately diverse sample across both time periods and regions, illustrating how different dimensions of authoritarian rule (repression, co-optation, and legitimation) manifest in varying emigration policies. In the Dominican Republic, under Trujillo (1930–1961), we see how ferocious state terror and assassinations abroad coincide with near-total control of exit—an important

exemplar of the link between high repression and tight emigration restrictions in mid-20-century Latin America. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan illustrates how a post-Soviet Government's heavy reliance on co-opting influential elites while allowing large-scale labour migration to alleviate economic and social pressures fostered more permissive emigration policies throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In Mozambique, the FRELIMO regime's shift from Marxist-Leninist revolution in the late 1970s and 1980s to market-oriented reforms in the 1990s reveals how changing disregarding ideological legitimisation narratives led to changes in their emigration policies. Finally, Singapore's decades-long emphasis on economic performance and technocratic governance demonstrates that when an authoritarian regime's legitimacy hinges on delivering prosperity, it can afford relatively open emigration policies, so long as skilled talent remains tethered to the state through economic incentives and strict citizenship rules. By examining these four countries, spanning different continents, political legacies, and time periods, I aim to highlight how repression, co-optation, and legitimisation strategies each produce distinct rationales for restricting or permitting emigration, illustrating the wide-ranging relevance of these dynamics across diverse authoritarian contexts.

Repression

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence for the relationship between repression and emigration policy in authoritarian regimes. The results demonstrate a clear pattern: higher levels of repression correlate with more restrictive emigration policies, while regimes that exhibit greater freedom from repression tend to allow more open emigration policies. The positive coefficient suggests that emigration policies become less restrictive as repression decreases within a given country over time. The significance of this effect confirms that emigration policy responds to shifts in domestic political repression.

The data also revealed that regimes with low levels of freedom from repression consistently score at the lowest end of the emigration policy scores (0 and 1), indicating that travel is either heavily restricted or selectively permitted only for regime loyalists. This also aligns with Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework, when emigration is conceptualised as an alternative to political engagement within a repressive system. In authoritarian contexts, where "voice" (dissent) is systematically repressed, exit threatens regime stability, enabling opposition actors to escape state control and organise externally. By restricting exit, authoritarian leaders deliberately limit the ability of dissatisfied citizens to mobilise abroad, thereby weakening opposition movements before they can gain international traction. Therefore, the state's control over emigration is not merely about regulating movement but about managing political threats by ensuring that potential dissenters remain within the state's coercive reach.

From this perspective, enforcing strict emigration policies now functions as an extension of repression itself. Highly repressive regimes perceive emigration as a political liability, fearing exiled dissidents

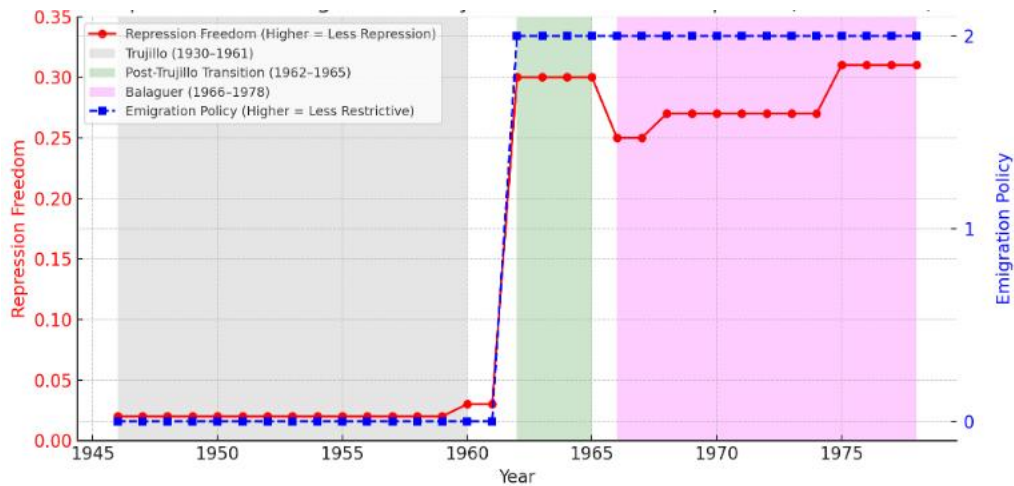
may establish transnational opposition networks, attract international scrutiny, and amplify resistance efforts beyond the regime's direct control (Davenport, 2007a). This is particularly relevant given the increasing role of diaspora activism in modern political movements, where external opposition groups leverage international institutions, media, and foreign governments to undermine authoritarian rule (Tsourapas, 2020). Thus, rather than allowing exit to serve as a pressure valve, repressive regimes internalise Hirschman's model by eliminating "voice" through repression while simultaneously curbing exit to prevent political opposition from consolidating externally.

Conversely, as freedom from repression increases, emigration policies become significantly more open. The analysis finds that less repressive regimes display greater variation in emigration policies, suggesting that these regimes use emigration as a flexible tool rather than a rigid control mechanism. Unlike highly repressive regimes, these governments are more likely to allow some degree of exit, either to reduce domestic dissent or as part of broader international engagement strategies.

The Dominican Republic

The case of the Dominican Republic serves as an illustrative example of how authoritarian regimes' emigration policies are correlated with levels of repression. The Dominican Republic's use of repression and its approach to emigration underwent transformations across different authoritarian regimes during the leadership of Rafael Trujillo (1930–1961) and Joaquin Balaguer (1966–1978). As illustrated in Figure 7.1, these periods reflect distinct strategies in emigration control, shaped by broader shifts in governance, political stability, and external pressures. Under Trujillo, emigration was tightly restricted as part of a broader strategy of state control and repression, whereas Balaguer's rule allowed greater freedom of movement, where emigration policies were adjusted in response to both domestic opposition and international factors.

Figure 7.1. Repression versus emigration policy in the Dominican Republic (1946–1978).



Rafael Trujillo's rule was marked by one of the most brutal and totalitarian dictatorships in Latin America. His regime relied on systematic state terror, censorship, and extrajudicial killings to eliminate opposition (Derby, 1994). Political dissidents were not only persecuted within the country but also assassinated abroad, demonstrating the regime's transnational repression capabilities. The Mirabal sisters, prominent anti-Trujillo activists, were murdered in 1960, becoming a symbol of state violence (Espinal, 1997). Similarly, the Galindez Affair, where a Basque nationalist was allegedly murdered for his doctoral dissertation on the critique of Trujillo's regime (Galindez, 1956), illustrated how Trujillo extended his repressive reach beyond national borders, orchestrating the kidnapping and disappearance of opposition figures even in the United States (Peguero, 2004).

Trujillo's fear of dissent was evident in his severe suppression of political opposition (Black, 2024). He maintained an execution list targeting individuals worldwide whom he perceived as enemies or traitors. Notably, he once permitted the establishment of an opposition party, only to identify and eliminate its members, demonstrating his intent to pre-emptively neutralise any potential threats (Galindez, 1956).

This internal repression also extended to his emigration policies. Trujillo's paranoia over external opposition led to an extremely restrictive emigration policy. The regime actively prevented political dissidents from leaving, fearing that exiled opposition groups would gain international support and organise resistance movements. Unlike later periods in Dominican history, where migration became a key outlet for political and economic pressures, Trujillo sought to contain dissent within national borders. The regime's secret police, the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar, operated not only domestically but also in countries such as Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, and Venezuela to monitor and eliminate exiled opponents (Galindez, 1956). Trujillo also implemented a system of bureaucratic and legal barriers to control movement in and out of the country. Passports and exit visas were tightly regulated, with approvals granted selectively based on political loyalty. Those suspected of opposing

the regime faced severe restrictions on their ability to travel, reinforcing the dictatorship's grip on potential dissidents (Manley, 2017).

Following Trujillo's assassination in 1961, emigration increased dramatically (Ferguson, 2003). As evident in the V-Dem data, repression also significantly decreased during this time. Many of the first to emigrate were Trujillo loyalists, who feared political retribution and the left-leaning policies of the newly elected President Juan Bosch in 1963 (Del Castillo & Murphy, 1987). The brief post-Trujillo transitional period (1962–1965) also saw a shift in emigration policy, with the V-Dem emigration policy score rising to 2, indicating that while political opponents still faced restrictions, ordinary citizens encountered only minor barriers to emigration. At this point, the U.S., recognising the instability in the Dominican Republic, also expanded its visa programmes to absorb these migrants, seeking to prevent further political unrest that might have destabilised the region (Ferguson, 2003).

The rise of Joaquin Balaguer in 1966 marked the return of authoritarian rule, though with a distinct approach to emigration (Sagás, 2000). Balaguer's regime, particularly during his first 12-year period (1966–1978), was characterised by systematic repression, including political assassinations, electoral manipulation, and the use of paramilitary groups such as La Banda to silence opposition (Mitchell, 1989). Although this level of repression was high, freedom from repression scores show that it was substantially less than the totalitarian extremes of the Trujillo era. During Trujillo's rule, thousands of Dominicans were executed, imprisoned, or disappeared. Trujillo frequently exiled or killed dissidents abroad, ensuring no organised resistance could emerge, and his government also used arbitrary detentions, widespread surveillance, and torture as routine state practices (Mitchell, 1989). Balaguer, on the other hand, targeted his repression strategically. His government still engaged in political killings, particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when leftist guerrilla groups emerged. However, instead of purging all potential threats, he focused on eliminating radical opposition while allowing some controlled opposition parties to exist. This tactic helped him maintain a facade of democracy, which was essential for retaining international legitimacy and U.S. support (Del Castillo & Murphy, 1987). While he did use state violence against opposition groups, he also allowed limited political opposition, though tightly controlled, and did not monopolise every aspect of life. Balaguer used electoral fraud and intimidation instead of outright eliminating all opposition while maintaining control. In the 1978 elections, for example, there were credible reports of fraudulent ballot stuffing, vote-buying, and intimidation of opposition supporters, but these practices were not so extreme as to outright eliminate opposition (Cohen, 1996).

Unlike Trujillo, Balaguer allowed emigration to function as a political safety valve (Mitchell, 1989). His government recognised that permitting political dissidents to leave reduced the likelihood of domestic uprisings (Ferguson, 2003). Emigration policies during this period were significantly more open, with a V-Dem score of 2, on par with the post-Trujillo transition period, indicating that while

restrictions still applied to some, the general population faced fewer barriers to leaving the country (Del Castillo & Murphy, 1987). The shift in policy led to a dramatic increase in Dominican emigration, and the trend continued throughout the 1970s, fuelled by economic instability and a lack of industrialisation, which left many middle- and working-class Dominicans seeking better opportunities abroad (Ferguson, 2003). The U.S. and Puerto Rico became primary destinations, and the U.S. Government, fearing the rise of leftist movements in Latin America, once again supported Balaguer and facilitated Dominican migration to stabilise the political landscape (Del Castillo & Murphy, 1987).

The Dominican Republic's emigration policies throughout the 20th century closely aligned with the repression levels of its ruling regimes. Under Trujillo, stringent emigration restrictions were a core component of his broader strategy of absolute state control aimed at preventing opposition mobilisation abroad. In contrast, Balaguer strategically leveraged emigration to maintain political stability, allowing controlled emigration to diffuse domestic unrest (Mitchell, 1989). The V-Dem emigration policy scores further support the link between repression and migration policy, demonstrating that shifts in authoritarian repression influence the degree of emigration restrictions. The Dominican Republic exemplifies how authoritarian regimes manipulate emigration policy not only to consolidate power and suppress dissent but also to navigate international pressures and maintain regime longevity (Sagás, 2000).

Building on the existing findings, the Dominican Republic's historical shifts in emigration controls align closely with broader scholarship on how authoritarian regimes balance coercion to ensure their survival (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Svolik, 2012). Under Trujillo's heavily repressive governance, the state not only eradicated domestic dissent through systematic violence but also prevented potential exiles from leaving. This mirrors Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* framework, wherein curtailing exit effectively blunts dissidents' capacity to "voice" grievances abroad. In later years, Balaguer's comparatively lighter but still targeted repression demonstrates how autocrats can selectively relax exit controls as a "safety valve". Allowing certain groups to emigrate diffused internal pressures, reduced the risk of organised resistance, and secured a measure of international legitimacy through the appearance of comparatively liberal policies (Tilly, 2003). Thus, the Dominican experience illustrates the adaptive nature of authoritarian rule: when domestic unrest intensifies, or foreign scrutiny grows, regimes recalibrate the balance between harsh coercion and the strategic use of emigration to ensure regime longevity (Davenport, 2007a; Svolik, 2012; Tsourapas, 2020).

Co-optation

Regression results from the panel data analysis revealed a positive correlation between co-optation and permissive emigration policies, indicating that as authoritarian regimes intensify efforts to co-opt

opposition and integrate elites, they become more tolerant of emigration. This finding aligns with theoretical arguments that co-optation serves as a strategic tool of authoritarian resilience, allowing rulers to pre-emptively neutralise opposition without resorting to overt repression (Kavasoglu, 2021), which can include restrictions on freedom of foreign movement.

In a co-optive framework, authoritarian rulers who effectively distribute material and symbolic benefits to key elites and opposition figures effectively mitigate the threat of organised dissent (Rivera, 2017). As a result, emigration becomes less politically risky since dissenters are either brought into the system or marginalised to the point where their exit poses no significant threat to regime stability. This contrasts with the findings on highly repressive regimes, which view emigration as a direct challenge and implement stringent exit controls to prevent international political opposition (Svolik, 2012).

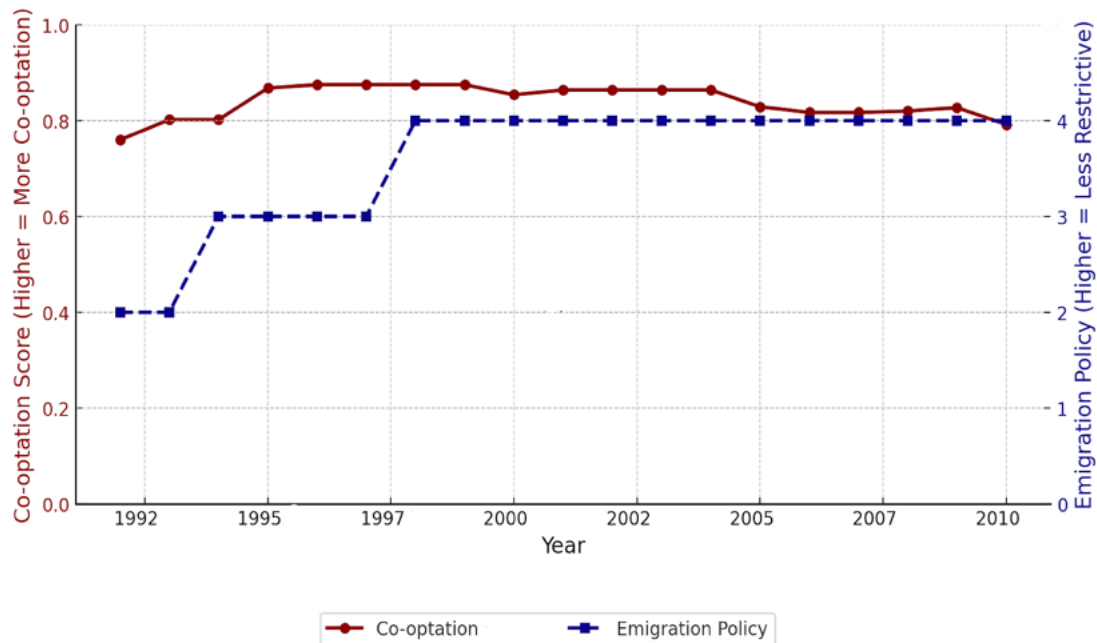
Furthermore, authoritarian regimes with robust co-optation strategies may seek to use emigration as a pressure valve, allowing dissatisfied citizens to leave rather than risk internal unrest. In this context, permissive emigration policies can function as a stabilising mechanism by reducing domestic tensions. This insight reinforces the broader arguments that co-optation not only consolidates power domestically but also shapes authoritarian regimes' external engagement with their diaspora, as rulers may selectively maintain ties with emigrants to influence narratives abroad (Glasius, 2018a; Tsourapas, 2018).

Thus, where co-optation mechanisms are strong, regimes are more likely to formulate permissive emigration policies, as political opposition is already contained within elite structures or dispersed through strategic concessions. This finding provides empirical support for theoretical models that position co-optation as a flexible and adaptive strategy that allows the regime to be more tolerant of civil and political freedoms while consolidating its authoritarian rule over time.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan presents an illustrative case of the positive relationship between co-optation and emigration policies in authoritarian regimes. Figure 7.2 demonstrates a correlation between high levels of co-optation and the increasing permissiveness of emigration policies from the early 1990s to 2010. The rise in co-optation in the mid-1990s coincided with a significant increase in emigration openness, a pattern that remained stable for over a decade. This suggests that rather than viewing emigration as a threat to their regime instability, the Kyrgyz regime relied on elite absorption and labour migration as mechanisms to prevent political instability.

Figure 7.2. Co-optation versus emigration policy in Kyrgyzstan.



The early post-Soviet period witnessed unregulated mass emigration from Kyrgyzstan. Widespread unemployment and inflation forced many people to seek work abroad, mainly in Russia and Kazakhstan. This may have caused the government to attempt to impose restrictions on particular groups, mainly to retain skilled professionals, particularly in key sectors such as education, healthcare, and administration. However, as economic conditions deteriorated, Kyrgyzstan actively began facilitating labour migration to alleviate domestic unemployment and secure remittances, which consequently became a crucial part of the national economy (Elebaeva, 2004).

Since independence, Kyrgyz leaders have consistently used co-optation to maintain political control, integrating opposition figures into government roles while sidelining or marginalising those who resist co-optation. This strategy has been instrumental in preventing large-scale political destabilisation, particularly in a country characterised by deep regional and tribal divisions (Temirkoulov, 2004). Even in the 1990s, when initial efforts to accommodate opposition groups and Islamist movements gave way to repressive policies following security concerns related to militant activities in Central Asia, the government continued to offer financial incentives and political appointments to moderate opposition figures to neutralise their influence (Trisko, 2006).

Historically, Kyrgyz politics have been shaped by divisions between northern and southern elites, with each faction vying for power and state resources. Co-optation has served as a mechanism for balancing these competing interests by distributing government positions and economic benefits along regional lines (Temirkoulov, 2004). Kyrgyzstan's weak institutional structures also played a crucial role in shaping its increasing co-optation strategies since its independence. The newly independent state struggled with institutional fragmentation, limited administrative capacity, and high dependence on informal networks for political stability (Cummings & Norgaard, 2002).

Additionally, Kyrgyzstan undertook rapid privatisation of state assets in an attempt to shift to a market economy. However, weak institutional oversight meant that state-owned enterprises were transferred to a small elite rather than fostering competition. Corrupt patronage networks emerged, where wealth and resources were distributed through political connections rather than transparent market mechanisms (Engvall, 2011). Kyrgyzstan's early political and economic liberalisation led to the empowerment of regional elites, clans, and international donors, which weakened the central state's authority (Cummings & Norgaard, 2002). This undermined economic governance, as policies were shaped by elite interests rather than institutional frameworks.

The economic instability of the 1990s in Kyrgyzstan also played a fundamental role in shaping the country's institutional weakness. Kyrgyzstan faced a severe economic contraction due to the sudden withdrawal of Soviet subsidies and the collapse of integrated industrial networks. GDP shrunk by nearly 50% between 1991 and 1995 (Elebaeva, 2004), making Kyrgyzstan one of the poorest post-Soviet states. Hyperinflation and the rapid decline of state revenue meant the government struggled to pay public sector wages, maintain basic services, and enforce policy decisions effectively (Wolters, 2006).

This caused the government to rely on emigration as a *de facto* economic policy, easing domestic pressures but also failing to build a sustainable employment strategy. Kyrgyzstan quickly became one of the most remittance-dependent economies in the region. By the late 1990s, many Kyrgyz workers migrated to Russia and Kazakhstan to find employment, sending back remittances that sustained the struggling economy (Rugut & Usmanalieva, 2008). Instead of developing domestic industries, Kyrgyzstan became dependent on external labour markets, reinforcing institutional weakness by shifting economic agency away from the state. The Kyrgyz Government actively facilitated it by signing BLAs with Russia and Kazakhstan. This approach allowed the state to manage economic instability while benefiting from the financial inflows that migration generated (Elebaeva, 2004; Rugut & Usmanalieva, 2008).

Under Askar Akayev, Kyrgyzstan's first president, early democratic reforms were soon replaced by a system in which political elites and opposition figures were selectively co-opted through government appointments and economic incentives (Akiner, 2016). Prominent opposition leaders such as Feliks Kulov and Melis Eshimkanov were integrated into the government at various points, while others such as Omurbek Tekebayev, who resisted co-optation, faced political marginalisation (Temirkoulov, 2004). Akayev also actively included political parties and social movements in decision-making, leading to more personalised and fragmented governance structures. This openness led to a high degree of co-optation, where opposition figures and regional powerbrokers were brought into government to maintain stability (Cummings & Norgaard, 2002).

Kyrgyzstan's leaders, beyond Akayev, have also used high levels of co-optation to neutralise opposition and consolidate power. After the 2005 Tulip Revolution, there was a struggle between the presidency and parliament over power distribution. The executive branch used co-optation and informal influence to ensure parliamentary loyalty (Wolters, 2006). In 2007, President Bakiyev appointed Almaz Atambayev, a key opposition leader, as Prime Minister during anti-government protests. This move effectively weakened the opposition by absorbing one of its major figures (Huskey & Iskakova, 2010). Initially presenting himself as a reformist, Bakiyev quickly reverted to co-optation tactics, appointing loyalists to key positions and offering economic privileges to influential figures in exchange for their political support (Matveeva, 2010).

Hence, co-optation has also been used as a tool of control by the Kyrgyzstan regime to control the opposition. Holding a government position in Kyrgyzstan provided access to patronage networks and financial benefits, making it tempting for opposition leaders to defect. Officials often gained wealth through informal rent-seeking, such as bribery and controlling government contracts. This financial allure discouraged opposition unity, as individual politicians prioritised personal gain over collective resistance (Huskey & Iskakova, 2010; Tekir, 2023). This weakened the credibility of the opposition, as defectors were seen as opportunistic. This also prevented institutional reforms, as opposition leaders often compromise in exchange for personal benefits (Wolters, 2006).

Thus, without clear legal frameworks, the ruling elite could use discretionary power to distribute state benefits. Co-optation in Kyrgyzstan often involved economic incentives. Access to government resources allowed elites to accumulate wealth through corruption, which they then used to sustain political influence (Tekir, 2023). For groups that were not co-opted, permissive emigration policies functioned as a complementary stabilising mechanism, offering an economic outlet for marginalised groups who did not have access to those economic incentives. With an unequal distribution of economic opportunities and the state's limited capacity to generate employment, labour migration became a critical safety valve, particularly for citizens from politically and economically disadvantaged regions, by providing alternative avenues for economic survival abroad rather than fuelling domestic unrest (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2008).

Over time, the Kyrgyz Government introduced emigration policies to regulate labour migration and maximise economic benefits (d'Appollonia & Kasymova, 2015; Markku, 2014). These policies included bilateral agreements with key destination countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, South Korea, and the UAE, alongside the establishment of legal frameworks such as the 2000 Law on External Migration and the Border Control Agency to oversee migrant outflows. As emigration rates continued to rise, new government strategies emerged, including the introduction of biometric passports in 2006 to regulate legal migration, BLAs in 2007 to formalise employment pathways, and the 2010 establishment of the State Program on Decent Labour, which aimed to improve working conditions

for Kyrgyz migrants abroad. Agreements with Russia included protecting the rights of migrant workers, mutual recognition of diplomas, and other social protections. Similar agreements have been signed with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (d'Appollonia & Kasymova, 2015; Elebaeva, 2004). The government actively promoted labour migration as a strategy to combat unemployment and increase remittances, which had become a crucial economic pillar. Institutions such as the Centre on Kyrgyz Citizens Employment Abroad were established to facilitate job placements, while vocational training programmes were introduced to align Kyrgyz workers' skills with foreign labour market demands. A notable example is the 2007 labour migration agreement with Russia, which allowed Kyrgyz workers to obtain legal status and avoid deportation (d'Appollonia & Kasymova, 2015).

This reliance on labour migration contributed to economic dependence on remittances, which accounted for over 19% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2010. While these remittances provided financial stability for many households, they also raised concerns about long-term economic sustainability, as the country remains dependent on external labour markets rather than fostering domestic economic growth. In response, policies were implemented to encourage formal remittance channels and reduce transaction costs, reinforcing the state's role in managing labour migration for economic benefit (d'Appollonia & Kasymova, 2015; Markku, 2014). This has enabled the Kyrgyz Government to prioritise the distribution of state resources among loyal elites rather than investing in public welfare, as many citizens rely on remittances for their economic survival.

These dynamics in Kyrgyzstan echo broader debates in authoritarianism studies, where co-optation is recognised as one of the most potent strategies for regime survival. Scholars have shown that by incorporating key elites and potential rivals into government roles or lucrative patronage networks, authoritarian leaders pre-empt the formation of a unified opposition (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Svoboda, 2012). In the Kyrgyz context, this is especially salient given the deep regional divisions between northern and southern factions, as well as the country's patronage-driven political culture. By offering critical posts and rent-seeking opportunities to influential actors, including opposition figures, successive leaders have aligned powerful stakeholders' interests with the regime, thus minimising the likelihood of collective mobilisation (Cummings & Norgaard, 2002; Temirkoulov, 2004). This co-optation effectively neutralises or fragments potential threats (Magaloni, 2008a) and, when paired with permissive emigration policies, diverts broader public dissatisfaction into economic migration rather than domestic unrest. Taken together, these strategies reflect how, in an environment of weak institutions, co-optation can function as both a substitute for overt repression and a mechanism for channelling political and economic pressures away from regime-threatening confrontation.

The analysis of Kyrgyzstan suggests that co-optation can play a crucial but understudied role in shaping emigration policies in authoritarian regimes with high elite absorption. Future research should explore whether similar patterns hold in other post-Soviet states and beyond, particularly in regions where elite accommodation and controlled political participation serve as primary mechanisms of authoritarian stability, and labour migration as an important aspect of economic stability of the country.

Legitimation

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, the analyses did not reveal a negative correlation between legitimation and emigration policies. This finding may be attributed to the composite nature of the legitimation index, which aggregates multiple forms of legitimation that may exert divergent influences on emigration policy. While certain legitimation strategies, such as nationalism or ideological control, might incentivise stricter emigration policies, others, such as performance-based or procedural legitimation, may encourage more open emigration policies to demonstrate state confidence and economic success. Additionally, the descriptive analysis indicates that legitimation exhibits a non-linear relationship with emigration policy. Restrictive policies appear across a wide range of legitimation levels, while permissive policies tend to align more consistently with moderate levels of legitimation rather than extreme cases. To explore this dynamic more thoroughly, I examine two illustrative cases, one demonstrating a positive relationship between legitimation and emigration policy and another illustrating a negative relationship.

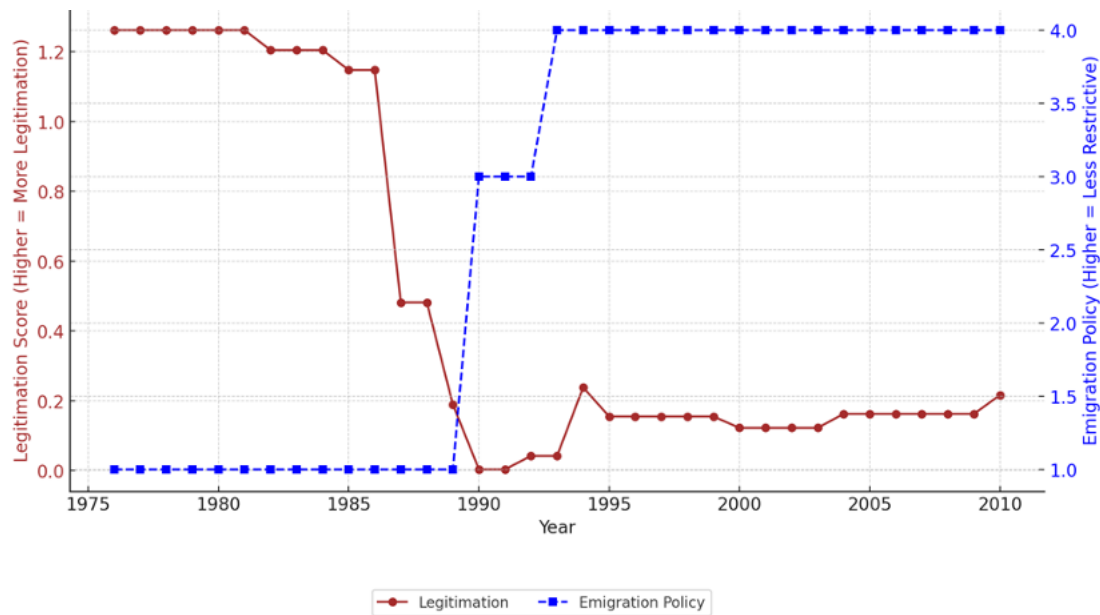
Mozambique

Mozambique's post-independence trajectory illustrates how shifts in legitimation strategies directly influenced emigration policy. Following independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) sought to break from colonial structures by adopting a socialist transformation model. This involved dismantling traditional governance institutions, which FRELIMO saw as remnants of colonial oppression, and replacing them with state-controlled structures such as Grupos Dinamizadores (dynamising groups). The party's legitimation strategy was rooted in Marxist-Leninist principles, emphasising centralised economic planning, social welfare, and state-led development as the primary means of governance (Meneses, 2005). However, while ideologically appealing to urban elites and party loyalists, these strategies failed to gain deep legitimacy in rural areas, where traditional authorities still held social and political influence (Fauvet, 1984; O'Meara, 1991).

This ideological commitment to socialism also shaped FRELIMO's approach to labour emigration. Under Portuguese rule, Mozambique had been a key labour supplier to South African mines, with colonial authorities enforcing strict labour quotas and agreements to maintain this system. However,

in its pursuit of national self-reliance, FRELIMO viewed labour emigration as a vestige of colonial exploitation that hindered domestic development. The party sought to curtail emigration flows, arguing that Mozambican labour should be directed toward national development projects rather than foreign economies (Lucas, 1987). Furthermore, there were security concerns as FRELIMO feared that returning migrant workers, exposed to capitalist economies and alternative political ideologies, might introduce counter-revolutionary sentiments that could threaten the socialist state (Fauvet, 1984).

Figure 7.3. Legitimation versus emigration policy in Mozambique.



However, while FRELIMO sought legitimacy through socialist modernisation, its policies faced considerable resistance, particularly from rural populations who had long relied on traditional governance structures and cross-border labour mobility for economic survival. The government's failure to accommodate these local realities contributed to the civil war (1977–1992), as RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) capitalised on local grievances to gain support. RENAMO's ability to incorporate traditional authorities and advocate for decentralised governance presented an alternative that undermined FRELIMO's centralised rule (Lorch & Bunk, 2017). The prolonged conflict weakened the state's authority and exacerbated economic instability, making it increasingly difficult for the government to maintain its socialist policies (Fauvet, 1984; Lucas, 1987; O'Meara, 1991).

By the mid-1980s, Mozambique was facing a severe economic crisis, driven by the inefficiencies of state-led development, the ongoing civil war, and external factors such as drought. FRELIMO's socialist policies, including nationalised industries and collective agriculture, had failed to generate sustainable growth, pushing the country toward economic collapse (O'Meara, 1991). This crisis forced FRELIMO to reconsider its approach to governance and economic management. Following the death of President Samora Machel in 1986, Joaquim Chissano took office and introduced a more

pragmatic, reform-oriented leadership. By 1989, FRELIMO had officially abandoned Marxism-Leninism, shifting toward a mixed-market economy (Freedom House, 2001).

As shown in Figure 7.3, Mozambique experienced a significant drop in legitimisation scores in the late 1980s, coinciding with a marked shift towards restrictive emigration policies. This ideological shift had direct implications for emigration policy. The economic reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly those implemented under the Structural Adjustment Programmes initiated in 1987, sought to transition Mozambique from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. These reforms, backed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, emphasised trade liberalisation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and fiscal austerity (de Camargo Penteado, 2022). However, while these policies aimed to stabilise the economy, they also had severe social consequences. The privatisation of industries led to widespread job losses, while cuts in public spending weakened healthcare, education, and other essential services (Cunguara et al., 2012).

As unemployment rose and economic hardships deepened, the state could no longer justify its restrictive emigration policies. Instead, liberalising labour migration became necessary to ease domestic pressures and stimulate remittance inflows (Fauvet, 1984; Lucas, 1987; O'Meara, 1991). In contrast to its earlier stance, which framed migration as a threat to national development, FRELIMO now increasingly viewed it as an economic lifeline that could help alleviate poverty and stabilise the post-war economy (Marshall, 1990).

By the 2000s, FRELIMO had further distanced itself from its socialist past, embracing neoliberal economic policies prioritising foreign investment and market integration. Under President Armando Guebuza (2005–2015), the government actively promoted economic liberalisation, particularly in the natural gas and coal sectors, leading to significant foreign capital inflows (Cook, 2019; Cunguara et al., 2012). This period also saw a continued relaxation of emigration policies, as the government recognised labour migration as a crucial mechanism for managing economic disparities and reducing social discontent (de Camargo Penteado, 2022).

An authoritarian regime's ability to pivot from ideological or highly repressive stances toward more flexible policy frameworks is often central to its survival. Rather than adhering rigidly to a single governing model, many regimes adopt "adaptive authoritarianism", leveraging changes in economic policy, institutional design, or even levels of social openness to withstand challenges at home and abroad (Brownlee, 2007b; Geddes, 2004; Hoffmann, 2012). Mozambique's transformation from a socialist project heavily reliant on state-led development in the 1970s and 1980s to a more market-oriented system in the 1990s showcases how autocrats adapt policy stances as circumstances change. Rather than rigidly adhering to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, FRELIMO gradually embraced liberalisation strategies as economic crises and protracted conflict endangered its rule. This pattern

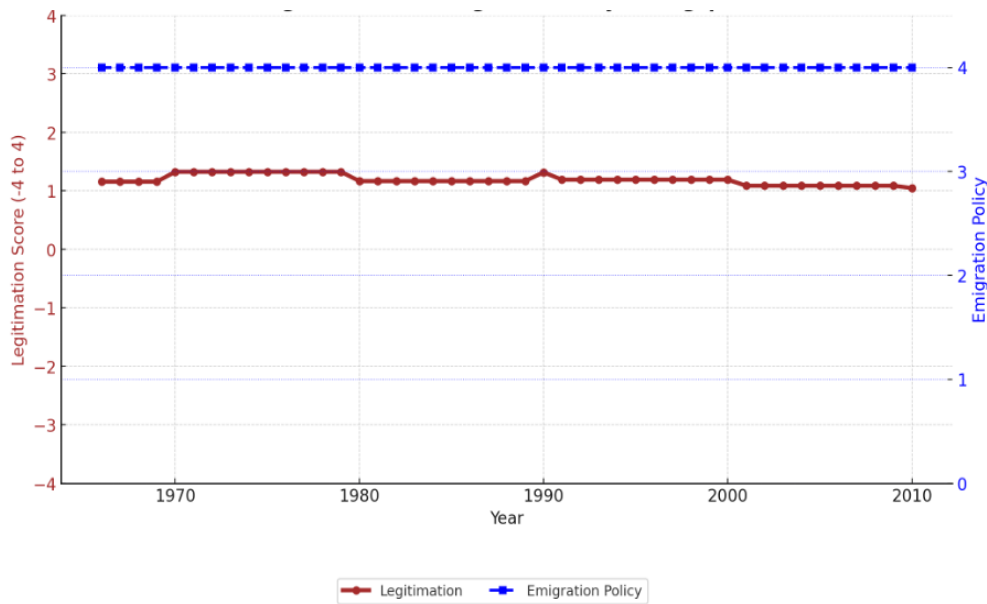
supports broader research underscoring how authoritarian elites strategically pivot between ideological commitments and pragmatic concessions, often including greater openness in migration and economic policy, when such moves can shore up their survival in the face of economic hardship and domestic unrest (Brownlee, 2007b; Geddes, 2004; Hankla & Kuthy, 2017).

Hence, Mozambique's evolving emigration policies cannot be understood in isolation from its shifting legitimization strategies. The socialist period saw an emphasis on state-led development and centralised control, leading to restrictive migration policies aligned with ideological goals. However, as economic realities changed and the government was forced to adopt a more pragmatic approach and abandon their ideology, emigration became an economic relief instrument. This transition underscores the broader relationship between legitimacy strategies and emigration policies, demonstrating how emigration policymaking can also be impacted by the legitimization narrative driven by the regime.

Singapore

On the other hand, as illustrated in figure 7.4, Singapore presents a compelling case of an authoritarian regime that relies heavily on legitimization strategies while maintaining a strategically managed open emigration policy. The ruling PAP has sustained its dominance through a combination of electoral legitimacy, economic performance, and international recognition (Morgenbesser, 2017), which has enabled Singapore to maintain political stability while engaging with global economic networks, positioning the state as a model of authoritarian resilience within a competitive international environment.

Figure 7.4. Legitimation versus emigration policy in Singapore.



A core pillar of PAP's legitimacy lies in its ability to link political stability with economic success. Since independence, Lee Kuan Yew framed PAP rule as essential for national survival, advocating for a state-controlled capitalist economy driven by government-linked corporations and foreign investment (Barr, 2021). This model not only reinforced PAP's dominance but also cultivated economic legitimacy, positioning the party as the sole guarantor of prosperity. Singapore's legitimacy is also deeply rooted in its technocratic governance, where PAP emphasises pragmatic policymaking and performance-based legitimacy. This technocratic model has been central to the nation's rapid development and social stability (Liu & Zhang, 2017). At the heart of this system is the principle of meritocracy, which ensures that government officials and policymakers are selected based on ability and expertise rather than ideology (Barr, 2021; Wong, 2013). By prioritising competence and fairness, PAP reinforces its legitimacy through demonstrable governance efficiency. Additionally, pragmatism serves as a key tenet of Singapore's governance, with PAP favouring policy solutions that yield results over strict ideological adherence (George, 2007). Lee Kuan Yew was also known to focus on the idea of Asian values to legitimise PAP's control. Asian societies' need to prioritise hierarchy, discipline, and collectivism over Western individualism has been central to Lee's rhetoric since the 1960s. Lee framed Confucian values, such as respect for authority, strong family ties, and meritocracy, as essential to Asian governance (Barr, 2000; Hoon, 2004).

The PAP's government's ability to deliver economic growth, social stability, and essential public goods strengthens its claim to authority. Public housing, healthcare, and education policies serve as tangible demonstrations of the effectiveness of governance, fostering a sense of citizen ownership and national belonging. By framing governance as a rational, apolitical, and technocratic process, PAP discouraged mass political participation while justifying the centralisation of power as a necessity for effective administration (Barr, 2000).

Alongside this economic performance, PAP has historically constructed a narrative of existential vulnerability to justify its tight political control. Lee Kuan Yew frequently invoked Singapore's small size, resource limitations, and geopolitical fragility to reinforce the necessity of a strong, centralised government (Barr, 2021; Heng, 2013). The city-state's 1965 expulsion from Malaysia was framed as a defining moment that underscored the risks of political instability, solidifying the argument that PAP dominance was crucial for national survival. Opposition movements were frequently discredited as threats to social cohesion, with dissent framed as communist subversion, foreign interference, or a danger to economic stability (Narine, 2004).

Singapore's emigration policies reflect these broader performance-based legitimisation strategies. Singapore has adopted a pragmatic migration model that allows outflows of talent while ensuring that emigrants remain economically and strategically connected to the state. During Lee Kuan Yew's leadership, concerns over brain drain prompted him to adopt a strategic approach prioritising retention over restriction. He often framed emigration as unpatriotic and a betrayal of the country (Barr, 2000, 2021). However, rather than imposing restrictions on emigration, he mitigated talent loss through targeted incentives and institutionalised connections with the diaspora, ensuring that skilled emigrants remained economically and strategically linked to Singapore (Liu & Zhang, 2017). Lee emphasised the importance of offering competitive, free-market rewards to skilled professionals, cautioning that punitive taxation could lead to talent loss and national decline (Lee, 1982). He also proactively addressed the talent shortage by advocating for attracting foreign professionals to Singapore (Liu & Zhang, 2017). The prohibition of dual citizenship, which requires Singaporeans who naturalise abroad to renounce their citizenship, ensured that loyalties remained singular while allowing expatriates to serve as economic ambassadors (Teng, 1994). Thus, while retaining skilled Singaporeans was deemed essential, the government maintained an open emigration policy instead of imposing exit restrictions and introduced targeted measures to incentivise key individuals vital to the regime's stability and economic success of the country to stay.

With the leadership transition to Goh Chok Tong in 1990, Singapore's stance on emigration became even more economically oriented. Goh framed emigration not as a loss of manpower but as an economic opportunity, introducing further policies to sustain connections with Singaporeans abroad. The Contact Singapore Initiative (1998) encouraged skilled emigrants to retain financial and business ties with Singapore, positioning the emigrants as assets rather than liabilities (Teng, 1994). However, legal constraints on dual citizenship and political participation remained unchanged despite this economic liberalisation, ensuring that emigration did not translate into external political opposition (Tan, 2012).

Since taking office in 2004, Lee Hsien Loong has further institutionalised economic-driven legitimacy, embedding emigration policies within a broader global competitiveness strategy. Lee

Hsien Loong's legitimization strategies also involve a blend of meritocratic principles, economic stewardship, controlled political engagement, and the deliberate crafting of national identity to sustain PAP's authority while adapting to evolving societal expectations (Austin, 2009). His government acknowledges the increasing trend of skilled emigration, and initiatives such as Global Talent Networks have been introduced to retain professional and economic ties with the diaspora, ensuring that emigrants continue contributing to Singapore's economy even if they no longer hold citizenship. At the same time, to compensate for talent outflows, Singapore has relaxed restrictions on foreign permanent residency, actively recruiting foreign professionals to maintain economic performance (Tan, 2012).

Rather than restricting emigration, Singapore's Government has adopted a two-pronged approach: attracting foreign talent to replace those who leave while ensuring that Singaporean expatriates remain economically connected to the state. At the same time, there is also the importation of large numbers of low-wage workers (e.g., Bangladeshi construction workers), who operate under different rules than educated "foreign talent". Singapore's case thus demonstrates how a regime reliant on legitimization strategies can maintain open emigration policies without destabilising political control. By externalising legitimacy through economic success, international credibility, and elite governance, PAP has successfully managed to avoid restrictive exit policies, instead focusing on the economic integration of its emigrants. Singapore sees emigration as a tool for economic expansion, reinforcing PAP's long-standing model of controlled openness.

Singapore's open emigration policies, set against rigorous controls on domestic political participation, offer a prime example of "performance-based authoritarianism", in which the regime's legitimacy rests heavily on demonstrated economic success and global integration (Gerschewski, 2013; Tan, 2012). PAP harnesses a technocratic model of governance that emphasises efficiency, meritocracy, and economic growth—to deflect both external pressures for liberal reforms (Barr, 2000) and internal calls for expanded political rights (George, 2007). However, this outward openness also diminishes the buildup of domestic discontent, as individuals dissatisfied with the constrained political arena can "exit" rather than formally challenge the regime (Hirschman, 1970). In doing so, the state adeptly leverages the benefits of a globally mobile labour force—skilled labour, reputation, and economic ties, while maintaining tight control over "voice", thereby illustrating a broader pattern in authoritarian politics—strategic management of mobility and economic performance to balance legitimacy and control.

Summary and Conclusion

This section has demonstrated how varying authoritarian emigration policies correlate with the pillars of authoritarian stability in different regimes across diverse contexts. By examining specific cases, I suggest that variations in emigration policies (restrictive versus permissive) can depend on which

stability mechanisms regimes predominantly rely upon. The Dominican Republic case illustrates how the intensity of repression correlates with the degree of emigration restriction. Under Trujillo's highly repressive regime, emigration policies were exceptionally restrictive, whereas Balaguer's comparatively moderate repression corresponded with less restrictive emigration controls. Kyrgyzstan's case reveals how a predominantly co-optive governance structure can give rise to permissive emigration policies. By facilitating labour migration, the regime addressed domestic economic challenges while preserving state resources for patron-client networks, demonstrating how co-optation strategies can drive more open emigration frameworks. Mozambique provides a temporal analysis showing how shifts in legitimation strategies affected its emigration policy orientation. The abandonment of socialist ideology as a legitimation mechanism corresponded with a transition from restrictive to open emigration policies, illustrating how legitimation can shape emigration governance. Singapore exemplifies how performance-based legitimation can enable open emigration policies if the regime successfully delivers on economic and administrative performance while simultaneously constraining domestic demands for greater political participation and civil liberties. These findings collectively demonstrate that authoritarian regimes can configure their emigration policies in response to their reliance on the pillars of authoritarian stability.

Personalism and Emigration Policy

As shown in Table 6.6, the regression analysis (with a coefficient of -0.97 in the main model) revealed a strong correlation between regimes with extreme power concentration in a single leader and the implementation of restrictive emigration policies. Among authoritarian regime types, restrictive policies are particularly justified in personalist regimes due to their structural vulnerabilities. As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, personalist regimes are marked by the deliberate weakening of formal institutions such as legislatures, judiciaries, and even ruling parties (Geddes, 1999; Linz, 2000). In undermining institutional constraints, personalist rulers consolidate unchecked authority but simultaneously expose themselves to heightened political risks, such as violent removal from office (Escribà-Folch et al., 2015). The resulting institutional fragility and unpredictability compel these leaders to rely heavily on coercion, surveillance, and restrictions—including exit controls, to sustain regime stability (Frantz, 2018b).

These restrictions can also serve a deeply symbolic and ideological function. Personalist regimes often construct mythological images of the leader as infallible, heroic, or even divine, which is reinforced through state propaganda, ideological indoctrination, and media monopolisation. However, emigration poses a fundamental threat to this narrative, as exposure to political pluralism, economic opportunity, and open discourse abroad can shatter the regime's carefully crafted illusions (Matveeva, 2010; Tsourapas, 2021). Citizens who migrate and experience alternative political models often reassess the legitimacy of the personalist leader, and returnees or diaspora communities may

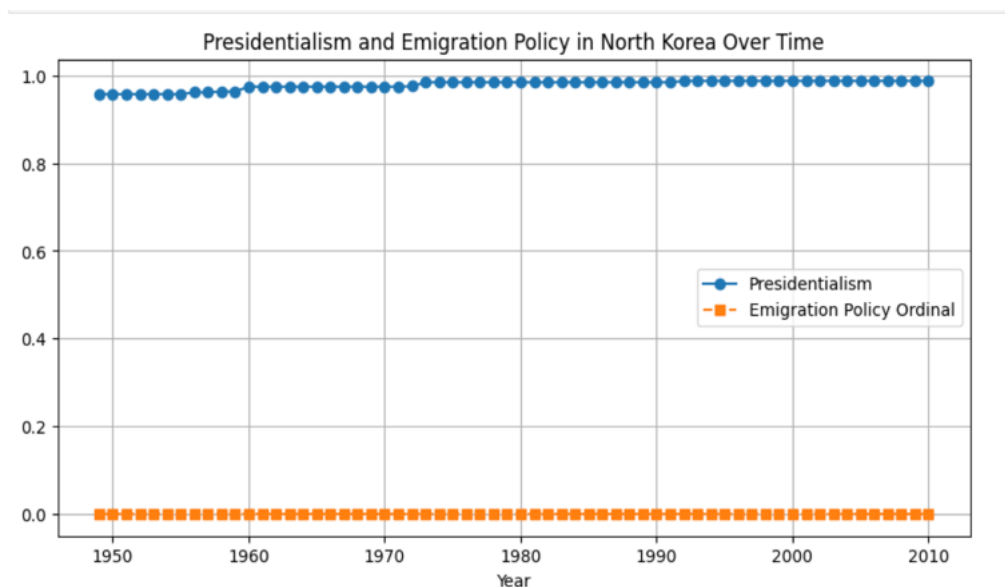
disseminate counter-narratives that erode the regime's domestic credibility (Hoffmann, 2005; Svolik, 2012). Consequently, emigration becomes not just a demographic concern but a political liability.

To further unpack these dynamics, I employ North Korea as an illustrative case to examine the relationship between the personalist regime and emigration policy.

North Korea

North Korea, classified as a party-personalist-hybrid regime in the GWF dataset (coded as a party regime in the four-category system), exhibited an exceptionally high concentration of power, as reflected in its presidentialism score of ~0.98 on a 0–1 scale. As seen in Figure 7.5, consistently throughout the dataset, the regime maintained an extremely restrictive emigration policy, with a recorded score of 0, making it a compelling case for analysis.

Figure 7.5. Presidentialism and emigration policy in North Korea over time.



North Korea represents one of the most enduring and personalist authoritarian regimes in modern history, where a leader of the Kim family monopolises political power. North Korea is unusual among authoritarian regimes because it is both highly personal and very durable. Over the decades, the country has evolved into a dynastic autocracy, in which the survival of the Supreme Leader is inextricably linked to the regime's survival (Song & Wright, 2018). Centralising authority around a single persona has created a political system prioritising absolute control, unwavering loyalty, and ideological conformity (Lim, 2015). Within this framework, emigration is not simply a logistical challenge but a direct affront to the regime's legitimacy. The regime claims to be guided in its policymaking by Kim Il Sung's Juche ideology of self-reliance (Myers, 2008), which also extends to emigration. These include stringent border controls, collective punishment, ideological indoctrination,

and pervasive surveillance mechanisms, ensuring that the population remains effectively captive (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014).

The origins of North Korea's personalist political structure can be traced back to the early consolidation of power by Kim Il Sung. Installed by the Soviet Union in 1945, Kim inherited a deeply factionalised political environment, with competing influences from Soviet-trained Koreans, Chinese Communist-aligned cadres, domestic communists, and his own Manchurian guerrilla allies (Buzo, 2017; Min, 1980). North Korea's early leadership lacked unity; each faction had competing loyalties and ideological orientations. Kim systematically eliminated his rivals through a series of purges, beginning with the Yan'an faction in 1956 and culminating in the removal of Soviet-aligned officials by 1961. In doing so, he transformed the Korean Workers' Party into an instrument of personal rule, removing any institutional checks on his authority (Buzo, 2017; Byman & Lind, 2010). Additionally, his complete subjugation of the military insulated him from the threat of coups, while his manoeuvring between Russia and China ensured his political autonomy. By eradicating competing centres of power, Kim Il Sung established a hyper-centralised personalist dictatorship, laying the groundwork for a dynastic succession model that continues to define North Korea's political structure (Armstrong, 2013; Schmid, 2018).

This hyper-centralised form of regime also gave rise to a deeply entrenched cult of personality, which portrays the ruling Kim family as the literal embodiment of the nation (Buzo, 2017). During Kim Il Sung's reign, ideological sessions were conducted weekly, where officials gave propagandistic speeches lauding the Kim family (Dukalskis & Joo, 2021). Hence, loyalty to the Supreme Leader was not just a political expectation but an existential requirement of being North Korean. Kim Il Sung especially institutionalised this principle through the *songbun* classification system, which ranked individuals based on their perceived ideological reliability (Byman & Lind, 2010; Collins, 2012). Songbun determined every aspect of a citizen's life, from employment opportunities to food rations and travel permissions. Those with "tainted" family histories, such as relatives of defectors, were systematically relegated to lower social strata and barred from internal or external movement, reinforcing the notion that loyalty was not only demanded but hereditary (Collins, 2012; Lankov, 2015). Thus, the regime's highly personalist nature frames emigration as a profound act of disloyalty, justifying the imposition of highly restrictive emigration policies.

This dynamic is evident in North Korea's approach to emigration, even toward its closest ally. After World War II, the Soviet Union provided educational and technical advisors to North Korea, heavily influencing its education system and ideological framework. This led to the integration of Cold War doctrines, embedding anti-imperialism and anti-bourgeoisie sentiments into North Korean education (Lee, 2010). Then, in the 1950s, the North Korean regime sent students to study in the Soviet Union. However, as some failed to return upon completing their studies, Kim Il Sung grew increasingly wary

of foreign influence. In response, he sought to curtail the number of North Koreans studying abroad. By the late 1950s, most undergraduates had been repatriated. This pattern continued into the late 1980s and early 1990s when some students defected while in the former Soviet Union. Those who returned, particularly from Eastern Europe, faced imprisonment or “re-education” to realign them with state ideology (Tanaka, 2019).

In line with North Korea’s core policy of self-reliance was its emphasis on transforming the nation into a fortress, with each county expected to develop its own local industry and agriculture. This approach was designed to ensure that the population could sustain itself without relying on central government food supplies in times of crisis, including emergencies such as war or economic hardship (Zhebin, 1998). However, this never manifested in practice. In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union severed North Korea’s access to subsidised fuel and raw materials, crippling its state-run production and food distribution system (Babson, 2016; Haggard & Noland, 2007). Following the death of Kim Il Sung, a series of droughts and floods between 1994 and 1997 further exacerbated the crisis, leading to widespread starvation, resulting in an estimated 200,000 to 1 million excess deaths. The Great Famine of the 1990s temporarily forced the North Korean regime to adapt its approach to migration control despite this portrayal of emigration as treason, sparking a huge public demand for alternative economic and migratory pathways (Haggard & Noland, 2011).

During this period, his son, Kim Jong Il, took over and maintained militarised border security with South Korea while relaxing enforcement against illegal border crossings into China and Russia. This shift resulted in a dual system where citizens publicly displayed loyalty to the regime to avoid scrutiny while privately finding ways to bypass state-imposed restrictions in their daily lives (Dukalskis & Joo, 2021). As a result, privately-run organisations and informal markets emerged as the primary sources of economic survival (Babson, 2016; Kim & Song, 2008). Border guards often allowed desperate individuals to cross into China in exchange for bribes, creating an unofficial but tolerated migration flow (Hanson et al., 2017). However, by 2004, as the state regained control, penalties for politically motivated crossings, especially those involving defection to South Korea, became even harsher (Kim, 2014). Following the famine, the regime quickly reinstated and reinforced border controls, introducing barbed wire fences, expanding patrols, and strengthening cooperation with Chinese authorities to repatriate defectors (Chan & Schloenhardt, 2007). Hence, the temporary relaxation of emigration was not a rejection of the regime’s ideological opposition to emigration but rather a strategic adaptation to preserve regime survival.

North Korea has consistently treated unauthorised departure as an act of treason. Individuals caught fleeing or aiding others in illegal border crossings are sent to the regime’s political labour camps. There, they face sentences of 2 to 7 years under brutal conditions, marked by severe torture and high death rates (Tanaka, 2019). The extreme measures imposed on those attempting to flee underscore

the regime's existential fear of political instability. The regime's pervasive surveillance apparatus, including *inminban* (neighbourhood watch units) and an extensive informant network managed by the Ministry of State Security, makes organising escape attempts extraordinarily difficult (Williams & Slavney, 2024). Even citizens permitted to leave the country temporarily, such as state-approved workers, are subject to strict supervision to prevent defection. This "bounded exit" policy serves two critical purposes: it allows the state to extract economic benefits through foreign remittances and labour contracts while ensuring that returning citizens remain shielded from exposure to external ideologies (Yi & Bahk, 2022).

In addition to promoting North Korean self-reliance, the regime also portrays the outside world as hostile and inferior through its absolute monopoly over information (Lee, 2010; Myers, 2008). This demonisation of foreign societies plays a central role in legitimising the regime's policies, including its nuclear ambitions, and reinforces the myth of the Supreme Leader as the sole protector of the nation (Lee, 2010). However, permitting emigration directly threatens this ideological construct. Exposure to alternative political systems, economic prosperity, and open discourse undermines the regime's carefully curated narrative, revealing contradictions between official propaganda and external reality. To counter this, the regime enforces strict censorship, intensifies propaganda, and closely monitors even state-approved labourers sent abroad. To ensure their return, the regime employs coercive deterrence, effectively holding the emigrants' families hostage (Yi & Bahk, 2022). This illustrates the extent to which emigration is perceived as a fundamental threat to the regime's stability and legitimacy.

Therefore, North Korea's extreme emigration controls are likely tied to its nature as a personalist dictatorship. North Korea embodies the most rigid form of personalism, characterised by a hereditary leadership structure, systematic purges of internal rivals, and one of the world's most pervasive surveillance states. Moreover, the regime's ideological legitimacy is inherently fragile, as it depends on an artificially constructed propaganda narrative that portrays North Korea as a self-reliant utopia. This makes defection pose a direct threat, not only exposing the regime's failures but also challenging the myth of absolute loyalty.

Hence, the case of North Korea sheds light on why personalist regimes are especially likely to impose strict exit controls: to prevent ideological defection, to maintain their symbolic dominance, and to shield the regime from the destabilising effects of external political exposure. Ultimately, the personalist ruler's need for absolute control, ideological dependence, and fear of dissent create a political environment that can thrive when emigration is tightly controlled. Thus, personalist regimes, characterised by high concentrations of power, can adopt restrictive emigration policies to preserve their authority at home and abroad.

Summary

This chapter has illustrated that emigration policy in authoritarian regimes is neither monolithic, nor incidental. Instead, it can be deeply embedded in a regime's strategy to sustain power, and can also vary depending on how they mobilise the pillars of stability—repression, legitimation, and co-optation, and the degree of personalism the regime possesses. The cases examined show restrictive policies are often used to prevent dissent and defection, while selective or permissive exit can be instrumentalised to defuse internal pressures, or be practised when it benefits the regime. Hence, whether through tightening controls or encouraging exit, these policies reflect broader strategies of ensuring authoritarian resilience.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has provided a systematic examination of the relationship between authoritarian resilience mechanisms and the regulation of emigration, offering fresh theoretical and empirical insights into the intersection of authoritarian stability and freedom of movement. In doing so, this research underscores an issue with profound normative and practical implications—restrictions on emigration are not only instruments of authoritarian survival but also constraints that directly limit individuals' ability to seek safety, opportunity and autonomy. By focusing on the politics of exit, this research foregrounds the often-overlooked human consequences of authoritarian survival strategies, underscoring that authoritarian practices are not merely abstract strategies of governance but exercises of power that materially constrain the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals.

The research was guided by several hypotheses concerning how different dimensions of authoritarianism influence emigration policies. I set out asking the following questions: How do the pillars of authoritarian stability (i.e., repression, co-optation and legitimisation) shape emigration policies of authoritarian regimes, and how does the regime type (personalist versus non-personalist) shape emigration policies of authoritarian regimes?

The empirical findings substantiate the hypothesis that regimes predominantly reliant on repression tend to implement more restrictive emigration policies. This correlation underscores how population containment functions as an integral component of repressive regimes. Preventing citizens from leaving serves multiple functions: it curtails opposition mobilisation abroad, maintains domestic surveillance, and reinforces a broader security apparatus designed to control dissent.

Similarly, the analyses suggested that regimes prioritising co-optation strategies—wherein elites and potential opposition forces are incorporated into the governing structure through material benefits and power-sharing arrangements, adopt more permissive emigration policies. This relationship suggests that co-optative regimes possess sufficient institutional flexibility and elite cohesion to manage the potential challenges posed by population mobility without resorting to restrictive measures.

Contrary to initial expectations, the hypothesised linear relationship between legitimisation-based resilience and restrictive emigration policies evolved differently than expected. Instead, the data revealed a more nuanced, non-linear pattern, indicating that legitimisation operates through complex, context-dependent mechanisms that defy straightforward correlation with emigration policy orientation.

The research also examined personalist regimes—conceptualised as a high concentration of power in a single leader, as a determinant of emigration restrictiveness. While the GWF typological classification of personalist regimes did not yield the anticipated correlation (likely attributable to the coding limitations critiqued in preceding chapters), the quantitative measure of power concentration operationalised by the presidentialism index demonstrated a significant association with restrictive emigration policies. This highlights that classifying hybrid regimes into rigid typologies requires careful reassessment, as reducing complex political systems to discrete categories may, while aiding quantitative analysis, compromise the accuracy and reliability of scholarly findings.

The aggregate time-trend analysis presented in Chapter 6 (Emigration Policy Trends) further revealed a trend toward increasingly permissive emigration policies among authoritarian regimes over time. This evolutionary pattern suggests broader structural transformations in how contemporary authoritarian regimes engage with transnational mobility, potentially reflecting changing economic imperatives, technological developments, and shifts in international normative environments that constrain even resilient authoritarian regimes. This does not imply a linear or irreversible trajectory toward liberalisation, but rather underscores the dynamic interdependence between domestic political structures and global forces in shaping state behaviour. The changing geopolitical order brought about by globalisation has redefined the international environment in which authoritarian regimes operate. While globalisation has facilitated the diffusion of liberal norms, it has also enabled the spread of capital, surveillance technologies, and transnational networks that support new forms of authoritarian learning. This dual dynamic has provided regimes with enhanced tools for repression—such as transnational digital surveillance—while simultaneously exposing them to new vulnerabilities, including transnational activism and mobilisation via digital platforms. As a result, authoritarian regimes are compelled to continuously recalibrate their strategies of control in response to an international landscape.

Contributions

This research advances migration studies by repositioning emigration governance as a crucial theoretical domain that has remained peripheral in a field predominantly focused on immigration regulation and border control mechanisms. By examining how regimes exercise control through regulating emigration, this study addresses a significant analytical gap in migration policy frameworks. While the scholarly literature has expanded to include diaspora engagement strategies (such as Dalmasso et al., 2018; Glasius, 2018a; Tsourapas, 2018, 2023), which primarily concern post-departure relationships between states and their expatriate populations, this thesis makes a distinctive contribution by interrogating the regulatory apparatus that operates in the pre-mobility phase. This reorientation challenges conventional conceptualisations of migration governance as

primarily destination-centred and reveals how sending states implement sophisticated institutional arrangements to monitor, facilitate, or restrict outward mobility.

Beyond its contributions to migration studies, this thesis advances debates in comparative authoritarianism by applying the framework of authoritarian stability pillars—repression, co-optation, and legitimation, to the study of emigration. While this framework has traditionally been used to explain regime stability, this research demonstrates its broader applicability by showing how these pillars can shape state migration approaches. In doing so, it expands the analytical utility of the stability pillars beyond their conventional focus on regime resilience. This extension opens new avenues for examining how authoritarian resilience strategies influence other areas of governance. By situating emigration within the broader context of authoritarian stability, this study underscores the value of interdisciplinary approaches that bridge comparative politics and migration studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of both fields.

As discussed in Chapter 2, emigration has historically been practised less as an inherent human right and more as an instrument of state control, shaped by the strategic interests of political regimes. While international legal frameworks, such as Article 13 of the UDHR, formally recognise the right to leave one's country, the actual ability to exercise this right remains contingent on a complex interplay of political authority, economic structures, and institutional constraints. This thesis reinforces this understanding by demonstrating that emigration is not a neutral or universally accessible freedom, but rather a highly regulated process shaped by regime interests and domestic governance imperatives. This perspective underscores the need to critically assess the gap between legal provisions of mobility rights and their practical enforcement, particularly in authoritarian contexts where migration governance is deeply intertwined with political survival strategies and state control.

Authoritarian regimes, which are widely recognised for their systematic erosion of human rights, exercise strict control over emigration, whether by facilitating, restricting, or coercing mobility in ways that serve their political and strategic interests. As discussed in Chapter 3, contemporary scholarship increasingly examines authoritarianism through institutional lenses, recognising that many authoritarian regimes adopt the outward appearance of democratic processes while subverting them for authoritarian ends. This study contributes to that discourse by demonstrating how emigration policy can similarly be instrumentalised—while regimes may ostensibly permit outward mobility to project an image of openness and compliance with democratic norms, they simultaneously manipulate migration governance to consolidate power, whether by selectively restricting exit, using forced emigration to expel dissenters, or leveraging mobility as an economic or diplomatic instrument. By framing emigration policy within the broader repertoire of authoritarian strategies, this research highlights the strategic, rather than purely repressive, logic that underpins migration control in authoritarian settings.

An additional critical contribution of this thesis lies in its explicit examination of methodological complexities associated with coding regimes and categorising political systems within databases, an issue often understated yet deeply consequential in political science research. As demonstrated through the analysis of regime typologies, choices made in the coding process—particularly the simplification or consolidation of regime categories, can profoundly influence empirical outcomes and theoretical interpretations. This research compellingly underscores the inherent trade-offs scholars face between analytical simplicity and nuanced accuracy, prompting deeper reflection on the robustness and validity of conclusions derived from widely utilised datasets, including seminal contributions such as the GWF typology.

The broader implications of this research extend beyond academic discourse, shedding light on the evolving role of mobility control in contemporary governance. As democratic backsliding accelerates across various regions, the strategic regulation of emigration is no longer the exclusive domain of consolidated autocracies. Recent shifts in traditionally democratic nations such as the U.S. under Donald Trump and India under Narendra Modi highlight the increasing complexity and sophistication of authoritarian dynamics within nominally democratic frameworks. Trump's imposition of targeted travel bans and border restrictions, ostensibly for national security, represents a nuanced form of legitimised exclusion reflecting deeper strategies of identity-based mobilisation and population control (Savage et al., 2025). Similarly, Modi's India exemplifies strategic uses of nationalist legitimisation coupled with repression, manipulating mobility restrictions and citizenship laws to manage internal dissent and consolidate political authority (BBC News, 2024; Ellis-Peterson, 2025). Hence, illiberal democracies and hybrid regimes can deploy migration control as a political instrument, leveraging selective passport restrictions, travel bans, and politically motivated denaturalisation policies to suppress dissent, manipulate electoral dynamics, and consolidate power under the guise of legal or administrative measures. In this context, understanding the intersection of emigration policy and political control is critical for policymakers, human rights organisations, and international institutions seeking to address the erosion of democratic norms.

Reflections and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this research is not without limitations. The temporal scope of the study, covering 1946–2010, excludes more recent political developments that have reshaped contemporary authoritarian strategies. Over the past decade, the expansion of digital surveillance, biometric tracking, and AI-driven security apparatuses has fundamentally reshaped how authoritarian regimes monitor, regulate, and control their populations (Racine, 2023; Ünver, 2024; Weber, 2025). These technological advancements have introduced new mechanisms for restricting emigration, ranging from algorithmic risk assessments that pre-emptively flag potential dissidents for travel bans to the use of digital passports and border surveillance systems that enable states to exercise greater

discretion over who is permitted to leave (Marciano, 2019; Qiang, 2019; Slipowitz, 2024; Xu, 2021). At the same time, these technologies may also facilitate selective emigration, allowing regimes to expel political opponents under the guise of legal or administrative measures while maintaining plausible deniability. Future research could explore how adopting these advanced surveillance tools affects the restrictiveness or permissiveness of emigration policies in contemporary non-democratic regimes.

This thesis has primarily examined the independent effects of authoritarian stability pillars—repression, legitimization, and co-optation, and personalist regimes on emigration policy, highlighting significant individual relationships. However, a crucial avenue for future research lies in exploring the interdependencies and interactions among the reliance of these pillars in personalist versus non-personalist regimes. Investigating how these pillars play their parts in different regime types and collectively shape emigration policies could provide deeper insights into the complexity of authoritarian stability mechanisms, particularly in the present context of increasingly personalist political systems. Similarly, legitimization can be further disaggregated to examine how specific types—such as ideological, performance-based, or procedural legitimization, individually influence emigration policy. The lack of a clear linear relationship in the analysis when using the aggregated variable may have stemmed from insufficient variation in legitimization strategies within regimes over time, making it difficult for the data to capture meaningful patterns. Disaggregating legitimization into its distinct components could reveal more nuanced relationships, potentially uncovering differential effects obscured in the aggregate approach. Future research could explore whether specific forms of legitimization correspond more closely with permissive or restrictive emigration policies, providing a more precise understanding of how regimes strategically calibrate migration governance in response to legitimacy concerns. Additionally, future studies can systematically examine a wider range of regime types concerning emigration policy, moving beyond the personalist versus non-personalist dichotomy to explore whether different hybrid configurations—such as military-led versus party-based hybrids, exhibit distinct patterns in the regulation of citizen mobility.

The absence of comprehensive emigration policy datasets remains a significant gap in migration research, underscoring the need for more systematic data collection in this area. Due to this limitation, this study relied on the freedom of foreign movement variable as a proxy measure, highlighting the challenges of empirically capturing state-imposed emigration restrictions. Recent scholarly efforts, such as the exploratory indexing exercise by Pedroza and Palop-García (2025), a cross-sectional snapshot of emigration-related policy measures in 2018, represent important initial steps toward addressing this lacuna. Such datasets should also be developed with a longitudinal dimension. Building such datasets is particularly pressing in the contemporary geopolitical context, where emigration policies are increasingly instrumentalised as strategic governance tools. Robust, detailed,

and longitudinally consistent emigration policy data would enhance the empirical validity and theoretical clarity of political science research and inform more precise policymaking responses to emerging global migration dynamics. Thus, addressing this critical data gap represents a foundational step towards advancing the field of migration studies and enriching our understanding of state behaviour and migration governance in an increasingly interconnected world.

It is also important to emphasise the necessity for political scientists to maintain a cautious and reflective stance regarding quantification practices. Although sophisticated datasets such as the V-Dem initiative offer unprecedented opportunities for empirical analysis, this thesis underscores the importance of exercising methodological prudence and critical reflexivity. While quantification provides powerful analytical leverage, it also risks oversimplifying the nuanced realities of political phenomena. How are legitimation and co-optation measured? More specifically, does the conversion from expert-coded categorical data to interval scales accurately reflect the substantive differences implied by the original coding? Consequently, scholars must consistently interrogate what aspects of complex political realities can be meaningfully quantified and acknowledge the inherent limitations and assumptions underlying these quantitative interpretations. Such methodological vigilance is vital for ensuring that scholarly claims remain robust, credible, and sensitive to the intricacies of political processes.

A critical avenue for future research concerns the paradoxical role of permissive emigration as an instrument of authoritarian control, particularly how regimes restrict or even facilitate exit as part of their repressive toolkit. Addressing this puzzle requires moving beyond the focus on restrictions to investigate the mechanisms through which outward migration is channelled, encouraged, or tolerated to achieve regime stability. Future research could explore, for instance, whether permissive emigration is more likely in periods of acute domestic unrest as a way of offloading dissent, or in contexts where regimes seek to signal resilience by appearing unconcerned with departures. Comparative analysis across authoritarian settings and over time would be particularly valuable in identifying when permissive exit strengthens repression, when it undermines regime stability, and what factors determine its limits.

In summary, this thesis contributes to comparative politics and migration studies by offering a theoretically grounded, empirically supported account of how authoritarian regimes regulate emigration. By integrating regime type and the pillars of authoritarian stability into the analysis of mobility governance, it reframes emigration control as a strategic tool of authoritarian rule—shaped by institutional configurations and political incentives rather than as a reactive or peripheral policy domain. This perspective challenges conventional, state-centric paradigms in migration studies and highlights the need to understand cross-border mobility within the broader logic of authoritarian governance. As non-democracies adapt to technological change and shifting geopolitical conditions,

the regulation of emigration will remain central to their strategies of control—underscoring its continued relevance for scholars of non-democratic rule.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Details of Variables Before Aggregation from V-Dem Codebook (2024). Personalist Regime Variable from GWF (2014).

Variables	Survey Questions	Scale
Emigration policy (Freedom of Foreign Movement)	<i>Question:</i> Is there freedom of foreign travel and emigration? <i>Clarification:</i> This indicator specifies the extent to which citizens are able to travel freely to and from the country and to emigrate without being subject to restrictions by public authorities. <i>Responses:</i> 0: Not respected by public authorities. Citizens are rarely allowed to emigrate or travel out of the country. Transgressors (or their families) are severely punished. People discredited by the public authorities are routinely exiled or prohibited from traveling. 1: Weakly respected by public authorities. The public authorities systematically restrict the right to travel, especially for political opponents or particular social groups. This can take the form of general restrictions on the duration of stays abroad or delays/refusals of visas. 2: Somewhat respected by the public authorities. The right to travel for leading political opponents or particular social groups is occasionally restricted but ordinary citizens only met minor restrictions. 3: Mostly respected by public authorities. Limitations on freedom of movement and residence are not directed at political opponents but minor restrictions exist. For example, exit visas may be required and citizens may be prohibited from traveling outside the country when accompanied by other members of their family. 4: Fully respected by the government. The freedom of citizens to travel from and to the country, and to emigrate and repatriate, is not restricted by public authorities.	Ordinal, 0-4
Physical Violence Index	<i>Question:</i> To what extent is physical integrity respected? <i>Clarification:</i> Physical integrity is understood as freedom from political killings and torture by the government. Among the set of civil liberties, these liberal rights are the most relevant for political competition and accountability. The index is based on indicators that reflect violence committed by government agents and that are not directly referring to elections.	Interval, low to high, 0-1
Political Civil Liberties Index	<i>Question:</i> To what extent are political liberties respected? <i>Clarification:</i> Political liberties are understood as freedom of association and freedom of expression. Among the set of civil liberties, these liberal rights are the most relevant for political competition and accountability. The index is based on indicators that reflect government repression and that are not directly referring to elections.	Interval, low to high, 0-1

Variables	Survey Questions	Scale
Performance legitimization	<i>Question:</i> To what extent does the government refer to performance (such as providing economic growth, poverty reduction, effective and non-corrupt governance, and/or providing security) in order to justify the regime in place? <i>Responses:</i> 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.	Ordinal, 0-4
Rational-Legal legitimization	<i>Question:</i> To what extent does the current government refer to the legal norms and regulations in order to justify the regime in place? <i>Clarification:</i> This question pertains to legal norms and regulations as laid out for instance in the constitution regarding access to power (e.g. elections) as well as exercise of power (e.g. rule of law). Electoral regimes may score high on this question as well as non-electoral regimes that emphasize their rule-boundedness. <i>Responses:</i> 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.	Ordinal, 0-4
Person of the Leader	<i>Question:</i> To what extent is the Chief Executive portrayed as being endowed with extraordinary personal characteristics and/or leadership skills (e.g. as father or mother of the nation, exceptionally heroic, moral, pious, or wise, or any other extraordinary attribute valued by the society)? <i>Clarification:</i> The Chief Executive refers to the Head of State or the Head of Government, depending on the relative power of each office. We are interested in the key leadership figure. <i>Responses:</i> 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.	Ordinal, 0-4
Ideology	<i>Question:</i> To what extent does the current government promote a specific ideology or societal model (an officially codified set of beliefs used to justify a particular set of social, political, and economic relations; for example, socialism, nationalism, religious traditionalism, etc.) in order to justify the regime in place? <i>Responses:</i> 0: Not at all. 1: To a small extent. 2: To some extent but it is not the most important component. 3: To a large extent but not exclusively. 4: Almost exclusively.	Ordinal, 0-4

Variables	Survey Questions	Scale
Clientelism Index	<i>Question:</i> To what extent are politics based on clientelistic relationships? <i>Clarification:</i> Clientelistic relationships include the targeted, contingent distribution of resources (goods, services, jobs, money, etc) in exchange for political support. The point estimates for this index have been reversed such that the directionality is opposite to the input variables. That is, lower scores indicate a normatively better situation (e.g. more democratic) and higher scores a normatively worse situation (e.g. less democratic). Note that this directionality is opposite of that of other V-Dem indices, which generally run from normatively worse to better.	Interval, low to high, 0-1
Presidential Index	<i>Question:</i> To what extent is the regime characterized by presidentialism? <i>Clarification:</i> Presidentialism means the “systemic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision making tasks” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997, p. 63). It focuses specifically on the extent to which the President is free from constraints by other institutions or actors. The point estimates for this index have been reversed such that the directionality is opposite to the input variables. That is, lower scores indicate a normatively better situation (e.g. more democratic) and higher scores a normatively worse situation (e.g. less democratic).	Interval, low to high, 0-1
Personalist Regime	Rule through single leader with minimal power-sharing	Binary, 0 or 1

- Freedom from Repression Index was created by averaging the aggregate values of variables Physical Violence Index and Political Civil Liberties Index.
- Legitimation variable was created by averaging the aggregate **interval** values of variables Performance Legitimation, Rational-Legal Legitimation, Person of the Leader and Ideology.

More details, if required, can be found in the V-Dem Codebook: https://v-dem.net/documents/38/V-Dem_Codebook_v14.pdf

Appendix B: Diagnostic Tests and Results

Test for: Fixed versus Random Effects

Test name: Hausman Test

Finding: Hausman Test Statistic = 10003.97866813349; p-value = 0.0

Conclusion: Fixed Effects model is preferred.

Test for: Heteroscedasticity

Test name: Breusch-Pagan Test

Finding: p-value = $2.52e-33$

Conclusion: Evidence of heteroskedasticity.

Test for: Autocorrelation

Test Name: Durbin-Watson Test

Finding: Durbin-Watson Statistic = 0.3551

Conclusion: Evidence of positive autocorrelation in residuals.

Test for: Cross Sectional Dependency

Test name: Pesaran CD Test

Finding: Pesaran's CD Statistic = 0.0715; p-value = 0.943

Conclusion: There is no significant cross-sectional dependence.

(PS. Model includes year fixed effects, reducing cross-sectional dependence)

Fix:

Newey-West Standard Errors: Corrects heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation.

Results reported after applying Newey-West Standard Errors.

VIF Table

Variable	VIF
gwf_personal	1.183154
presidentialism	2.305436
legitimation	1.240674
repression_freedom	2.695116
co-optation	1.538277
gdppc	2.979807
fuel_income_pc	2.574799
urbanisation	1.314494
population_density	1.278466
emigration_policy	2.790624

Correlation Matrix

	Personalist	Presidentialism	Legitimation	Freedom from Repression	Co-optation	GDP per capita	Fuel income per capita	Urbanisation	Population Density	Emigration Policy
Personalist	1									
Presidentialism	0.18	1								
Legitimation	-0.11	0.04	1							
Freedom from Repression	-0.04	-0.67	-0.02	1						
Co-optation	0.26	0.23	-0.35	-0.14	1					
GDP per capita	-0.11	-0.04	0.23	0.15	-0.02	1				
Fuel income per capita	-0.06	-0.02	0.13	0.06	0.04	0.76	1			
Urbanisation	-0.01	0.06	0.09	0.01	0.02	0.38	0.23	1		
Population Density	-0.06	-0.17	0.11	0.18	-0.18	0.17	-0.03	0.33	1	
Emigration Policy	0.14	-0.58	-0.16	0.56	0.18	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.13	1

Appendix C: Case List of Authoritarian Regimes in the GWF Dataset

Afghanistan (1946–1992)	Afghanistan (1997–2001)	Afghanistan (2010–2010)	Albania (1946–1991)
Algeria (1963–2010)	Angola (1976–2010)	Argentina (1946–1946)	Argentina (1952–1973)
Argentina (1977–1983)	Armenia (1995–2010)	Azerbaijan (1992–1992)	Azerbaijan (1994–2010)
Bangladesh (1972–1990)	Bangladesh (2008–2008)	Belarus (1992–2010)	Benin (1961–1970)
Benin (1973–1990)	Bolivia (1946–1979)	Bolivia (1981–1982)	Botswana (1967–2010)
Brazil (1965–1985)	Bulgaria (1946–1990)	Burkina Faso (1961–2010)	Burundi (1963–1993)
Burundi (1997–2003)	Cambodia (1954–2010)	Cameroon (1961–2010)	Central African Republic (1961–1993)
Central African Republic (2004–2010)	Chad (1961–1979)	Chad (1983–2010)	Chile (1974–1989)
China (1950–2010)	Colombia (1950–1958)	Costa Rica (1949–1949)	Cuba (1953–2010)
Czechoslovakia (1949–1989)	Democratic Republic of Congo (1961–2010)	Dominican Republic (1946–1962)	Dominican Republic (1964–1965)
Dominican Republic (1967–1978)	East Germany (1950–1990)	Ecuador (1946–1947)	Ecuador (1964–1966)
Ecuador (1971–1979)	Egypt (1946–2010)	El Salvador (1946–1994)	Eritrea (1994–2010)
Ethiopia (1946–2010)	Gabon (1961–2010)	Gambia (1966–2010)	Georgia (1992–2003)
Ghana (1961–1969)	Ghana (1973–1979)	Ghana (1982–2000)	Greece (1968–1974)
Guatemala (1955–1995)	Guinea (1959–2010)	Guinea Bissau (1975–1999)	Guinea Bissau (2003–2003)
Haiti (1946–1946)	Haiti (1951–1956)	Haiti (1958–1990)	Haiti (1992–1994)
Haiti (2000–2004)	Honduras (1946–1956)	Honduras (1964–1971)	Honduras (1973–1981)
Hungary (1948–1990)	Indonesia (1950–1999)	Iran (1946–2010)	Iraq (1946–2003)
Ivory Coast (1961–2010)	Jordan (1947–2010)	Kazakhstan (1992–2010)	Kenya (1964–2002)
Kuwait (1962–2010)	Kyrgyzstan (1992–2010)	Laos (1960–1962)	Laos (1976–2010)
Lesotho (1971–1993)	Liberia (1946–1990)	Liberia (1998–2003)	Libya (1952–2010)
Madagascar (1961–1993)	Madagascar (2010–2010)	Malawi (1965–1994)	Malaysia (1958–2010)
Mali (1961–1991)	Mauritania (1961–2007)	Mauritania (2009–2010)	Mexico (1946–2000)
Mongolia (1946–1993)	Morocco (1957–2010)	Mozambique (1976–2010)	Myanmar (1959–1960)
Myanmar (1963–2010)	Namibia (1991–2010)	Nepal (1946–1991)	Nepal (2003–2006)

Nicaragua (1946–1990)	Niger (1961–1991)	Niger (1997–1999)	Nigeria (1967–1979)
Nigeria (1984–1999)	North Korea (1949–2010)	Oman (1946–2010)	Pakistan (1948–1971)
Pakistan (1976–1988)	Pakistan (2000–2008)	Panama (1950–1951)	Panama (1954–1955)
Panama (1969–1989)	Paraguay (1946–1993)	Peru (1949–1956)	Peru (1963–1963)
Peru (1969–1980)	Peru (1993–2000)	Philippines (1973–1986)	Poland (1946–1989)
Portugal (1946–1974)	Republic of the Congo (1961–1991)	Republic of the Congo (1998–2010)	Romania (1946–1989)
Russia (1994–2010)	Rwanda (1963–2010)	Saudi Arabia (1946–2010)	Senegal (1961–2000)
Serbia (1992–2000)	Sierra Leone (1968–1996)	Sierra Leone (1998–1998)	Singapore (1966–2010)
Somalia (1970–1991)	South Africa (1946–1994)	South Korea (1949–1960)	South Korea (1962–1987)
South Vietnam (1955–1975)	South Yemen (1968–1990)	Soviet Union (1946–1991)	Spain (1946–1976)
Sri Lanka (1979–1994)	Sudan (1959–1964)	Sudan (1970–1986)	Sudan (1990–2010)
Swaziland (1969–2010)	Syria (1947–1947)	Syria (1950–1954)	Syria (1958–1958)
Syria (1963–2010)	Taiwan (1950–2000)	Tajikistan (1992–2010)	Tanzania (1965–2010)
Thailand (1946–1973)	Thailand (1977–1988)	Thailand (1992–1992)	Thailand (2007–2007)
Togo (1961–2010)	Tunisia (1957–2010)	Turkey (1946–1950)	Turkey (1958–1961)
Turkey (1981–1983)	Turkmenistan (1992–2010)	Uganda (1967–1979)	Uganda (1981–1985)
Uganda (1987–2010)	United Arab Emirates (1972–2010)	Uruguay (1974–1984)	Uzbekistan (1992–2010)
Venezuela (1949–1958)	Venezuela (2006–2010)	Vietnam (1955–2010)	Yemen (1946–2010)
Yugoslavia (1946–1990)	Zambia (1968–1991)	Zambia (1997–2010)	Zimbabwe (1981–2010)

