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Filipino students join protest in Baguio denouncing the suppression of press freedom, Feb. 23, 2018. (Photo: Karl Romano/BenarNews)

Global Dynamics of Authoritarian Populism

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The 21st century has witnessed a worldwide rise in authoritarianism that seeks to mobilize a populist base by casting bearers of globalization and modernity as a danger to the nation, with the ultimate goal of subverting fragile democratic institutions that could check the rising power of a reactionary elite. As in previous eras, fascist ideology invoked by a wide swath of contemporary authoritarianism locates the threat to the imagined body politic in ethnic and religious difference, modernizing gender regimes, migration, and independent intellectual critique of national myths and leaders' claims. In each case, the targeted group is depicted by charismatic patriarchal leadership as a threat to national security and values, which is connected with the destabilizing consequences of economic and political globalization: rising inequality, demographic change, and dilution of national political authority. Authoritarian strategies of institutional attacks, repression, and scapegoating are constructed in reference to historical models and transnational sources of emulation—and in this sense, represent a form of anti-global globalization. Culturally and politically, 21st century authoritarian movements add new layers to preexisting patterns of hierarchy, repression, and boundaries by mobilizing a new coalition of semi-peripheral countries and sectors that have lost trust in the liberal model and the liberal international order. While the first wave of fascism was linked to external military defeat, the current wave is largely comprised of regional leaders that are economically frustrated rising powers.

Populist authoritarianism is analyzed as a reaction to economic change in which the losers of global liberalism use the mechanisms of electoral democracy to undermine or exclude the citizenship of perceived competitors and empower charismatic leaders who promise redistribution and the restoration of national greatness.[1] Most

scholars examine European, Latin American, or more recently, American experience—often assuming that authoritarianism operates through a playbook of personalism, political party formation, and economic redistribution. But the regimes of the new wave are economically neo-liberal rather than corporatist, political formations range from the hegemonic party currently in power in Turkey to extreme decentralization now at work in Brazil. Moreover, nationalist factions have developed new cultural repertoires like religious appeals.

To broaden and deepen this conversation, the Mellichamp Global Dynamics Initiative recently convened a workshop to study these trends via cross-regional comparisons of distinctive countries beyond the core: Turkey, the Philippines, Hungary, Brazil, and Israel. The workshop asked contributors to consider what aspects of *globalization* helped drive the authoritarian response in each country, the authoritarian *strategy, common* global or transnational models, *distinctive* features, and finally, *lessons* for how to respond more effectively.

In Turkey, the rise of authoritarianism is seen as a response to the global contradiction of neo-liberal IMF economic demands and liberal EU political demands that led to expanding civil-political rights and narrowing social rights. In classic fashion, angry publics used their greater civil rights to protest economic inequities and eventually endorse populist nationalism at the expense of rights and democracy. However, this was not a full-fledged historic authoritarian 'takeover,' as Zehra Arat explained in her presentation, but rather a gradual subversion of democratic principles by a democratically elected government that is more characteristic of our 21st century cases. The dominant AKP party catered to both sides of Turkey's historic divides by providing Islamic poverty relief for the religious masses and promising liberal Islamism that reassured the middle class and intellectuals. Erdogan's 2007 turn against the military on trumped-up charges won support from the Left and Europe, who ignored its anti-institutional character—and presaged his successive measures against Kurds, women/LGBT, left and intelligentsia, and finally his own former ally Fethullah Gülen in 2016. Like in the Philippines, rhetoric and moves to restore male privilege helped to buffer economic and psychological insecurity resulting from globalization. In the global security dynamic, as in Israel, declining democracy in Turkey legitimated and inspired aggressive foreign policy in Syria and Libya—and similarly, there was direct global exchange with Hungary's Orban regime, among others. The difference between Turkey's current wave of authoritarianism and others, as well as its own history, is

the dimension of cultural populist nationalism, which builds a cross-class religious coalition.

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In the Philippines, stagnant dependent development, extreme inequality, and insecurity from crime and insurgencies fostered authoritarianism. Unusually, in the Philippines emigration is a source of revenue and a safety valve, so migration is not stigmatized. The rise of Rodrigo Duterte saw thousands of extrajudicial killings, attacks on judges, journalists, legislators—and especially against women, in the form of persecution of popular and rights organizations, vigilantism, and extreme misogynist rhetoric. In my presentation I highlighted the distinctive level of patriarchal violence in the Philippines, paralleled perhaps only in Brazil. A model for emulation from the wider global context was the War on Drugs across the Americas. But Duterte also spurned "the global" by blocking foreign aid from countries that had criticized the Philippines' human rights record in the United Nations. And while the transnational Catholic Church plays a role in constructing national identity as well as a patriarchal gender regime, it has also advocated for human rights against authoritarian violence, and religion has not been weaponized for populist mobilization as it has in Turkey and Israel.

Brazil and Hungary make an interesting comparison of different drivers and authoritarian strategies leading to similar consequences, according to Carol Wise and Oldrich Krpec. Both countries were reacting against a perceived failure of the liberal model, but Brazil's economic opening and extractive oil economy led to the worst GINI inequality in Latin America while Hungary experienced economic decline and loss of Western investment but retained reasonable equity and social indicators that were nevertheless experienced as a crisis by citizens. In Brazil, weak political institutions and parties were further hobbled by new levels of corruption and violent crime, as in the Philippines, clearing the way for a personalist, hyper-nationalist, misogynist, and racist appeal by Jair Bolsonaro promising security and greatness. By contrast, Hungary's Viktor Orban, like Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, fostered a gradual authoritarian takeover of strong institutions by electoral means: from a 2012 Constitutional reform to a 2014 election victory, followed by anti-democratic media

legislation, NGO limitations, attacks on the Constitutional Court, and retirement of judges. Hungary converges with Brazil and the Philippines with attacks on ethnic minorities, feminists, LGBT populations, and academics through a mix of militarized policing and violent government rhetoric cuing private or paramilitary attacks. While Bolsonaro refers to himself as the “Trump of the tropics,” Orban openly models his regime on Russia, Poland, Turkey, and far-right anti-immigrant and anti-Roma political parties. Both vary from the classic fascist model—although nationalism in multicultural Brazil largely seeks order and control rather than purity, while Hungary’s authoritarian turn is framed as resistance to the external impositions of the EU that resonates with a national tradition of resistance to Ottoman, Habsburg, and Soviet occupiers.



Fidesz supporters react as Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wins Hungarian parliamentary election. Budapest, April 8, 2018. (Photo: Getty/AFP/Attila Kisbenedek)

Generations of inter-ethnic conflict have shaped the rise of authoritarian trends in Israel. And while Israel shares the other cases' overall rise in inequality under neo-liberal policies, with the highest GINI index in the OECD, restrictive policies are also

a specific reaction against the threat to Jewish Israeli economic dominance by the social mobility of the 25% of Palestinians who are now middle-class. Interethnic competition has now outpaced the historic pattern of labor interdependence, as the Israeli economy has increasingly outsourced Palestinian labor to immigrants. An intersecting motive for democratic retraction, as Gershon Shafir explained, is the security dilemma: maintaining Jewish dominance despite growing Palestinian populations under Occupation and with formal Palestinian citizens in Israel demanding equity (in this respect, the situation is similar to India's conflict in Kashmir). This has led to measures parallel to those in Turkey: systematic attacks on the freedoms of media, courts, and civil society that spread from Palestinians under Occupation to Palestinians in Israel to Jewish dissidents; vigilantism and private inter-ethnic violence; and a shift in the rhetoric and legal structure of Jewish privilege from settler colonialism to secular nationalism to religious rule to recent racialization. Evidence includes the 2018 Nation-state Law, growing influence of Jewish religious education that focuses on biblical Conquest narratives in state institutions and public opinion, the introduction of DNA tests for aspiring immigrants, and recent peace proposals to consolidate settlement with land swaps that denationalize Palestinian Israeli citizens. As in our other cases, the decline of democracy in a national security state is associated with global consequences of aggressive foreign policy and abetted by exchanges with what Shafir dubs the "Authoritarian International" alliance—which, for Israel, even includes strategic support for anti-Semitic Hungary.

Authoritarian strategies of institutional attacks, repression, and scapegoating are constructed in reference to historical models and transnational sources of emulation—and in this sense, represent a form of anti-global globalization.

Over the coming months, *global-e* will publish a series of essays on the individual cases discussed above that will expand on these patterns and differences. I conclude this overview with a very brief preview of lessons that emerged from and resonated across our cases. As Brazil, the Philippines, and Israel signal, development paths that produce vast inequality kill democracy. As seen especially in Hungary and Turkey, polities that cannot achieve their 'national project' within the liberal model then turn to negative politics. Across our 21st century semi-peripheral cases, all noted for strong civil society, mass publics accept and even embrace authoritarian leaders even as civic institutions attempt to act as an immune system for besieged democracy. And above all, as we identified first in Turkey, it is the silence of the

liberals at home and abroad, and their inattention to democratic institutions in favor of populist claims of national identity and social justice, that enables the authoritarian turn.

Notes

1. Pankaj Mishra, *The Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2017); Barry Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Gino Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and Populist Nationalism* (Routledge, 2019).

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