THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF AUTOCRATIZATION

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Chapter 11

IDEOLOGICAL MODULES OF AUTOCRATIZATION

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Zsolt Enyedi

Introduction

Ideological discourse is often used to hide materialistic motives. When Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, he used the language of anti-Bolshevism. In response, Stalin mobilized his people against the possible return of landlords, capitalists, and the tsar. The historical record shows that both were primarily concerned about the control of the oilfields and granaries in Ukraine, southern Russia, and the Caucasus and, indirectly, about their own grip on power.

Mindful of the potential gap between words and true motives, contemporary observers are often skeptical about the utility of ideas for making sense of political processes. This perspective is problematic as there is no such thing as politics without ideological elements. Nor is there, of course, politics driven exclusively by ideological considerations. The task of the analysts is to identify the specific ideological modules used by political actors and to assess their significance.

As far as the recent wave of autocratization is concerned, the aversion of the observers toward ideology-focused analyses is particularly conspicuous. The emphasis of the scholarship tends to be on the logic of patronage, propaganda, power-grabbing, and kleptocracy (Schedler, 2013; Lewis, 2022).[2] Ideological aspects receive less attention because of three major reasons. First, thanks to media penetration, nowadays we have a better overview of the work of spin doctors, the wealth-accumulation by leaders, or of the behind-the-scenes collaboration of business and political elites. Second, the currently autocratizing countries are led by political actors with diverse ideological affiliations. Third, no elaborate and explicit anti-democratic ideology has emerged (yet) in the current wave of autocratization. While the third wave of democratization produced convergence to the model of liberal democracy, and the post-1989 transitions were dominated by the glorification of human rights and the market economy, the current challenges to liberal democracy come from various ideological corners and betray diverging normative sensitivities.

The relevant policies and ideas can be analyzed under the umbrella term of "illiberalism" (Laruelle, 2022; Sajó, Uitz, & Holmes, 2021). By illiberalism here I mean opposition to some or all central features of liberal democracy, primarily freedom of expression, state neutrality, rule of law, checks and balances, pluralism, and non-discrimination based on ethnic-

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ity, sexual orientation, gender, or race. The global trend toward questioning these norms is robust (Boese et al., 2022; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The rule of strongmen appealing to traditional moral values, enhanced homogeneity, and national pride is on the rise.

Illiberalism is typically conceptualized as a mixture of practices and ideological elements (Kauth & King, 2020). In this chapter the emphasis will be on the latter. By ideology I mean a set or interrelated ideas about socio-political structures and about the adequate human conduct toward these structures. The latter point is important because if ideas only address issues concerning public affairs, without any implication for the nature of virtuous life, then they may constitute a political theory but not an ideology. Ideological visions about ultimate goals need to be connected to values that shape everyday life in order to help citizens make sense of political developments and in order to legitimize particular public policies and political projects.

Ideologies are expected to have some degree of coherence, but I take coherence to refer primarily to the ability of the promoters of the ideology to project harmony into their various claims. In other words, there is no expectation that the examined values and attitudes should match the ideologies described in textbooks or should satisfy the criteria of logical cohesion.

Clusters of ideas not based on some foundational text, not properly codified, and lacking the comprehensive scope typical of many classical 20th-century ideologies are sometimes discussed under the label of "mentality", following the suggestion of Juan Linz, instead of ideology. This is, however, an unnecessarily restrictive approach, depriving the analysts of contemporary politics of a central – though debated – term of social sciences. The relatively loose structure of most current-day ideologies needs to be acknowledged and emphasized, especially in contrast to the full-fledged, monolithic, and fully integrated templates akin to Marxist socialism, Thomist Christian integralism, or Rawlsian liberalism. But they all have an intellectual and normative core that has the potential to structure political actions beyond materialistic cost-benefit calculations. The chapter is aimed at identifying such core ideas, termed here as ideological modules.

To the extent one finds common ideas across various illiberal initiatives, they may result from "authoritarian learning", that is, diffusion and mimicry within the world of illiberal actors. The diffusion of ideas does not require purposefully designed institutions and arenas, but it can be facilitated by various structures of education and international cooperation. Organizations such as the World Congress of Families (WCF) or Marion Maréchal Le Pen's Institute of Social, Economic and Political Sciences (ISSEP) offer a radical conservative critique of liberal democracy, while institutions like the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) provide venues for politicians to exchange ideas and to forge ties of solidarity. As the list above indicates, these organizations cater to different actors: the illiberal front is fragmented. But they sometimes converge on common enemy figures, such as the millionaire philanthropist businessman George Soros, and borrow specific arguments and solutions from each other.

Left and right

V-Dem's legitimation data provide initial empirical support for the relevance of ideology in autocratization. The correlation between ideological legitimation and liberal democracy is significant and negative, and it was higher in 2022, the latest time point of the time

series, than across the full database (–0.6 versus –0.44). The ten countries that autocratized most between 2012 and 2022 (Brazil, India, Serbia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Thailand, Mauritius, El Salvador, and Tunisia) were coded to be more ideological than the rest of the world.[3]

As shown below, the principal criticism leveled by autocratic projects against liberal democracies is that they fail to achieve social and cultural integration. As a result, right-wing cultural and, to a lesser extent, left-wing economic values tend to dominate their rhetoric. But the concerns about social cohesion have so far rarely led to the implementation of traditional left-wing economic policies.[4]

In fact, the most clearly right-wing illiberal projects, such as Jair Bolsonaro's in Brazil, can even be said to have defended – in an illiberal way – some elements of the liberal order, primarily its economic aspects. Accordingly, these leaders were backed by educated and well-to-do social segments of society (Mafei et al., 2021). In a similar vein, in the Philippines the left-wing populism of President Joseph Estrada was countered by President Rodrigo Duterte's more unequivocally illiberal right-wing populism. Duterte's anti-elitist rhetoric (directed especially against journalists, human rights lawyers, and international actors) was popular exactly because the educated middle classes feared the corruption and chaos associated with left-wing populism (Garrido, 2022; Rüland, 2022).

Next to nativism and authoritarianism, right-wing illiberals typically also rely on a modernized version of anti-communism. This discourse is most pronounced where the radical left is a serious alternative, like parts of Latin America, but it is also present in post-communist countries where it primarily expresses a rivalry with forces perceived as successors of the defunct communist establishment.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, leftist autocratizers like Evo Morales, Hugo Chavez, Nicolás Maduro, or Rafael Correa justified their authoritarian measures, such as the extension of their own term limits, with the fight against the economic oligarchy. In sharp contrast to the right-wing versions of illiberalism, their rhetoric focused on the emancipation of marginalized social groups, egalitarianism, and anti-Americanism (Alarcón, Alvarez, & Hidalgo, 2016; Chaguaceda, 2021; Corrales, 2020; de la Torre, 2010; Garcia-Holgado & Perez-Linan, 2021; Landau, 2021; Moffitt, 2016).

The complexity of the relationship between the left–right spectrum and illiberalism is exacerbated by two factors: the illiberalism of some of the centrist political forces and the blurred profile of some of the illiberal parties. The first is represented by shifts toward autocratic structures under nominally centrist leadership in East-Central Europe, where the majority of the leaders under whose reign the quality of democracy declined (the "liberal" Boyko Borisov in Bulgaria, the "center-right" Aleksandar Vučić in Slovakia or the "socialist" Robert Fico in Slovakia) avoided a comprehensive critique of liberal democracy (Cianetti, Dawson, & Hanley, 2018; Dawson & Hanley, 2016) and mostly kept distance from the most radical forces in the party system. From the opposite end of the globe Indonesia is a representative case of silent autocratization: under the pragmatic and initially liberal Joko Widodo (Jokowi), civil liberties were gradually restricted without much fanfare.

India, one of the most significant examples of recently autocratized countries, represents well the second phenomenon. The traditionally ruling Congress party that simultaneously represented social elites and marginalized social groups was successfully challenged by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, partly because the BJP gave voice to the anxieties surrounding the positive discrimination of the lowest castes, a policy that was seen as dysfunctional and unfair even by many citizens who lived in modest circumstances. The

combination of neoliberal economic policies and the distribution of tangible goods to the poor created a broad cross-class support for the BJP (Ganguly, 2020; Jaffrelot, 2022; Maerz et al., 2020; Varshney, 2019). But while on economic issues BJP's ideology is a complex one, culturally it is unequivocally right-wing, embracing radical versions of Hindu nationalism and inviting citizens to think of themselves not in economic but in ethnoreligious terms.

Attacks on universalism and globalism, lip service to democracy

The search for commonalities behind this bewildering variation must start with the acknowledgment that the current wave of autocratizers formally accepts democratic rules and principles. Executive aggrandizement, the unwillingness to guarantee a level playing field in the political arena, and the frequent and often arbitrary disrespect of the constitutional limits on governments and of citizens' rights question the genuineness of their democratic orientation, but the difference compared to the interwar anti-democratic template is undeniable. Emphatically elitist worldviews have not been reinvigorated in the current democratic regress, even if, as discussed below, bottom-up legitimization is often combined with various top-down arguments.

In the context of hybrid regimes the acceptance of democratic rule can mean two things: maintenance of formally democratic procedures and/or appeal to the will of the people. While the first is often a practical necessity, the second is related to the nature of the promoted ideologies. Most contemporary autocratization couples the evocation of bottom-up legitimacy with opposition against imposed political correctness. This is, in fact one of the peculiarities of the current era: illiberal actors devote considerable energy to the identification of instances of violation of freedoms by liberal democratic regimes and of biases and censorship within the (international) media, incorporating freedom-of-speech arguments into their discourses. They embrace the values of pluralism and tolerance in a very specific and narrow sense of these words: by objecting to the progressive regulations of private and public affairs. The advocacy for a multipolar world[5] in which different regimes coexist fits the pattern of using liberal-sounding arguments against "liberal hegemony".

This partial (and often superficial) borrowing from liberal discourse is combined with a profoundly anti-universalistic orientation. Universalism is one of the most visible and provocative hallmarks of the liberal democratic order. It is a provocative ideological orientation because it sits uneasily with national sovereignty, localism, and religion-based political identities. It also has, historically speaking, a Western flavor, a fact exploited by autocratizers in non-Western regions.

Accordingly, the recent autocratization wave in Southeast Asia revived the "Asian values"-style arguments (Thompson forthcoming). The "Asian'"(or "Confucian") template was developed in the 1990s to justify the resistance to "Western" norms. It argued that human rights are products of historical developments and are contingent on local conditions (Chang, 2021; Davis, 1998). Society and family deserve priority vis-a-vis the individual, consensus and social harmony over contention, and collective safety over individual freedom. This vision also entails the veneration of a paternalistic, economically active and, in terms of values, non-neutral state (Bourchier, 2019; Ghai, 2000; Ginsburg, 2021; Jones et al., 1995; Mahbubani, 1992).

While the "Asian" label lost some of its appeal recently, the restrictions on criticism of authorities, the surveillance of the citizens, and the hierarchically organized, collectivistic vision of the state-society nexus are often justified with reference to cultural legacies, sometimes in combination with technocratic efficiency.

Despite the cultural references, skepticism about the constraints on state power travels well across Confucian, Muslim, or Catholic boundaries, as reflected by the dominance of the *raison d'état* over individual freedoms in constitutions from China to Indonesia (Bourchier, 2015; Mudhoffir & Hadiz, 2021). It is important to underline that the discourse of social harmony is framed not only against the challenge coming from the rhetoric of pluralism and human rights but also against the opposition coming from religious and ethnic fundamentalism, that is, from radical movements that advocate both less tolerance and more bottom-up legislation.

Next to the general rejection of universalism, autocratizing actors frequently incorporate anti-globalist elements into their rhetoric. This is understandably less common with office-holders in charge of countries that benefit economically from globalization (Ganga, 2021; Ikenberry, 2014). The explicit attacks on globalization and on liberal democracy come more naturally to governments that see their international economic position deteriorating. The Russian leadership, fueled also by the legacy of messianic role-perception, is a case in point (Lewis, 2020). One of the central concepts of the Putinist discourse, *Russkij mir* (the "Russian world" or, more precisely, the "world of Rus"), provides civilizational boundaries to the regime's scope of demands, but because it encompasses all Russian speakers it also legitimizes interference well beyond the country's borders, bolstering the rhetoric's expansionist potential (Yatsyk & Makarychev, 2022). In this ideological framework, however, the will of the people is not the most central factor, sovereignty belongs more to the state than to the people (Laruelle, 2022).

Anti-globalization plays an even more pronounced role in the ideology of the would-be autocratizers of advanced capitalist countries. In these regions the connection between the substantive rise of inequality and globalization led to populist, protectionist, nativist, and isolationist movements, supported particularly by social groups that bore the costs of globalization. During the 2010s Donald Trump became the main representative of such demands, explicitly contrasting the narrow material interests of the United States with the existing regime of international trade and military agreements. His attempts at undermining the rule of law led to relatively little backlash from his supporters exactly because he was seen as a champion of the American working class against the globalists – as argued by Steve Bannon, one of his chief ideologues.[6]

In most regions the goal of illiberal initiatives is not to pull up the country's drawbridges in general, but to turn away from particular geopolitical poles. The most spectacular such U-turn happened in the case of Turkey. The Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was originally in favor of European integration. But during the 2010s confrontation with and differentiation from the European Union became part of the core identity of the Erdoğan regime. As in many similar instances, this was partly a reaction to the European Union's insistence on issues such as press freedom and the independence of the judiciary (Taspinar, 2014). A similar U-turn, albeit in a different format, happened in the same period in Hungary under Viktor Orbán, whose strategy is to keep Hungary within the European Union as long as possible, while campaigning against "Brussels".

In general, the Eurosceptic authoritarian forces within the European Union tend not to campaign for an exit but they try to slow down the speed of integration, with the ultimate goal of transforming the Union into a pragmatic economic intergovernmental enterprise.

While Euroskepticism found a home in illiberal circles,[7] the relevance of antisemitism decreased among the radical right opponents of liberal democracy. This happened in parallel to Isreal's turn in an autocratic direction, where the decades-long presence of anti-minority policies

and the ascendence of religious fundamentalist and/or radical nationalist forces to power received a new impetus from the success of Trumpism. The attacks against academic freedom, the politicization of the judiciary, and the increased governmental control over media resemble similar phenomena elsewhere with two differences: they happen under the shadow of inter-community tensions and largely without the adoption of a self-conscious anti-liberal democracy discourse (Shany & Kremnitzer, 2022).

The governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu are paradigmatic examples of the recent wave of autocratization because they exhibit most clearly the "first things first" rhetoric. This "realist" discourse conceptualizes political leaders as responsible for their own population, and within that for the majority. The job of elected leaders is to assure economic survival, security, law and order, demographic sustainability, and, in many instances, the preservation of the cultural legacies that guarantee internal cohesion. Abstract notions, like freedom of movement or human rights, have only marginal place in this role-perception. The "realist" perspective criticizes liberal legalism for separating law from politics and from everyday morality and for advancing a dangerous utopianism in the form of universalism (Blokker, 2021). While such ideas have always been convenient for autocrats, the failure of democracy promotion in various corners of the world, from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya, or Venezuela, provided credence to this more "pragmatic" approach to international affairs.

Culture wars

The cultural agenda of 21st-century autocratizers is anchored in the success of progressive policies across the world, but particularly in advanced capitalist countries, representing a correction of and a backlash against the robust victories of progressive-liberal values. These victories, beginning in the 1960s but continuing unabated through the turn of the millennium, led to the growing acceptance of cultural diversity. As the left increasingly focused on identity issues, the authoritarian right also structured its rhetoric around cultural identities, championing majority identities (Fukuyama, 2019). Since the progressive reforms were driven by educated, socially and physically mobile elites, the resistance adopted a populist format.

Within the rhetoric of cultural resistance, the fear of replacement by another racial or ethnic group (immigrants or minorities like the Roma in Eastern Europe or the Muslims in India) was fused with the fear of being eclipsed by liberated sexual minorities. The growing visibility of the latter groups does not only represent a challenge to traditional lifestyles and religious convictions, it also evokes the fear of demographic extinction through the "culture of death" (Mancini & Palazzo, 2021). In this frame traditional personal and (majority) group identities are seen to be equally at risk, necessitating proactive measures such as limiting sex education in schools, banning abortion, or constraining NGOs that represent sexual minorities (Querioz et al., 2021).

The backlash against progressivism turned traditionalism into the language of choice for most autocratizers. Their type of conservatism is illiberal in the sense of considering contemporary democracy as overly influenced by liberal values such as internationalism, multiculturalism, and human rights. The tough-on-crime principles gain new meaning within the culture-war context: they can be utilized to justify anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism policies, such as the incarceration and deportation of foreigners who violate domestic moral rules. In Europe illiberal conservatism is typically coupled with civilizationist ethnocentrism, an ideological construct within which agency is assigned to ethnocultural units fighting globalization and expanding Islam (Enyedi, 2024).

The culture-war logic structures the behavior even of the ideologically less fundamentalist autocratizers, such as Donald Trump. His stance against immigration, abortion, and science, or his association with white supremacists, reflected the concerns of conservative believers who felt threatened by progressive racial policies, LGBTQ+ rights, and what they perceived as restrictions on religious freedom (Gray, 2021; Jamin, 2021).

In general, the culturalist rejections of liberal democracy often have religious roots and/or adopt a religious format, typically manifesting in an opposition to the "extreme secularism" of liberal democracy. Some forms of religious resistance target the spirit of individualism, others the separation of church and state. Virtually all of them criticize liberals for moral relativism and, for secularizing interventions into the everyday lives of citizens.

The trend toward global liberal cultural ascendency provides a boost for the discourse of re-traditionalization, even in regions without local progressive victories. In Central Asia, for example, the departure from the relative moral conservatism of the Soviet regime, in conjunction with the political chaos, threat of violence, corruption, ethnic tensions, inequality, criminality, and the opaque redistribution of resources that followed the arrival of capitalism, turned both the authoritarian rulers and the jihadists against Western influence (Tucker, 2022). Even in countries like Turkey and Russia, where the geopolitical presence of the West is significantly smaller than in the past, the defense of the "family" and of the "children" from "gay propaganda" is seen as an urgent and plausible political program for many citizens.

The explicit alliance of illiberal forces and churches is sometimes prevented by the pro-democratic stance of the clergy. Leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro and Rodrigo Duterte were forced to publicly confront a pro-democracy Catholic Church. Pentecostal-charismatic evangelicalism, on the other hand, emerged as a major cultural resource of authoritarian politics in Africa (Uganda, Kenya, etc.), Latin America (Brazil, Guatemala, etc.) and in North America. This is not so because of specific theological, economic or democracy-related views held by the movement, but rather due to the involvement of these churches in the culture wars, placing the majority (though not all) of Evangelicals on the arch-conservative end of the spectrum, especially on sexual minority rights and abortion. The Orthodox Church, particularly the leadership of the Russian clergy, takes an essentially similar position, albeit in a top-down fashion, focusing on the resistance against the poisonous impact of Western values (Frick, 2021).

The clearest expression of neo-traditionalism is to be found in the "anti-gender" discourse. This discourse was launched by the Vatican but it quickly spread across denominations in most regions. It builds on the tradition of anti-feminism while occasionally receiving the backing of a large section of women. In Europe the animosity against sexual tolerance often goes together, somewhat paradoxically, with the fear of Muslim opposition to gender equality (Dietze & Roth, 2020; Pető, 2021; Chapter 28 in this handbook). The case of Poland is exemplary in this regard as religious (in this case Catholic) fundamentalism is combined with the fear of both Western and Islamic influence.

The people and the state

Without any doubt, populism is an important layer of the autocratizing ideological discourse in many corners of the world. Populist rhetoric played a central role in the rise and, then, in the rule of many autocratizing leaders in Europe (e.g., Hungary, Poland), in Asia (e.g., the Philippines, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives), Africa (e.g., South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania) and Latin America (e.g., Venezuela, Bolívia, Ecuador). The

anti-elite discourse has robust, long-lasting traditions in the United States and Latin America, but in most other regions it is relatively new, at least as a major organizing force of political divides. The pernicious side-effects of neoliberal policies, especially the increase of inequalities, have fostered the plausibility of people-centric appeals and have helped the radical right to discover the native working class as a major constituency.

In Europe populism capitalized on the culmination of social challenges, from the 2008 financial crisis to the 2015 terrorist attacks in France and the refugee crisis of the same year. In the western part of the continent the authoritarian breakthrough failed to materialize, but in Eastern Europe the various crises of legitimacy contributed to the advance of autocratization in countries such as Hungary and Poland.

And yet, the overlap between autocratization and populism is partial, at best, and it is hardly relevant in countries without robust democratic traditions.[8] Furthermore, populism is present in many respective countries only in its specific, paternalist variety. Paternalist populism (Enyedi, 2020), championed by leaders such as Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, combines the superiority of the popular will with the educational role of the state. While the ideal-typical populist rhetoric is vague on the definition of the "people", paternalist populism champions governmental support for the "model citizens" (Querioz et al., 2021), a social group whose boundaries are determined in line with the values and interests of the ruling elite.

The exact balance between populism and paternalism can vary even within a single country. In Italy, for example, the League represents more the populist side, while the Brothers of Italy, in line with its Fascist roots, the paternalist sensibilities (Albertazzi, 2022). The "winning formula" in most cases is the appeal to the homogeneously conceived people against the corrupt foreign or foreign-hearted elites, with the promise that the state sides with the virtuous citizens and takes a leadership role in the fight against foreign interest groups. The state is envisioned as a force that can redress the arbitrariness of the markets and is capable of resisting the imperialistic intervention of great powers and international financial institutions. The adoption of the paternalist populist approach comes with the additional advantage for the autocrats: the discontent caused by the excesses of neoliberalism can be turned against the opposition and its international allies. (Scheppele, 2019).

The ideological construct of paternalist populism, just like the "Asian values" agenda, emphasizes the citizens' obligations toward the community. One of the Hungarian ideologues, András Lánczi, for example, praised Viktor Orbán for introducing the "system of the meritorious moral relationships" (Lánczi, 2018), in which community assistance and individual rights are conditioned on fulfilling obligations. Meeting objective criteria does not guarantee, however, meritocratic mobility; the social worth of the individual contributions is determined by essentially political processes. The community is supposed to be held together by ideological values, while the leader is left relatively free of ideological constraints in order to stay victorious in the struggle for power (Lánczi, 2015; Scheppele, 2019). The narrowing of the channels of accountability is justified with reference to the need for curbing the pernicious influence of privileged elites, for resisting external powers, and, in general, for allowing swift governmental action.

The statist values that accompany paternalist populism require not only the enhanced capability of intervention but also the internal homogenization of the state, where education, health care, the judiciary, public information, sport, and often, religious affairs are coordinated and centralized. In line with the paternalistic aspects of this ideological module, the attention of the governments, from Brazil to Poland, turned to history textbooks. Even in the United States, where the right traditionally championed school autonomy, efforts have been made by state governments to change curricula in a more conservative and nationalistic direction.

The growing relevance of culture wars facilitated the international diffusion of paternalistic aspects. In 2021 Viktor Orbán banned instruction on sexual minorities in schools. In 2022 Ron DeSantis, Governor of Florida, followed suit with the "Don't Say Gay" bill and went even further with the "Stop WOKE" bill, forbidding various topics in schools and universities. A couple of months later, in 2023, Vladimir Putin introduced a decree according to which the government's obligations include the protection of traditional family values, especially concerning heterosexual marriage, and the enforcement of traditional Russian spirituality and morality in the education of children. Additionally, the state was given the task to protect "historical truth" and defend the society against "external ideological and value expansion and destructive information and psychological impact".[9]

The state-oriented discourse in countries such as Russia or China is, of course, not new, even if the recent glorification of the central authority (since the mid-2000s in Russia and since the mid-2010s in China) can be considered as innovative vis-a-vis the previous, more market- and civil society-friendly, decades. The more unexpected change is the one that took place on the right in the United States, where earlier individualism and pro-market orientation prevailed. Leading conservative academics such as Adrian Vermeule (2020), Patrick Deneen (2018), Rod Dreher (2021), and others developed a new, more communitarian and more explicitly illiberal approach. The principal message of these thinkers is that conservatives should no longer be afraid of using state power for implementing their principles (Halmai, 2021, Garcia-Holgado & Perez-Linan, 2021).

Conclusions

Paraphrasing Tolstoy, one is tempted to say that all liberal democracies are alike, but every autocratic initiative is autocratic in its own way. This asymmetry is a result of liberal democracy being a more particular concept than autocracy and being a relatively recent, barely a century old, innovation, in need of a generic legitimization. Individual autocracies, on the other hand, do not need to provide legitimacy for all other autocracies; they only need to legitimize their own rule. And specific justifications can rest on the references to the charisma of the leader or on the unique challenges faced by the country. In general, authoritarian practices can exist without an elaborate and unequivocally authoritarian rhetoric.

But while the asymmetry exists, there are similarities in the ideological discourse of autocratic politicians across various regions of the world, as demonstrated above. Today's autocratizers are majoritarian, they see the "West" in decline, and they consider political correctness and judicial activism as anti-democratic. Accordingly, their favorite enemies are human rights advocates, journalists, international finance, academic elites, judges, cosmopolitan citizens and, occasionally, great powers. Their rhetoric rarely explicitly denigrates freedom or elections, and it even alleges that the ambition is to reset the linkage between the demands of "real people" and the government, a linkage broken by the radicalized liberal social elites. They are particularly in favor of restoring national sovereignty that was undermined by the liberal world order or by some specific great powers, and, in this regard, they often employ anti-colonial discourse. This freedom-centered argument, however, is rarely followed up in the domestic arena where the same forces tend to restrict media freedom, regulate historical memory and enforce a specific cultural script.

Autocratizers dismiss universalism either as a hypocritic ploy of international elites, or as utopianism, the rejection of the natural (often God-given) order. They also detect behind the universalist standards "oikophobia" (Scruton, 2006), i.e., the dislike of one own's culture and national

community. They claim to represent a homogenous community that is victimized by shadowy, foreign or foreign-hearted, actors. The existential struggle for survival legitimizes the harsh treatment of the enemies, whether they are located inside or outside the national community.

The various surveyed ideational modules, anti-universalism, neo-traditionalism, nativism, illiberal conservatism, paternalist populism or civilizationist ethnocentrism, do not always glue together into a single authoritarian ideology. They provide justification for measures that violate pluralism, limited government, and the equality of citizens and they mobilize supporters against dissenting groups and individuals, but they do not elevate an entire system of such measures above democracy. Most autocratizer politicians are not as forthright as Orbán and Putin who both argued that liberalism is obsolete and pernicious (Barber, Foy, & Barker, 2019), and not even these two embrace a comprehensively authoritarian worldview.

Populist argumentation is definitely more common than during previous waves of autocratization, but populism is neither necessary nor sufficient to justify restrictions on civil liberties and fair competition. Furthermore, paternalist populism, the most relevant version of populism in our context, differs from ideal-typical populism by redefining the popular will as one that is jointly determined by the people and the state, with the latter having a major role in guiding the former.

In an important recent piece, Marlene Laruelle (2022) pointed to right-wing conservative ideas that form the basis of illiberalism, albeit in an "updated" and distorted form, and in combination with anti-minority and anti-institutionalist sentiments. Similarly, Ruzha Smilova (2021) defined "democratic illiberalism" with the features of ethno-nationalist anti-individualism, anti-liberalism, anti-globalism, unrestrained popular sovereignty, and anti-pluralism. They both argued that this "blueprint" is an increasingly successful rival to the liberal democratic model. The discussion of various discursive strategies of autocratizers above suggests that the right-wing illiberalism described by Laruelle and Smilova is indeed a major component of the ideological toolbox of autocratizers, even if it doesn't cover their entire repertoire. The task of further research is to provide us with a typology of illiberal ideas and to systematically analyze their relationships to the ongoing de-democratization.

Without any doubt, the earlier dominance of the liberal democratic model was closely tied to its ability to deliver economic growth, social mobility, and security. But restoring the competitiveness of liberal democracy requires not only improved performance but also ideological adjustments and fine-tuning. The latter needs to reckon with the fact that in the world of ideas, there exists a still fragmented but increasingly robust illiberal alternative.

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Notes

1 The chapter was written as part of the AUTHLIB Horizon Europe project (www.authlib.eu).
2 The literature of legitimation (Gerschewski, 2013) brought back some of the interest in ideology, but more for authoritarian countries than for hybrid or autocratizing regimes.

3 On the role of ideology (variable v2exl_legitideol_osp) the difference was significant at the 0.036-level.
4 The evaluation of V-Dem coders was in line with this assessment. The group of the ten most autocratizing cases listed above was more nationalistic (sig = 0.1), less socialist (0.075), more conservative (0.002) and more religious (0.003) than the rest of the countries in 2022.
5 The support for multilateralism is typically closely tied with the criticism of American hegemony.
6 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/steve-bannon-trump-tower-interview-trumps-strategist-plots-new-political-movement-948747/
7 With the exception of the Balkans where even authoritarian leaders tend to tone down their criticism of the European Union.
8 As the Introduction (Chapter 1) to this handbook clarifies, autocratization is not confined to democracies; any regime can become (even) more autocratic.
9 See https://news.russia.postsen.com/news/180415.html

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