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China and East Asian Democracy

IS CCP RULE FRAGILE OR RESILIENT?

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The continuing survival of authoritarian regimes around the world and the apparent resilience of such regimes in several major countries, particularly China and Russia, have attracted enormous scholarly interest in recent years.¹ Analysts have put forward various theories to explain the success and durability of these regimes. Some theories focus on authoritarians' capacity to learn from mistakes (their own as well as those made by other authoritarians) and adapt accordingly. Others center around an observed correlation between high natural-resource rents and regime survival. Still others identify the repressive capacity of authoritarian regimes as the key to their durability, while a final group of explanations pays special attention to the capacity of authoritarian regimes to institutionalize their rule.

These theories may provide tantalizing explanations for the endurance of authoritarian regimes, but they suffer from one common weakness: They are ad hoc and inductive. Moreover, they have a selection-bias problem resulting from small sample sizes (limited by the number of surviving autocracies). As a result, when supposedly invulnerable autocracies crumble in the face of mass protest and popular uprising, the explanations of authoritarian resilience largely break down. The series of popular revolts in 2011 that toppled autocracies in Tunisia and Egypt, triggered a civil war in Libya, and sparked prolonged and bloody anti-regime protests in Syria and Yemen provide a humbling lesson for those who had viewed those regimes as "robust" and "resilient."

In terms of authoritarian resilience, the People's Republic of China (PRC) stands out as exemplary. Not only did the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) survive the turbulent spring of 1989, when millions

of protesters nationwide nearly toppled its rule and it put down demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square with dramatic violence, but it has since thrived. The ruling elites coalesced around a new strategy that joined the promotion of rapid (mostly export-led) economic growth to the preservation of one-party rule through selective political repression. The rapid growth of the Chinese economy in the post-Tiananmen era has lent the CCP popular legitimacy and the resources to defend its political monopoly. The party has demonstrated remarkable tactical sophistication, a knack for adaptation, and a capacity for asserting control. It has succeeded in maintaining unity within the elite cadres, resisted the global tide of democratization, and prevented the revolution in communications technologies from undermining its grip on the flow of information. It has also manipulated nationalism to bolster its support among the young and better educated, eliminated any form of organized opposition, and contained social unrest through a combination of carrots and sticks.

The CCP's ability to consolidate authoritarian rule even as a wave of democratic openings swept much the world after 1989 raises several important questions. Does the Chinese case validate any of the theories of authoritarian resilience advanced by scholars who specialize in the study of other regions? What are the explanations for authoritarian resilience in China, and what evidence supports them? Are these explanations theoretically robust? Is authoritarian resilience in China a passing phenomenon, or is it something more durable?

Explaining Authoritarian Resilience

Theories of authoritarian survival all share a common feature: They turn theories of democratic transition upside down. Specifically, they attempt either to identify the *absence* of factors normally favorable to democratic transition or to pinpoint the *presence* of unfavorable factors associated with the prevention of democratic transition. Among all these explanations, three stand out.

The first focuses on matters of political economy. Generally speaking, authoritarian regimes that are dependent on natural-resource rents tend to be more durable. Such regimes are able to buy off the population with high welfare spending and low taxation. Resource-based rents also allow autocratic regimes to escape political accountability and maintain a strong repressive apparatus. Authoritarian regimes with significant control over economic resources, such as state-owned enterprises, have greater survival capabilities because such control allows rulers to keep their key supporters loyal through patronage and to reassert their influence over the economy.

The capacity to adapt to new social and political challenges is a second variable associated with authoritarian resilience. For example,

a number of authoritarian regimes have managed to stay in power by manipulating elections. The long-ruling one-party regimes in Malaysia and Singapore stand out for the sophistication of their political institutions. During its 71-year reign, Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was said to have maintained a "perfect dictatorship" featuring highly developed political institutions that managed leadership succession and generated popular support.² Resilient authoritarian regimes adapt by learning to differentiate between the types of public goods that they provide. More sophisticated autocracies typically supply welfare-enhancing public goods such as economic growth but limit "coordination goods" such as the freedom of information and association, in order to reduce the opposition's ability to organize.³

The third explanation concerns the balance of power between the regime and opposition. Despite its obvious importance, the role of repression in the survival of autocracies has received surprisingly little attention. Yet a simple and persuasive explanation for authoritarians' longevity is that they are ready, willing, and able to use the coercive power necessary to suppress any societal challenge. More than anything else, it is effective repression that has sustained the Middle East's autocracies.⁴ As long as this balance of power favors autocratic regimes, their survival is guaranteed by the application of repression. Of course, if the military refuses support, as happened in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, the balance of power shifts decisively and the regime is doomed.

In the Chinese context, the discussion about authoritarian resilience has centered around three themes—regime institutionalization, organizational learning and adaptation, and organizational and administrative capacity. Regime institutionalization—the process through which important norms and rules of the game are formulated and enforced—is thought by some to be the key to the CCP regime's durability. Since 1989, the CCP supposedly has greatly improved the procedures governing political succession, defined functional responsibilities, and promoted elites on the basis of merit. These and other measures, according to Andrew Nathan, have greatly increased the degree of institutionalization within the CCP, enabling it to survive and succeed.⁵ In Steve Tsang's view, the post-Tiananmen regime has evolved into a distinct and more resilient form of Leninist rule by adopting a mixture of survival strategies that focus on governance reforms (to preempt public demands for democratization), greater capacity for responding to public opinion, pragmatic economic management (considerations of socialist ideology take a back seat to the need for growth), and appeals to nationalism. Tsang calls this "consultative Leninism."⁶

Those who stress the second theme—organizational learning and adaptation—note that authoritarian elites are motivated by an urge to survive and can draw useful lessons from the demise or collapse of their counterparts in other parts of the world. As a result, a regime may

adopt new policies that contribute to its longevity and power. David Shambaugh argues that the collapse of the USSR taught the CCP valuable lessons, leading it to implement effective policy responses to post-Cold War challenges both at home and abroad.⁷

Authoritarian resilience, however defined, may result from tried-and-true survival tactics rather than the adoption of innovative political strategies.

The third theme stresses that, compared to other developing-world autocracies, China's organizational and administrative capacity is exceptional. Since 1989, the CCP has undertaken further measures to strengthen the capacity of the Chinese state in revenue collection and regulatory enforcement. By building state capacity, the CCP has made itself more resilient.⁸

These explanations of the Chinese regime's durability leave several important questions unanswered. For example, is regime survival the same thing as regime resilience? Scholars studying the persistence of authoritarian rule in China rarely make a conceptual distinction between the two. Yet the mere fact of regime survival does not necessarily indicate regime resilience; survival is an empirical measurement, whereas resilience is a subjective concept. Thus authoritarian regimes that survive are not necessarily resilient.

If it lacks strong opposition or employs brutal repression, even a decrepit autocracy—that is, one without a high degree of institutionalization or performance-based legitimacy—may hang on for a long time. It would, for example, be a definitional stretch to label the personalistic dictatorship of Zimbabwe's elderly Robert Mugabe a "resilient autocracy." What, after all, constitutes the resilience of a regime? Longevity is perhaps the most-used criterion, and by that standard, the regimes of Burma, Cuba, and North Korea would be considered resilient. But because the word "resilience" implies inherent strengths and the capacity to endure and overcome adversity, regime survival reflects only one aspect of resilience, not others. In fact, these regimes appear to live under perpetual siege and in a permanent state of crisis and insecurity, making it hard to call them resilient. Even for the more successful authoritarian regimes—China and, to a lesser extent, Russia—their degree of resilience is debatable. In the case of China, for example, the CCP faces daily instances of defiance and disturbances, ranging from hundreds of local protests to accidents and disasters caused by corruption and incompetence. It is forced to devote massive resources to maintaining domestic order.

Authoritarian resilience, however defined, may result from tried-and-true survival tactics rather than the adoption of innovative political strategies. Although many studies have focused on autocrats' use of

semicompetitive elections to legitimize their power and on authoritarian regimes' successful management of succession and promotion of regime elites,⁹ the more critical variables are economic patronage, political cooptation, and ruthlessly effective repression. For all their current success and perceived strengths, authoritarian regimes have not been able to address effectively the systemic and well-known weaknesses that imperil their long-term survival and limit their policy choices in responding to public demands. Such weaknesses include political illegitimacy; endemic corruption caused by lack of political accountability and misalignment of interests between the regime and its agents; political exclusion of the middle class; and predatory state policies that victimize and alienate disadvantaged social groups. As long as such systemic weaknesses persist under authoritarian rule, autocracy is unlikely to remain resilient.

To be sure, some authoritarian regimes have helped their survival chances by improving internal rules governing succession and promotion, learning useful lessons from the success or failures of other authoritarian regimes, strengthening the administrative capacity of the state, and managing to restrict the provision of coordination goods. Such autocracies are undeniably more sophisticated in institutional and tactical terms than garden-variety dictatorships in developing countries. But an explanation of the survival of "resilient" authoritarian regimes must take into account the additional factors that enable them to maintain power and the underlying forces that threaten their long-term survival. Such a comprehensive analytical approach is likely to yield more useful insights into the political dynamics of regime survival and demise in contemporary autocracies.

In particular, we should consider simpler and more straightforward explanations for the survival of authoritarian regimes—economic performance, for example. Everything else being equal, empirical research shows that authoritarian regimes that manage to perform well economically tend to survive longer.¹⁰ Obviously, autocracies gain political legitimacy if the standard of living rises as a result of sustained economic growth. Autocratic regimes can use the resulting rents to coopt the middle class and redistribute the benefits from growth among the ruling elites, thus avoiding internecine struggles over a more or less fixed set of spoils. Sustained economic growth in an authoritarian regime also allows ruling elites to finance and maintain an extensive repressive apparatus to suppress political opposition.

Another straightforward explanation is that the greater the range of a regime's survival strategies—the more diversified its "portfolio" of methods for staying in power—the more likely it is to endure. Force alone may sustain some authoritarian regimes, but heavy use of repression can be costly. Moreover, large military and internal-security forces will consume resources that might otherwise be spent on nonrepressive

survival strategies such as cooptation and patronage. Highly repressive regimes are also unlikely to instill confidence in private entrepreneurs or to create business opportunities for them. Robert Barro has found that heavy repression depresses economic growth, while moderate repression may have a positive impact.¹¹ In autocracies that rely solely on repression, economic performance tends to be abysmal, sowing the seeds of social discontent and sapping regime legitimacy.

Even if a regime's economic performance has been satisfactory and its survival strategies and tactics sophisticated, it must still contend with autocracy's inherent flaws—the absence of procedural legitimacy, a narrow base of social support, gross misalignment of interests between the regime and its agents, and systemic and pervasive corruption—all of which threaten its long-term durability. Thus, perceived authoritarian resilience is, in all likelihood, a temporary phenomenon that conceals fatal weaknesses.

The Keys to CCP Survival

The three keys to the CCP's survival are refined repression, economic statism, and political cooptation. Proponents of the authoritarian-resilience theory have downplayed or overlooked their role. Although autocracies may use other, sometimes more sophisticated, means of keeping power, the most important is the use of violence against political opposition. No autocracy has survived without in some way resorting to repression. The difference between more successful autocracies and less successful ones lies mainly in how they use repression. The more successful autocracies do so more selectively, efficiently, and effectively while the less successful ones typically repress opposition in cruder, more wasteful, and less productive ways.

Since the early 1990s, China has shifted toward “smart repression.” The CCP has narrowed the scope and shifted the focus of its repressive actions. While the CCP continues to restrict people's political freedoms and civil rights, it has almost completely withdrawn from their private lives and stopped meddling in lifestyle issues. At the same time, the regime has drawn a clear line against organized political opposition, which is not tolerated in any form.

Selective repression, such as brutally suppressing the quasi-spiritual group the Falun Gong or targeting leading dissidents, avoids antagonizing the majority of the population while achieving the objectives of political decapitation and preventing organized opposition from emerging. This approach also conserves the regime's repressive resources and utilizes them more efficiently. The CCP regime has become more selective in its application of harsh crackdowns both because it learned lessons from the 1989 experience and because of the party-state's institutional decentralization. China's multiple levels of authority allow the regime

to avoid either using excessive repression or making needless concessions in dealing with popular resistance.¹²

The regime's repressive tactics have also grown more sophisticated, even as the Party remains ruthless in defending its political monopoly. It now favors a less brutal approach, forcing top dissidents into exile abroad, for example, rather than sentencing them to long prison terms. Routine harassment of human-rights activists and political dissidents has taken on softer forms: Inviting them to have tea with the police is a favorite tactic. The regime's methods for dealing with rising social unrest have likewise become more sophisticated. Confronted with hundreds of collective protests and riots each day, the party-state has shown a considerable capacity to deploy highly effective measures such as quickly arresting and jailing protest leaders to decapitate local unrest, disperse crowds, and pacify the masses.¹³

The regime's efforts at manipulating public opinion have also become more complex—a mix of harsh censorship and campaigning for popular support. Rather than simply relying on old-fashioned ideological indoctrination, the CCP's propaganda department has, in recent years, learned to influence the social agenda by showcasing the Party's success in addressing social issues such as rising housing prices and declining access to healthcare. Although this approach has not been entirely successful, it is a telling example of the CCP's growing tactical sophistication.

Through its massive investment in manpower, technology, and training, the CCP has greatly improved the operational capabilities of its already well-funded, well-equipped, and well-trained security forces. The CCP has dealt with the emergence of new threats, such as information and communication technologies, with relatively effective countermeasures that include both regulatory restrictions and technological fixes. In this manner, the regime has contained the political impact of the information revolution, although it has had to adopt new tactics in order to do so. Instead of losing its grip on the flow of information, the CCP's propaganda operations have grown more sophisticated, helping to guard the CCP's political hegemony.

The Party's operational capabilities with regard to emergency management have also improved during the last decade. In 2003, with the SARS outbreak, China faced its first major public-health crisis since the end of the Cultural Revolution. The government's initial response was incompetent and ineffective. After replacing key leaders, however, the regime quickly turned the situation around. Natural disasters, major accidents, protests, and the like are frequent in China. Because of better emergency response, however, such periodic shocks have not inflicted serious damage on CCP control.

The CCP fully understands the inseparable link between political survival and control over the country's economic resources. Without its ability to hand out economic rents, the Party would surely lose the

loyalty of its supporters and its ability to retain power. Thus the CCP keeps extensive and tight control over China's state-owned enterprises so that it can dole out political patronage.¹⁴ This means that the Party is inherently incapable of implementing market-oriented reforms beyond a certain point, since they will ultimately undermine its political base. China's stalled economic reform in recent years has vindicated this view. Indeed, the Party has not only publicly announced its intention of retaining state control of key economic sectors such as finance, energy, telecom services, and transportation, but has also successfully defended these monopolies or oligopolies from domestic and international competition. State-owned firms dominate these industries, while private firms and foreign competitors are kept out. Such policies have slowed the pace of privatization but enabled the state to remain the country's most powerful economic actor.

Even after three decades of economic reform, firms owned or controlled by the party-state account for close to 40 percent of China's GDP. The regime's domination of the economy rose to a new level after the government used aggressive fiscal and monetary policies to maintain high rates of growth following the 2008 global economic crisis. With a fiscal-stimulus package of nearly US\$700 billion and \$2 trillion in new bank loans, the Chinese state further strengthened state-owned enterprises at the expense of the private sector.¹⁵

While the economic-efficiency losses caused by the state's continuing and deep involvement in the economy are huge, the political benefits of this strategy are clear. The Party retains the power to appoint top officials in state-owned firms and the capacity to distribute lucrative economic rents to its key constituents (bureaucrats and businessmen with ties to the ruling elites). For members of these groups, the Communist Party's patronage pays. One study shows that politically connected firms often have higher offering prices when their stocks are listed on China's equity markets.¹⁶ Economic patronage thus serves a dual function: It is both a critical instrument for influencing economic activities and a source of incentives to secure and maintain the backing of the regime's key political supporters.

In addition to keeping a strong hand on the levers of the economy, authoritarian regimes can help to extend their lives by expanding their social bases. Since the early 1990s, the CCP has been working successfully to do just that, building an elite alliance through cooptation. Elevating the political status of the intelligentsia and the professional class and improving their material benefits—while simultaneously using regulations and sanctions to penalize and deter intellectuals who dare to challenge the regime—are the most important elements of this strategy.

The Party has systematically campaigned to recruit the intelligentsia and professionals into its fold and to award them important technocratic appointments. This effort has succeeded both in raising the CCP's tech-

nocratic capacity and in extending its base into the intelligentsia, an elite social group that was at odds with the Party in the 1980s over the issue of political reform.¹⁷ The much-publicized effort to recruit private entrepreneurs into the Party has done less to expand its social base, since the majority of private owners of nonagricultural firms were already Party members who had used their power to convert state-owned assets into private property. Nevertheless, numerous studies have concluded that the CCP has been relatively successful in coopting private entrepreneurs. Some scholars have even called Chinese private entrepreneurs “allies of the state.”¹⁸ One case study finds that local officials who are supportive of the private sector have proven to be more effective in incorporating private businesspeople into local power structures.¹⁹

The CCP’s strategy of political cooptation has been unexpectedly successful, leading some observers to argue that China’s emerging middle class mainly favors the status quo. In addition to pacifying the middle class, the CCP has managed to transform its own membership base. During the Mao era, it was predominantly a party of peasants and workers; now it is a party of elites. According to official figures released in 2010, roughly 10 percent of the Party’s 78 million members at the end of 2009 were workers and 20 percent were farmers. The remaining 70 percent were bureaucrats, managers, retired officials, professionals, college students, and intellectuals. Particularly noteworthy is the high proportion of well-educated individuals in the CCP—36 percent were either college graduates or had received some college education, and 15 percent were management, technical, and professional personnel and college students.²⁰ By comparison, less than 8 percent of China’s total population is college-educated. In short, political cooptation has turned the Party into an elite-based alliance. The incorporation of key social elites into an authoritarian regime generates significant political benefits for the rulers. Among other things, it denies potential opposition groups access to social elites and makes it much harder for lower-status groups to organize and become effective political forces.

Behind the Façade of Authoritarian Strength

There is a sharp and intriguing discrepancy between how strong autocracies seem to outsiders and how insecure the rulers themselves feel. Autocrats are constantly on guard against forces that pose even the slightest threat to their rule, expending tremendous resources and taking excessively harsh and repressive measures in the process. But if authoritarian regimes really were so strong, then such costly measures motivated by insecurity would be self-defeating and counterproductive: They would be unnecessary and, by wasting a regime’s scarce resources, would undermine its long-term survival. So why is there this

discrepancy? The answer is quite simple: The authoritarian strength that outsiders perceive is merely an illusion. Insiders—the authoritarians themselves—possess information about the regime’s weaknesses that outsiders know little about. These weaknesses make authoritarians feel insecure and prompt them to act accordingly.

The resilience of China’s authoritarian regime may be a temporary phenomenon, fated to succumb eventually to autocracy’s institutional and systemic defects. These defects are inherent features of autocratic systems and therefore uncorrectable. Thus the measures that the CCP has taken since the early 1990s to strengthen its rule (regardless of how effective they may have been) merely serve to offset somewhat the deleterious effects that these flaws have on regime survival. In the long run, China’s authoritarian regime is likely to lose its resilience.

Ironically, an authoritarian regime’s short-term success can imperil its long-term survival and effectiveness. Success, defined in terms of suppressing political opposition and defending a political monopoly, makes it more likely that authoritarians, unrestrained by political opposition, free media, and the rule of law, will engage in looting and theft, inevitably weakening the regime’s capacity for survival.

Authoritarian regimes tend to breed corruption for a variety of reasons. A principal cause is the relatively short time horizon of autocrats, whose hold on power is tenuous, uncertain, and insecure. Even where the rules of succession and promotion have improved, as they have in China, such improvement is only relative to the previous state of affairs. Succession at the top remains opaque and unpredictable in China. Although the top leadership has managed to reach compromises through bargaining, thereby avoiding destabilizing power struggles, succession politics continues to be mired in intrigue and factionalism. In the case of promotion, the only objective rule appears to be an age requirement; all the other factors that are supposedly merit-based can be gamed. The fact that many officials resort to bribery to gain promotions indicates that personal favoritism continues to play an important role in internal Party promotions.²¹

All this renders uncertain the political future of members of the CCP hierarchy and thus encourages predatory behavior. There is evidence that corruption has worsened in China in recent years despite periodic anticorruption campaigns launched by the CCP.²² More important, because of the deep and extensive involvement of the Chinese party-state in the economy, the combination of motives (driven by uncertainty) and opportunity (access to economic rents) can create an ideal environment for regime insiders to engage in collusion, looting, and theft.

Corruption endangers the long-term survival of authoritarian regimes in several ways. It can hinder economic growth, thus reducing the regime’s political legitimacy and capacity to underwrite a costly patronage system and maintain its repressive apparatus. Corruption also

contributes to rising inequality by benefiting a small number of well-connected elites at the expense of public welfare, thus further fueling antiregime sentiments and social tensions. Corruption creates a high-risk environment, making it difficult to enforce regulations governing the workplace, food and drugs, traffic, and environmental safety, thereby increasing the risks of accidents and disasters and the likelihood of mismanaged government responses to them.²³

The Limits of Political Cooptation

By nature, autocracies are exclusionary political coalitions. Although the incorporation of social elites can generate short-term benefits for rulers, it is a costly and ultimately unsustainable strategy because the modernization process produces social elites at a faster rate than authoritarian rulers can coopt them. Eventually, the regime will be unable to afford to coopt so many social elites, thus creating a potential pool of opposition leaders.

A key test of the CCP's capacity for coopting new social elites is the employment of college graduates. Since the late 1990s, college and university enrollment in China has shot upward. In 1997, Chinese tertiary educational institutions admitted a million new students; in 2009, they admitted 6.4 million. The number of college graduates soared in the same period. In 1997, students graduating from college numbered 829,000; in 2009, that figure was 5.3 million.²⁴

For all its focus on coopting social elites, however, the CCP has been able to recruit into its own ranks only a small percentage of China's college graduates. In 2009, the CCP recruited 919,000 new members with a college degree (roughly 30 percent of the Party's annual new recruits).²⁵ In other words, so far the CCP has been able to absorb each year only about a fifth of the net increase in the college-educated population. This implies that the CCP leaves out the vast majority of newly minted college graduates. Because Party membership confers enormous material benefits, college graduates who are rejected by the CCP are bound to be frustrated politically and socially.²⁶ Because of the difficulty that graduates of second- and third-tier colleges have experienced in finding employment in recent years, the prospect that this group will form an antiregime force has become ever more likely.²⁷

The long-term effectiveness of political cooptation is also limited by the questionable loyalty of those social elites being targeted for recruitment into the Party and its patronage system. To the extent that these individuals join the Party or support its policies chiefly out of pecuniary interests, the CCP may not be able to count on their loyalty if its ability to satisfy their material interests declines, due to poor economic performance or constraints on the state's fiscal capacity. In a crisis, when these opportunistic supporters might be called on to risk their lives or

property to defend the Party, it is doubtful that a majority would stick with a regime in danger of collapse.

For the most part, however, authoritarian regimes adapt and make adjustments in times of crisis. The CCP adopted many of its regime-strengthening measures in response to the challenges posed by the Tiananmen crisis in 1989 and the collapse of European communism that followed soon thereafter. These measures have largely been effective in addressing the challenges stemming from these twin crises: reviving the country's stagnant economy through greater liberalization and opening to the outside world; ending international isolation; placating the intelligentsia; and boosting the confidence of the business community. But the measures that helped to keep the regime in power during the tumults of the late twentieth century are not necessarily working as well in the postcrisis era.

Activist Opposition

Today, after two decades of rapid economic growth, China's political landscape and socioeconomic environment have radically changed. New threats to the CCP's hold on power have emerged, while the dangers of the early 1990s—the threats that the Party's current adaptive survival strategies were designed to meet—have disappeared or dissipated. The Chinese government no longer faces international isolation or a mass antiregime movement led by the intelligentsia.

Instead, the CCP regime now faces an entirely new set of challenges. Rapid economic growth has greatly expanded China's middle class. Although most members of that middle class have remained politically acquiescent, some have become more active in civic affairs, such as environmental protection and charity work. While regime repression has effectively destroyed the political-dissident community, opposition to the regime has taken more innovative forms. Activists today challenge the CCP on issues that can connect them with ordinary people—labor rights, forced evictions, land disputes, environmental protection, and public health. The CCP's single-minded focus on GDP growth has led to a systemic degradation of the Chinese state's capacity for providing such essential public goods as health care, education, and environmental protection. Rising official corruption and an unbalanced economic-development strategy that has depressed the growth of household income and consumption have also fueled a rapid increase in income inequality.

Most of the countermeasures that the Party has taken since Tiananmen are ill suited to dealing with these issues. If the CCP is to address these challenges effectively, it will have to abandon many key components of its post-Tiananmen strategy. Economically, it needs to find a different development model that is less investment-intensive and socially costly. Politically, it may have to replace repression and coopta-

tion with some form of political liberalization to gain a broader base of social support. But the leadership of the Hu Jintao administration has shown no sign that the Party is ready or willing to embrace such fundamental policy shifts. This means that the CCP is now at risk of falling into the trap of “adaptive ossification”—applying an outdated adaptive strategy that no longer works. The result can be, ironically, an accumulation of tensions and risks during the period of perceived authoritarian resilience. Just when the party-state has come to be viewed as resourceful and supremely skilled at hanging on, it may in fact have entered a time of stagnation and dwindling dynamism.

Is the PRC’s authoritarianism resilient or decaying? The answer to this question will depend on whether the CCP’s post-Tiananmen strategy of relying on economic growth and political repression continues to prove effective despite social and economic conditions that have changed drastically during the past two decades. Proponents of the resilience school are expecting the CCP’s adaptive capacity to be equal to the challenges that lie ahead. Skeptics, meanwhile, are pointing to the institutional flaws inherent in any autocracy and expressing doubt that the CCP will manage to frame and implement a substantially different survival strategy that can help it to maintain its political monopoly and gain new sources of legitimacy.

I side with the skeptics in rejecting the argument that the post-1989 regime has made itself resilient through fundamental institutional and policy innovations. Instead, the principal reasons for the CCP’s survival since Tiananmen have been robust economic performance and consistent political repression. Although it is true that the CCP may have improved its political tactics, its survival for the last two decades would have been unthinkable without these two critical factors—economic performance and political repression.

In the future, economic performance and political repression may remain important factors for the CCP’s survival, but their contribution is likely to decline for several reasons. First, the deleterious effects of authoritarian decay will offset the positive impact of economic growth. Second, political repression is likely to be less effective in defending the regime’s political monopoly, as opposition groups and figures equipped with novel methods and technologies will acquire greater capabilities to challenge and delegitimize CCP rule. Finally, the probability of splits in Party ranks will rise as the CCP’s fortunes fall and the choices confronting it become harder. Ironically, those at the top of the Party’s hierarchy may prove the least firmly bound to it, whether by ideological commitment or political loyalty. As regime decay sets in and “crises of order” begin to increase in frequency and severity, top players within the party-state itself will be tempted to exploit the opportunities thereby presented for boosting their own power and advantages. Open factionalism will not be far behind. Splits within

the rulers' highest inner councils, we should recall, are typically a prime condition for democratic transition.

NOTES

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4. See Bellin, "Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East"; and Louay Abdulkaki, "Democracy and the Re-Consolidation of Authoritarian Rule in Egypt," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 1 (July 2008): 445–63.

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14. See Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (New York: Harper, 2010).

15. Barry Naughton, "China's Economic Policy Today: The New State Activism," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52 (May–June 2011): 313–29.

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