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Review of: Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *DICTATORS AND DEMOCRATS: MASSES, ELITES AND REGIME CHANGE*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016

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Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman,
DICTATORS AND DEMOCRATS: MASSES, ELITES AND REGIME CHANGE,
Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016, xxii + 396 pages.

During the last three decades, political science and history have been mostly interested in the processes of the transition and consolidation of democracies. The reverse, the trajectories to authoritarianism, although not neglected, have been less popular. This reflected the prevailing optimism of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it was held that liberal democracy had become the only model of political, social and economic order.

Before the coming of the liberal tide, apart from interwar Fascism and National Socialism, it was a specific type of reversion to authoritarianism that had caught the eye of political scientists and historians – military coups. Civic-military relations and the path to authoritarianism were the focus of attention of a distinguished political scientist, Samuel Huntington. In 1968 he offered a compact approach of the underlying causes of military coups in the developing world.¹ In contrast to what Walt Rostow had argued in 1960,² Huntington's conclusion was that modernisation was not a motor

of democratisation but a catalyst for authoritarianism, with the military as its principal agent. He explained that, in the context of traditional political orders, political institutions were weak and participation limited. The entry into the political arena of new social groups that sprang up as a result of a rapid process of economic and social transformation, or “modernisation”, as the sociology of development termed it, meant that the masses were mobilised to demand participation in the political arena. Along with the ruling oligarchies or monarchies, the middle classes, fragile and insecure as they were, felt threatened by the entry of the poor urban masses into the political process. In these circumstances, the army would frequently intervene in politics to serve as the custodian of order whereas in the early twentieth century the officer corps had facilitated the entry of the middle classes into the political system.

However, in the 1970s in southern Europe, and later on during the 1980s in Latin America and, at the turn of the 1980s to the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, democracy spread all over the world. It was not only the southern European and the Latin American countries that, although “prone to instability and dictatorship”, escaped the grip of authoritarianism. It was also the former

¹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

² Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Soviet Union and the people's republics, the bloc that was the manifestation of an economic and political alternative to liberalism that had collapsed and opted for the western model of political and economic organisation. In the tune of the times, Huntington offered another sweeping account, this time of the process of democratisation, which was titled *The Third Wave*.³ It was indeed a representation of a tidal wave. The rise or expansion of the middle classes, the ideological preponderance of liberalism and the snowball effect that swept the globe after the completion of the first democratisations were factors that explained, in his view, this new movement towards democracy.

The story though was far from over. As Haggard and Kaufman amplify, in this study that extends from 1980 to the early 2010s, there were at least 25 "reversions" from democracy to authoritarianism. This reversion does not necessarily take the form of a coup but it is sort of "backsliding", as the authors call it (219). It frequently involves democratically elected incumbents sidelining democratic processes and institutions. Quite often, it is a reaction of the ruling elites to mass mobilisation as they see their predominance and interests threatened from below. Beyond that, Haggard and Kaufman also identify a rather novel type of "populist reversion", the seizure of power by the mobilisation of dissatisfaction. It involves lower groups, whose demands had been neglected within the framework of the regular functioning of democracies. Nevertheless, the authors

do not think that inequality is the prime cause of the reversion to authoritarianism. They identify the problem in the "weak democracy syndrome". They do not deny that this syndrome reflects "institutional, administrative and fiscal weaknesses" that are associated with low per capita income. They think, nonetheless, that the primary cause for the reversion to authoritarianism is a weak civil society.

Haggard and Kaufman's work is commendable. The wealth of their sources is impressive, derived often from extensive databases which quantify various aspects of the political and institutional process in democratic and authoritarian regimes. Still, it is one thing to collect data and another to evaluate and interpret the material, and it is the latter which should primarily draw the attention of the historian or political scientist. Their assumptions and analysis display the restraint of political scientists with regard to the usefulness of class as a concept in in history and the social sciences. Haggard and Kaufman's approach is quite different from that of great narrators like Barrington Moore,⁴ Huntington or Gregory Luebbert.⁵ Haggard and Kaufman's hypothesis that explaining the reversion to authoritarianism mainly through the weakness of civil society is useful only in conjunction with an analysis that would take into account the

³ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

⁴ Barrington Moore Jr, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

⁵ Gregory Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

social origins of dissatisfaction and the support base of emerging authoritarian rulers. Bringing class and social forces at the epicentre of historical inquiry or political research would not necessarily involve a Marxist revival. Non-Marxist intellectuals of the calibre of Max Weber or Ralf Dahrendorf were receptive to class and social differentiation in their analyses and they clearly disassociated themselves from a crude reductionist approach. A careful examination of the most characteristic examples of authoritarian relapse such as Russia and Turkey or the endurance of political domination by an authoritarian structure like that of China would showcase the utility of linking the concept of a weak civil society to the social dimension of politics. In each of these cases, civil society was indeed weak as it lacked the historical depth, cultural resources and institutional autonomy to withstand the pressures emanating from the state. But at the same time, Putin's power base within state institutions, the parliament, the public and the private sectors of the economy; Erdogan's moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party;

and the Communist Party of China secured legitimacy for regimes with these authoritarian underpinnings by accommodating or favouring the emergence of a wide enough middle class that was rather satisfied with its actual living standards and prospects. It is impossible to understand Erdogan's rule if the only point of reference is weak civil society; the mass of Anatolian, pious, lower middle-class adherents to his party cannot be disregarded. A case in point is also the tolerance enjoyed by the Communist Party in China, which is secured by a combination of widespread prosperity and the links between the business elites and the party.

Overall, the concept of a weak civil society is useful as it brings into our analysis the importance of political culture, traditions and institutional practices that burden a democratic polity. At the same time, this concept is inadequate to explain the social divisions and political polarisation that underline acute conflicts that lead to the erosion of the democratic process and provide the context for the relapse to authoritarianism.

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