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**Deep historical roots, culture choice and the New World Order**

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# Deep historical roots, culture choice and the 'New World Order' [1]

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Abstract

Gerard Roland examines data going back to 3,000 BC for historical roots that might explain the current division of nations as between cultures of collectivism and individualism.

In response to the appeal for theories bearing on the empirical evidence presented - and of recent moves by Russia and China to create a 'New World Order' based on similar cultural division - three contributions are discussed.

First is the 'competing powers' perspective of Acemoglu and Robinson, who propose that individualism flourishes where power is evenly balanced between the state and the people: otherwise, either Despotism or Disorder will ultimately prevail. Then there is Ken Binmore's study of cooperative social contracts: this offers support for stable societies of each cultural type, based on the folk theorem of repeated games. Finally the notion that dictatorship may be sustained by deception rather than repression - by leaders whom Guriev and Treisman call 'spin dictators'.

In the light of these perspectives, what to make of the current drive for a new global order that recognizes different 'spheres of influence' for each of Roland's cultural types? We look specifically at the case of Russia. (188 words)

Keywords: Individualism, Collectivism, Culture, Social Contracts, Social preferences, Neofeudalism, Despotism, New World Order.

JEL Codes: C70, C73, N00, P00, P50, Z10, Z13

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## Section 1. Introduction

In St Petersburg in 2017, in a keynote address given[2] on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Gerard Roland proposed that the contrast between Communism and capitalism was but one chapter of a very long-running saga. In the published paper, entitled "The deep historical roots of modern culture", this is described as follows:

> There have been since antiquity two opposed types of institutional systems: one resembling central planning and present in ancient China, ancient Egypt, the Inca Empire and other territorial states, and another one, with strong market institutions [and] protection of property rights, present mostly in city-states, not just in the Mediterranean but throughout the world.
> These institutional differences can be seen to be at the root of the two cultural systems in today's world: collectivism versus individualism. Roland (2020, p. 483)

Five years on from that Congress in St Petersburg, unfolding events appear to bear out this perspective. For many Western leaders boycotted the February 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing on account of human rights violations in the host country: but the presidents of China and Russia met and spoke of creating an alternative 'New World Order'. On what basis, one might ask?

> Beijing and Moscow argue that the current world order is characterised by American attempts to impose Western ideas about democracy and human rights on others … The new world order that Russia and China are demanding would instead be based on distinct spheres of influence.
>
> While the Western liberal tradition promotes universal human rights, Russian and Chinese thinkers make the argument that different cultural traditions and "civilisations" should be allowed to develop in different ways. Rachman (2022)

The premeditated invasion of neighbouring Ukraine - launched less than a week after the end of the Winter Olympics - has unveiled with sudden and brutal clarity what establishing distinct 'spheres of influence' may entail.

At the end of his historical report, Roland makes an open-ended appeal for theoretical insights into the empirical associations detected in the data. Both

[2] To the Second World Congress of Comparative Economics, held at the Higher School for Economics

for the light they may throw on his distinct cultural types and on prospects for the so-called New World Order, we turn to three recent investigations.

First is the *Narrow Corridor* by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2019), hereafter A&R, who argue that the form of governance that ultimately prevails depends on the domestic balance of competing forces - those of the State and Society. The broad rationale for this has been expressed succinctly by Michael Ignatieff (1999): "if you create the state that protects everybody, sooner or later you have to protect the individual against the state"! If the balance is even, they argue, liberty and justice may be secured. If not, applying non-cooperative game theory leads A&R to predict a slide either to dictatorship or to disorder, depending on the initial conditions. For both China and Russia their pessimistic assessment of the 'initial conditions' appears prescient.

While A&R offer a persuasive account of what happens when power is imbalanced, the notion that successful governance rests on intense but balanced competition between ruler and those ruled rings less true – at least for democracies. In *Natural Justice* by Ken Binmore (2005) it is, by contrast, the role of *cooperation* that is analysed. This study of fictive 'social contracts' employs the theory of repeated games to establish preconditions for successful cooperation in arranging human affairs. How this evolved in bands of hunter-gathers before the Agricultural Revolution some 12,000 years ago, has, it is argued, much relevance for how 'free and fair' modes of governance operate in democracies today. But Binmore also outlines a second variety of sustainable social contract, referred to as Neofeudal, which is neither free nor fair but offers efficient cooperation nonetheless. Could this be what the leaders of China and Russia have in mind?

In a more recent line of enquiry, Guriev and Treisman investigate the role of information – and misinformation – in sustaining non-democratic forms of governance. In technical papers, followed by a nontechnical exposition in *Spin Dictators,* Guriev and Treisman (2022), they show how dictatorship may be secured not by repression but by delivering bribes to a well-informed but narrow elite while supplying misinformation to the rest of the population. Is this the blueprint for modern dictators?

As a guide to how the paper proceeds before directly addressing the nature of the proposed New World Order, Table 1 provides a brief overview of the methodologies used in these studies and the types of governance analysed. For the convenience of the reader, a brief account of the empirical investigation of Roland and his team – whose database fills a 500 page appendix!– is provided in Annex 1.

| Reference | Methodology | Forms of | Governance | Or lack thereof |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| Roland (2020) | Historical survey of comparative institutions over 5,000 years | Top down **Statist** society | **Individualist**, market society | n.a. |
| | | | | |
| A&R (2019) | Non-cooperative solution of dynamic game | All powerful **Despotic** Leviathan | **Shackled** Leviathan in a **Narrow Corridor** | **Absent** Leviathan |
| | | | | |
| Binmore (2005) | Co-operative solution of a repeated game with no definite end-point | **'Neofeudal'** Social contract | **'Free-and-Fair'** Social contract | n.a. |
| | | | | |
| Guriev & Treisman (2022) | Non-cooperative dynamic game with asymmetric information | **Spin dictatorship** | n.a. | n.a. |

Note: A&R use Leviathan as a metaphor for the state

Table 1 Empirical findings and theoretical approaches – a brief overview

After spelling out the three regimes of A&R as indicated in the second line of the Table, we consider in Section 2 what light governance inside or outside a Narrow Corridor, where the power of the state is shackled, may throw on long-run prospects under democracy and autocracy respectively. In Section 3, Ken Binmore's two types of cooperative social contract are outlined (see third line of the table). How these might relate to Roland's types is discussed - along with the subsequent critique of repeated games by Bowles and Gintis (2011). In section 4, the contemporary relevance of Spin Dictatorship is discussed.

In Section 5 the lessons that emerge from this *tour d'horizon* are used to assess the proposal for a New World Order (NWO) that recognizes different spheres of influence for each of Roland's cultural types, with a focus on Russia. Section 6 concludes.

## Section 2 Acemoglu and Robinson: a 'Narrow Corridor' of liberty and justice

In seeking sustainable forms of governance, Acemoglu and Robinson - like Gerard Roland - look far back in time, and across the globe. In A&R this search for the roots of democracy is, indeed, inspired by a sweeping view of history – like something from Homer or Virgil, perhaps. Lightning first strikes in Attica,

which creates democracy in both word and deed. It then moves West, where a combination of Roman law and state-craft, together with egalitarian traditions of Germanic tribes, acts as the seed-bed for a wider spread of participatory governance. …. [Some centuries later] religious settlers fleeing across the Atlantic to North America claim independence from Britain and choose a balance of powers that Montesquieu would marvel at. Britain in turn moves slowly, one step at a time, to enfranchise its people and implement a more liberal form government.

To address what Dixit (2021, p.1362) in his review reckons to be "one of the biggest questions confronting humankind: how can liberty be preserved against the opposing dangers of disorder, on one hand, and oppression on the other?", A&R adopt a contesting powers approach. This is described in detail in the working paper circulated beforehand, Acemoglu and Robinson (2017), where the focus is explicitly on how the power of Elite and of the People (which they label as State and Society) evolve over time. These 'powers' are like stocks of capital in which each party invests; and the *allocation of output between the parties* takes the form of 'winner takes all', with the probability of winning in any period depending on the ratio of these powers[3] - irrespective of how they contribute to the total output of society[4].

The dynamic contest resembles a patent race; and the intensity of competition when the powers are close to being equal encourages rapid development (along what is called the Narrow Corridor, to be shown in the figure below). When powers are unequal, however, the presence of increasing returns to scale in the creation of power plays an important role. As shown in Acemoglu and Robinson (2017), increasing returns, with the implied inefficiency of small-scale production, imply a higher unit cost of investment for the weaker power: and this 'discouragement effect' can, in time, lead to the latter becoming totally powerless. What is good news for the winner is, however, bad news for society as a whole, as it loses the benefits of cooperative production in this struggle for survival.

This is displayed graphically by A&R in a type of 'phase diagram', with the power of the state on the vertical axis and that of the people on the horizontal (both measured between zero and one) and arrows indicating evolution over time.

[3] See Annex 1 for more detail from Dixit (2021).

[4] In the simplest model total output is constant; but in a later version total output depends on the sum of these powers.

The diagram below is a combination of the iconic figure of A&R (p.64) and that appearing in the review by Dixit (2021, p. 1364).

The assumptions they make generate three separate regions, each with a distinct pattern of governance: above the diagonal in Figure 1 is the region of Despotic state control; below the diagonal, however, governance is Absent; finally, hugging the diagonal, is the Narrow Corridor - where the power of the state is Shackled by that of the people - and liberty and justice are reckoned to prevail as society heads towards equilibrium at $S_2$ , upper right.

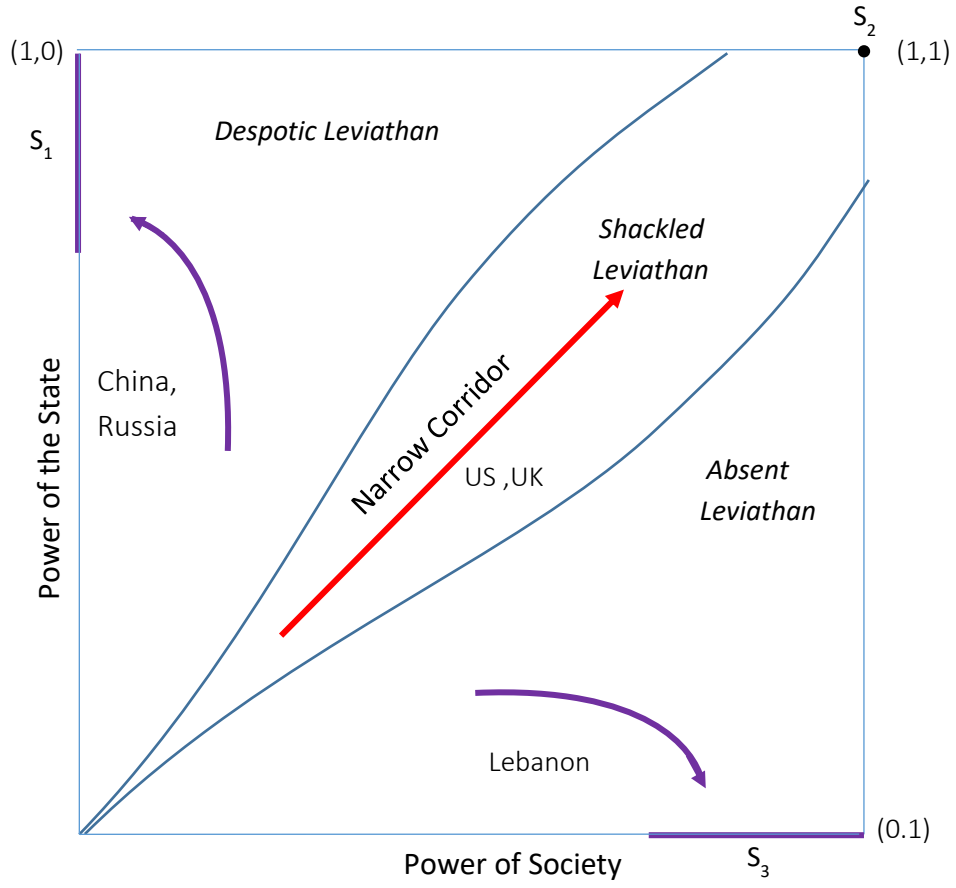


Figure 1 The evolution of powers under three different forms of government - called Leviathans - with end points in sets $S_1$, $S_3$ or at $S_2$ .

Outside the Narrow Corridor, however, dynamic forces lead inexorably to extreme outcomes. For countries lying below the diagonal, for example, A&R contend that the long-run outcome will realise Hobbes's nightmare of life without the state being "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." As a case in point, they cite the case of Lebanon - where the capital, Beirut, has - since they

wrote - been severely damaged by an enormous explosion of dangerous material left unattended for many years in the harbour[5].

In symmetrical fashion, for countries above the diagonal, Despotism leads in time to some point in the set labelled $S_1$ in the top left of the figure, where it is people power that is completely eliminated! The paths that A&R derive for Despotic regimes appear, indeed, to illustrate Lord Acton's famous dictum that 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

[To see this graphically, let a reduction in the power of society be treated as an increase in corruption. Then, on the path heading towards $S_1$ in Figure 1, one observes the rising power of the State leading to a complete loss of power for society - i.e. to absolute corruption! ]

It is important to stress that that in terms of *national* output these extreme are inefficient, maybe grossly so. Even if total output is a linear function of the powers measured along the axes, as in Acemoglu and Robinson (2017, Section 5.2), then any long run equilibria in $S_1$ will generate output that is strictly less – possibly very much less[6] - than that what would be generated by progress up the Narrow Corridor, which converges to 1,1. So all the Despotic outcomes of A&R will fail Binmore's 'efficiency test' for a sustainable social contract, to be studied next.

**Section 3 Social Contracts: two varieties of cooperative equilibrium**

In contrast to A&R, Binmore (2005) seeks conditions that will support a *cooperative* equilibrium for society based on what is described as reciprocal altruism. Conditions that will support such a 'social contract' include the need for stability, secured by subgame-perfect Nash equilibrium at the individual level; and for social efficiency, secured by a cooperation in the form of a Nash Bargain.

It appears, however, that, providing the 'payoffs' are repeated without a definite end-point, two different types of cooperative outcome can be sustained by social contract – referred to as Egalitarian and Neofeudal. Whether or not these correspond with the long-run equilibria of A&R will be considered after these two possible outcomes are illustrated in turn in the figures that follow.

In these figures, X is the convex payoff-possibility-set of outcomes satisfying the necessary efficiency conditions for the two parties that are bargaining - each

[5] with wall signs by local citizens protesting "Our Government did this"

[6] If, for example, total output Y were just the sum of the power levels, so $Y = X_1 + X_2$ , then in the long run output in $S_1$ would be *at most half* of output at $S_2$.

trying to secure the highest payoff that may be agreed. In the spirit of Rawls's (1972) *Theory of Justice*, the equilibrium reached in the medium-term is assumed to be a Nash Bargain (i.e. the point which offers the highest joint payoff relative to the disagreement point at D, the current status quo).

Given the symmetry of the Nash Bargaining contours - indicated by the hyperbola in Figure 2 - the shape of the set X will determine how equitably the pie is divided when joint welfare is maximised on the set, as appropriate for a Nash Bargain. Figure 2 illustrates the case where the pie gets divided evenly between two members of the group, denoted A and B – see point N. Such an egalitarian outcome, it is claimed, was characteristic of conditions reckoned to prevail in small tribes of hunter-gatherers[7] who roamed the earth for 200,000 years or more before the Agricultural revolution about 12, 000 years ago.

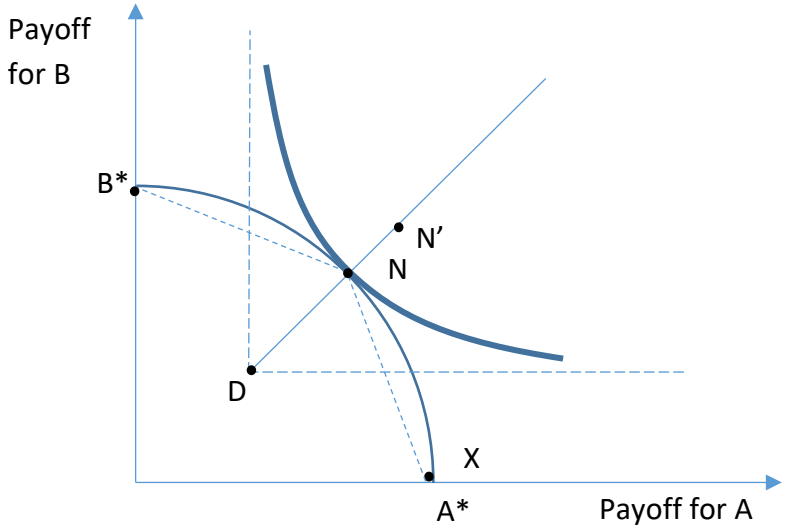


Figure 2 An egalitarian outcome: a Free-and–Fair social contract

The benefits of cooperation can easily be appreciated if, as possible alternatives to the Nash Bargaining solution at N, one considers the one-sided outcomes available at A* and B*, the twin horns of a Prisoners' Dilemma, both dominated by the status quo at D.

It should be said that, given the focus on repeated games[8] not much attention is given to dynamic evolution - changes to the payoff-possibility-set being treated as unanticipated surprises, Binmore (2005, p.198). If X were to expand exogenously in a uniform way, for example, then the Bargaining solution would shift from N to N'.

[7] So A and B might be thought of as two members of such a tribe.
[8] See Binmore (2005, Chapter 5.2) for discussion of the Folk Theorem of repeated games.

Only by chance will the benefits of progress be so evenly spread, however. As Roland (2020) points out, the development of the Nile valley following the Agricultural Revolution went hand-in-glove with the statist nature of Egyptian society, the better exploit returns to scale available because of homogeneous production conditions. As he explains:

> In societies where conditions of production were more homogeneous and where potential benefits from trade were smaller, it was possible to enjoy larger benefits from division of labor by having a larger number of people participate in production so as to establish a much finer division of labor and specialization of tasks. In those societies, strong states developed that exercised control over all of society." Roland (2020, p. 487)

How these conditions of production could affect the distribution of payoffs is illustrated graphically in Figure 3, where a distinction is made between the Elite, who gain substantially from this statism, and the People at large, who lose. On the assumption that equilibrium *before* the Agricultural Revolution was at H, representing the Egalitarian outcome of hunter-gatherers, the payoff-possibility-set is shifted upwards to the left when the fertile Nile valley is farmed for food.

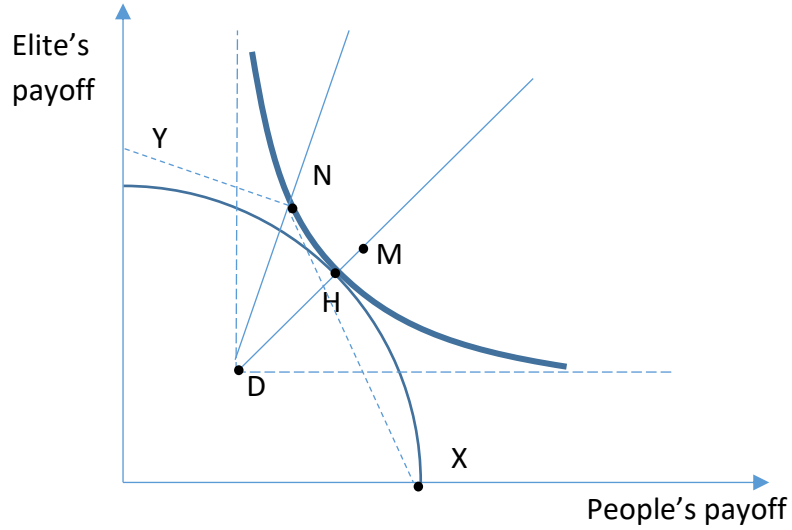


Figure 3 A Neofeudal outcome

For clarity, only one point on the revised possibility set is shown, namely where the dotted lines meet at the 'Neofeudal' Nash Bargaining equilibrium labelled N, a point of efficient production by assumption. As drawn, N lies on the same welfare curve as H: so the Agricultural Revolution offers no Pareto improvement – more is produced and the Elite gains, but the People lose. (This fits the

characterisation of the Agricultural Revolution in terms of welfare for most of the population offered by Harari, 2011, Chapter 5, entitled History's Biggest Fraud!)

In Mesopotamia, by contrast, geographical conditions in the North of the region differed from those in the South: this, according to Roland, encouraged development with specialisation on different products and trade between regions. The outcome was more equitable, as symbolised by the point[9] labelled M in the Figure. In both cases, the gains to cooperation were being harnassed; but the distribution of the gains differed greatly.

By construction, these two types of social contract match Roland's two cultural types, with statist Egypt contrasting with market-oriented, individualistic Mesopotamia[10]. How might they relate to the outcomes arrived at in A&R? The individualistic type - with productive efficiency and a more equitable distribution - seems, broadly speaking, to correspond to the efficient outcome to be reached at the end of their Narrow Corridor. But the former, statist outcome, being socially efficient, is superior to any of the Despotic outcomes of A&R, where the people are rendered powerless by an almighty state - to the detriment of national output.

Two important caveats should be expressed. First, the bold assumption of aggregate groups, as in the discussion above, surely goes beyond the formal logic of deviation-proof cooperation explored in Binmore (2005), which does not consider coalitions[11]. Yet coalitions in the form of political parties have played a key role in the evolution of so-called Free-and-Fair contracts in liberal democracies like Britain[12].

It has, in any case, been argued that one should be cautious about relying too closely on the application of repeated game theory in this context. Bowles and Gintis (2011, p. 91) observe that, for 'cooperation supported by retaliation as in the folk theorem, highly choreographed coordination on complex strategies capable of deterring defection are supposed to materialize quite without the need for a choreographer'!

[9] lying on an expanded, symmetric payoff-possibility-set, not shown explicitly in the figure.

[10] Ancient China is discussed as another prime illustration of Statism.

[11] "Only in very exceptional circumstances can equilibria be found that are stable against … closely coordinated deviations by large coalitions." Binmore(2022)

[12] When using the label of Whiggery to describe such contracts, Binmore (2005) is explicitly referring to the Whig party that ensured the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832 – and later promoted the creation of constitutional monarchy in the Glorious Revolution of 1868.

By considering how real-world institutions address issues (such as proving guilt and administering punishment) with the use of preexisting norms and cooperative institutions, they are able to offer a multi-pronged alternative[13] to repeated game theory as the basis for cooperation[14]. As they explain:

> The fact that helping behaviors are indeed motivated by [a] wide range of proximate motives, from maternal love, to enlightened self-interest, to solidarity with one's coethnics or conationals, is consistent with our view that in all likelihood each of the mechanisms we have described here has played a significant role in human evolution, the importance of each depending on the forms of cooperation under consideration and the ecological and social conditions under which ancestral humans interacted. Bowles and Gintis (2011, pp. 90 – 2)

While these two approaches – repeated games versus social preferences - differ on how social norms are maintained *within* any particular group, there is more agreement on how efficient social norms may be propagated *between* groups by what may be described as 'group- or multi-level selection'. Binmore (2005, p.12 and 2022, p. ) explains how group competition works as a Darwinian mechanism for transmitting social norms:

> Suppose that many identical small societies are operating one of two social norms, *busy* and *idle*. If *busy* makes each member of a society that operates it biologically fitter than the corresponding member of a society that operates *idle*, then there is an argument which says that busy will eventually come to predominate.
> To say that a citizen is biologically fitter means that the citizen has a larger number of children on average. Societies operating the social norm *busy* will therefore grow faster. Assuming societies cope with population growth by splitting off colonies which inherit the social norms of the parent society, we will then eventually observe large numbers of copies of societies operating the social norm *busy* compared with those operating the norm *idle*.

As Bowles and Gintis (2011, pp. 50-51) go on to observe:

> Differential group success plays a central role in the evolution of human behaviors and institutions, members of less successful groups copying the

[13] Discussed in detail in the publication cited, entitled *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and its Evolution.*

[14] Widening the focus beyond that of repeated games strictly defined may also help in considering adjustment over time in the payoffs available to society.

> more successful or being eliminated by them. Examples of this process include the peopling of many parts of the world by people of European ancestry and the associated spread of European customs and institutions in the past half millennium, and the spread of agriculture and its associated novel systems of social organization and behaviour from the Middle East to Europe beginning 11 millenia ago.

In the same spirit, genetic closeness to the USA[15] is used as an instrument to measure the degree of individualism in other countries by Gorodnichenko and Roland (2017) in fitting a model of endogenous growth where individualism leads to higher long-term growth via stronger incentives to innovate due to the culturally-induced social rewards.

## Section 4 Dictatorship by Deception?

Can Despots conceal their type by misinformation – which Sergei Guriev and Donald Treisman (2022) refer to as 'spin'? In a book just published with the title *Spin Dictators,* they claim that the key to what they call 'informational autocracy' is deception. In contrast to dictators of fear[16], who employ violent repression and aim for complete control over public communications, those they call spin dictators[17] aim to:

> manipulate information to boost their popularity with the general public and use that popularity to consolidate political control , all the while *pretending to be democratic* , avoiding or at least camouflaging violent repression and [avoiding] integrating their countries with the outside world. Guriev and Treisman (2022, pp.18,19) [italics added]

To illustrate how they see the balance between fear and spin changing since WWII, they have produced a chart showing the proportions of each type in successive cohorts of dictatorial leaders (starting with those taking office immediately after WWII and extending to those taking office in the 2000s). This is shown as Figure 4.

[15] the most individualistic country in their sample

[16] With Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and - more recently- Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro and Kim Jung-Un, cited as examples, Guriev and Treisman (2022, p. 83).

[17] With Vladimir Putin, Rafael Correa, Hugo Chavez, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Lee Kuan Kew cited as prominent examples, Guriev and Treisman (2022, p. 83).

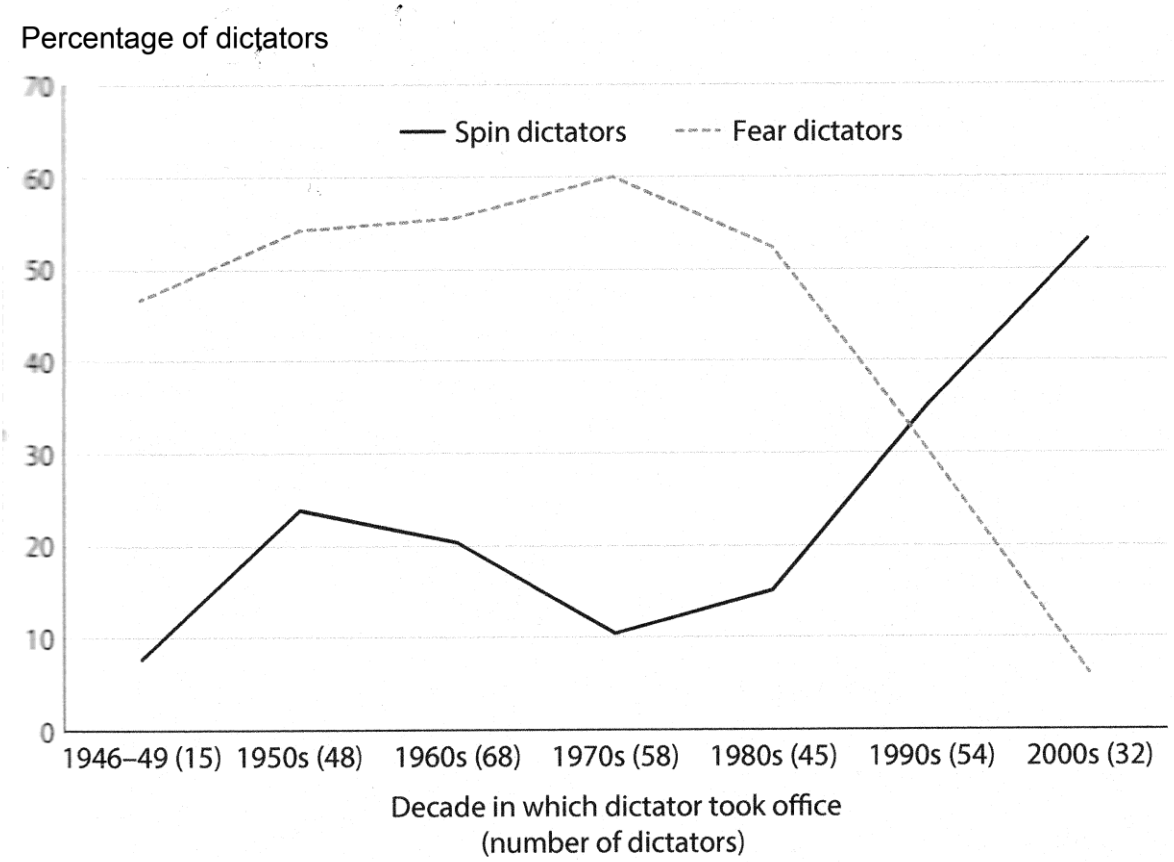


Figure 4 Shares of fear and spin; from *Spin Dictators*, Guriev and Treisman (2022, p. 21)

As indicated, the share of fear dictators starts at 50 percent and rises steadily for more than two decades; but then

> fear dictatorships plunge from 60 percent of the total in the 1970s cohort to less than one-tenth in the 2000s cohort. The proportion of spin dictatorships soars from 13 to 53 percent. Guriev and Treisman (2022, p. 22)

The principal contention in their book is, indeed, that modern dictators are effectively substituting spin for fear. It should be added that they do also

> consider the possibility that they have just become more efficient at repression. Perhaps they have found ways to keep people terrified using less actual violence. .. Is that all that's going on? We do not think so.

A key issue is whether a dictator using 'spin' can fool people into believing that he or she has for ever renounced the use of fear - until it is too late. The case of Russia is discussed in some detail in the next section.

**Section 5 The New World Order**

How germane these ideas of cooperation, competition and cheating may be in responding to Roland's appeal for theory could surely be discussed further. But current events pose a more pressing issue: to see what light they can throw on prospects for a New World Order.

*(1) Two different civilisations and Roland's culture types*

The framing of the NWO agenda in terms of different civilisations and cultures does seem broadly to match Roland's distinction of two cultural types - with countries in the West hewing to liberty and human rights, while China and Russia, with founding civilisations clearly labelled as statist, do not. The current Hofstede scores for individualism - which Roland uses to distinguish between these two types - are far lower for Russia and China (respectively 39 and 20) than, for example, for UK and US ( 89 and 91, respectively) two countries whose 'founding civilisations' are reckoned to be non–statist.

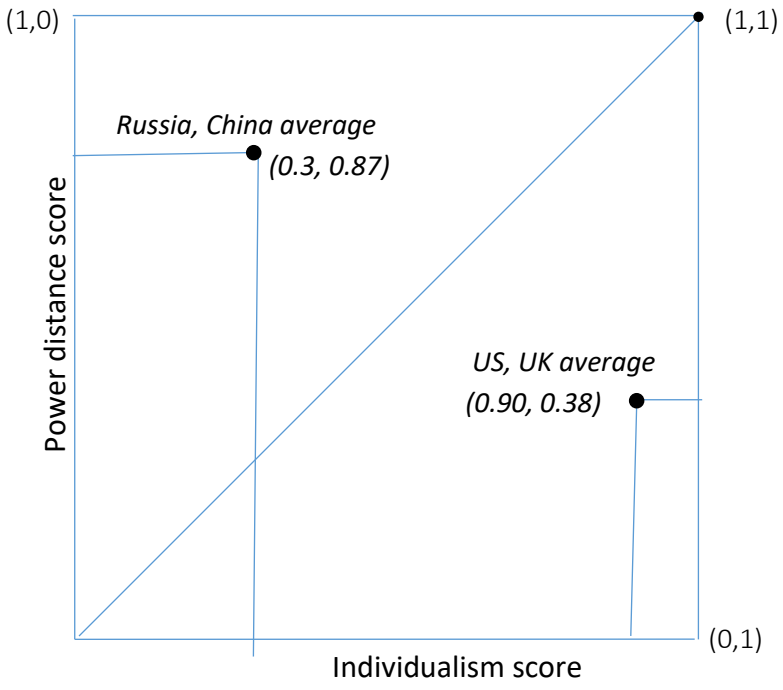


Figure 5 Average Hofstede scores for Individualism and Power Distance

To further illustrate the notion of cultural difference, consider Figure 5 showing the Hofstede scores for perceived 'distance from power', as well as those for individualism. The average for Russia and China indicates that, as well as showing far less individualism, their citizens feel far greater distance

from those in power than their counterparts in the US and UK on average. Does this not encapsulate the essence of the NWO proposal[18]?

As a guide to their current conduct, leaders of both China and Russia do indeed refer explicitly to their earlier history. President Xi, for example, has vowed to restore China to its former imperial glory after the humiliation inflicted by Western powers in the 19th century. As for Russia, where post-Tatar Muscovy with its highly centralized and autocratic political system is listed as the 'founding civilisation', President Putin has frequently lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union three decades ago as the demise of what he calls "historical Russia".

Thus, in his inaugural speech as President in the Grand Kremlin Palace in May 2000, Putin talked of the importance of history and a powerful state.

> The history of our country has run through the walls of the Kremlin for centuries. We don't have the right to be "Ivans who don't remember their birth". We shouldn't forget anything. We should know our history as it was, and take lessons from it, and always remember those who created the Russian state and defended its values, who made it a great and powerful state. .. We believe in our strength, that we can really transform our country. .. I can assure you that in my actions I will be led only by the interests of the state. As cited in Belton (2020, p.180).

Furthermore, shortly before launching the military invasion of Ukraine, Putin released a version of history that stressed the deep historical linkages between Russia, Belarus and Ukraine; and subsequently, on the 350th anniversary of the birth of Peter the Great, the Russian President cited the czar's occupation of Swedish land as an honourable precedent for his invasion of Ukraine.

Support for the historical roots of the current regime has also been affirmed by an outspoken critic, the novelist and playwright Vladimir Sorokin, who writes:

> the principle of Russian power hasn't even remotely changed in the last five centuries. I consider this to be our country's main tragedy. … The Pyramid of Power poisons the ruler with absolute authority. It shoots archaic, medieval vibrations into the ruler and his retinue, seeming to say: "you are the masters of a country whose integrity can only be maintained by violence and cruelty; be as opaque as I am, as cruel and unpredictable, everything is allowed to you; you must call forth shock and awe in your population, the people must not understand you, but they *must* fear you." Sorokin (2022)

[18] That Iraq, current day successor to 'individualist' Mesopotamia, currently scores only 0.31 for Individualism and 0.97 for Power Distance is a warning that historical cultural typing need not necessarily prevail.

While this might seem to accord with Roland's script, there are two important qualifications, both flagged up recently by Mark Harrison, an economic historian with a special interest in Russia.

First is the *ad hominem* proposition that, by common consent, the narrative Putin professes is but pseudo-history: what seems like a declaration of deep-seated affinity with Ukraine is better interpreted as a pretext for war[19].

> Russian leaders have falsely claimed unique national values that are supposedly shared by all Russians, except for a few renegades. The crisis has arisen, they maintain, because these values are increasingly threatened by corrupt and unscrupulous outsiders and their collaborators, against whom the nation is entitled to defend itself by any means. Thus, an imagined set of national values has been invoked to call Russia to arms and to rationalise the crime of planning and waging an aggressive war against Ukraine. Harrison (2022)

Second is the important observation that, in any case, cultural traits can vary within countries and change over time.

> Historical evidence undermines the idea of national values that are distinct, innate, and unchanging. Attitudes to gender roles, education, and trust in others turn out to vary across space and over time. While some variation responds to state borders and ethnolinguistic boundaries, much variation is found within national boundaries and within ethnic groups. Harrison (2022)

Instead of the rather static perspective of unchanging types, an alternative is one where societies may develop their own distinctive cultures but are also exposed to what may be called Darwinian cultural competition. In *The Descent of Man,* Charles Darwin sketched this more dynamic view as follows:

> Selfish and contentious people will not cohere, and without coherence, nothing can be effected. A tribe possessing … a greater number of courageous , sympathetic and faithful members, who were always ready to warn each other of danger, to aid and defend each other .. would spread and be victorious over other tribes… Thus social and moral qualities would tend slowly to advance and be diffused around the world. Darwin (1998[1873], pp. 134-5).

[19] For if all three nations are one, then Ukraine has no right to be independent: if it acts so, it must be punished.

As the quotation suggests, the development of a cooperative culture is a vital element. How is this to be achieved if people are individually selfish? Two different, but closely related, accounts have been discussed briefly above: either that individuals realise they are engaged in a 'repeated game' of life; or that people living in groups develop 'social preferences' (so individuals are willing to pay a private cost for behaving altruistically because their society offers a higher probability of meeting other altruists ).

How then do societies themselves compete? Key mechanisms - cultural diffusion (the imitation of more successful cultures) and migration – have been studied with the aid of recent developments in genetics. As regards the Agricultural Revolution, for example, " whole genome DNA of early farmers in Anatolia and Greece show clearly that migration was a major factor in the spread of farming into and across Europe" Miles (2021, p. 401.)

On this dynamic perspective, instead of seeing each nation's progress as being determined essentially by its own deep historical roots, one needs to consider the impact of other cultures; and to see how it fares in a Darwinian 'competition of cultures'. In an extended and illuminating review of the *Narrow Corridor* James Fenske (2021) complains that the authors ignore the influence of external factors: this wider perspective provides a response to that critique.

In this context, it is worth recalling that[20] Gorodnichenko and Roland (2017) have proposed that individualism is more effective than statism in promoting innovation and economic growth – essentially because the cooperative gains offered by the latter are static. The empirical evidence that they provide of the spread of individualist culture (based on genetic closeness to the USA), appears to support this more dynamic view of how culture gets disseminated by imitation and migration.

It also suggests the challenge that more individualistic Western culture poses for statist Russia: either to adapt global best practice and accept incomers - or grow more slowly. If, as argued forcefully by Belton (2020, p.497) and Khodorovsky (2021) for example, Putin's Russia is failing to rise to this challenge then it risks losing out in the Darwinian competition of cultures.

*Two types of Social Contract to support different civilisations?*

Binmore's game-theoretic analysis appears, at first blush, broadly to coincide with the NWO perspective. For viable social contracts are said to be of two

[20] as discussed above-

distinct types: individualistic, 'Free-and-Fair' contracts versus those of a statist Neofeudal - or what might be called Neoautocratic - variety. The former, referred to as Whiggery, are essentially what Western democracies aspire to promote and protect: but what of the latter? Have Russia and China been successful in promoting cooperative social contracts which promote efficiency at both the individual level at for society without much protection of individual liberty and civil rights?

Discussion in the last section is enough to dismiss the idea of that the system in Russia under President Putin has been delivering such a socially efficient outcome. As Khodorovsky (2021) put it:

> the Kremlin sees the economy as a tool of politics. Simply put, one can only achieve and hold on to economic success in Putin's Russia by agreeing to engage in corruption or by becoming an agent of Kremlin policies.

What Guriev and Treisman (2022) have proposed instead is that Putin was acting as a 'spin dictator' – that he was imitating some of the features of democratic systems while retaining power for himself and his elite.

It might be helpful to insert these two possibilities - the Neofeudal social contract described by Binmore and the 'fooling equilibrium' of spin dictators – into the phase diagram that A&R have popularised, see Figure 6. In this figure, their own broad assessment[21] is shown as the modest reduction in the power of the state shown by the arrow from the point labelled USSR [post-Stalin] and that labelled Russia [2019], denoting the regime that had evolved under President Putin when A&R went to print. (In Annex 3, however, more detail is provided to show that this move was far from straightforward, with major changes under Gorbachev and Yeltsin being reversed later by Putin.)

The point reached in 2019 is labelled as a 'Spin dictatorship'[22] in line with the analysis of Guriev and Treisman. Note however that this is quite distinct from what would be true of more efficient Neofeudalism, as shown at the top of the figure labelled Neo-autocracy, where both state and society are much more highly developed.

[21] as presented in A&R, Figure 3 p.290

[22] so Russia would qualify as a case of what Barber (2022) calls 'dictatorship lite'

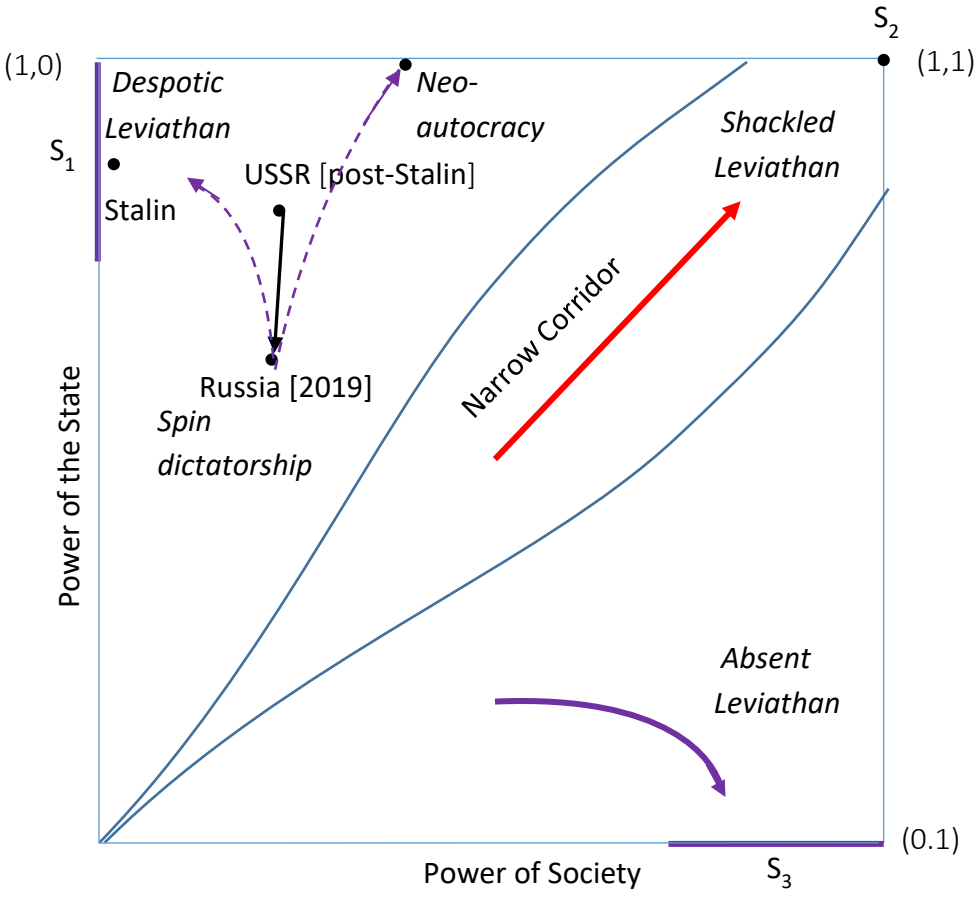


Figure 6. Russia's path after 2019: Spin, Neoautocracy or Despotism?

For Acemoglu and Robinson what statist regimes have to offer as an alternative to Western-style liberal democracy are neither sustainable social contracts, nor a stable 'fooling equilibrium' of spin, but trajectories of increasing oppression of the people at large.

As they observed following the collapse of the USSR:

> Russia was too distant from the corridor. Though the collapse of the despotic Soviet state pushed it in the right direction, it wasn't enough to tame the Russian state, which just picked up where the Soviet one had left off and reconstituted its despotic control over society. A&R (p. 288)

To update what they wrote, the path beyond the point labelled Russia [2019] has been sketched-in using one of the dynamic paths of their model outside the Narrow Corridor. (See the dashed line in Figure 6 which heads NorthWest towards the set $S_1$ .) When one considers the scale and resources available to

the forces of repression[23], their model of a technological 'discouragement effect' hampering those fighting for human rights (with few resources and much smaller scale) seems, alas, only too plausible.

To summarize: three prospects are illustrated in the Figure. First is the point, Russia [2019], that seemed to expert observers like Guriev and Treisman to be a sustainable Spin Dictatorship. Second is the outcome at the top of the figure showing what might be achieved by a 'top down' rational dictatorship focusing on efficiency but not on civil liberty[24]. Finally is what seems to have emerged - a trajectory towards a despotic dictatorship where the President casts himself in the role of Peter the Great as he mounts a full-blown invasion of Ukraine - with those who dare to criticise facing long terms in prison.

It should be said that, following the invasion, the idea that the President was getting away with a fooling equilibrium without fear was promptly disavowed by Sergei Guriev[25]:

> Before the war, Putin was a spin dictator, pretending to be a democrat and relying on money and manipulation of information. … [But] a week after the war started, he closed down the few remaining independent media and introduced wartime censorship. Borrowing from Adolf Hitler, he now refers to anti-war protesters as "national traitors" and threatens to "spit them out like a fly". Putin's regime has completed its reversion from a 21st century spin dictatorship to a 20th century dictatorship based on fear.' Guriev (2022)

Why should Putin have chosen to change his course of action in this way? For Acemoglu and Robinson, no special explanation is needed: the move towards Despotism - which they effectively forecast - will reflect the factors captured by Acton's dictum doing their customary dirty work!

From the perspective of cultural competition, however, another explanation lies at hand. In Putin's Russia, as Catherine Belton shows, not only is the political system a sham, so too is the judicial system and the operation of finance and the market economy: and the President had come to realise that his plans for progress were failing. If Russia was failing in the business of peaceful cultural competition, could it not do better with military conflict?

[23] As described by Henry Foy (2021), for example.
[24] Such a Neofeudal outcome was suggested as plausible for Russia and China in Miller and Zissimos (2022)
[25] So too was the idea that Russia might be implementing a rational dictatorship - in a postscript in Miller and Zissimos (2022) written after the invasion.

Darwin's perspective, as quoted, suggests otherwise; but the war is not yet over.

**Section 6. Conclusion : history matters, but cultures evolve**

In Roland's view, historical data reveal two distinct ways of organising the governance of nation states - statism and individualism; it is claimed, moreover, that such cultures can have very long-lasting effects on the nation states involved. The analytical studies considered here focus on the need for cooperation in successful governance (and how this may be propagated elsewhere); on the adverse consequences of power imbalances between the state and the individual; and on the possibility of dictatorship by deception.

So what do these imply for the NWO? In responding, we have focused on Russia, leaving the - substantially different - case of China for consideration elsewhere.

With their concept of Spin dictators, Guriev and Treisman (2020, 2022) have examined the role of information manipulation in sustaining dictatorial control, both in theory and in recent practice. But events in Russia have evidently moved further - and faster- than they expected. As Catherine Belton concludes in her detailed investigation of *Putin's men:*

> The West's willing complicity had helped produce a KGB simulation of a normal market economy. Institutions of power and the market that were meant to be independent were in fact no more than Kremlin fronts. The rulings handed down by Russian courts looked, on paper, as if they could be legitimate. But in reality, the court's rulings were not rulings, but Kremlin directives. The same went for the Parliament, for elections, and for the oligarchy. Putin's KGB men controlled all of them. Belton (2020 p. 497)

What she describes is 'fooling' on an epic scale – an Orwellian dystopia. As long as it is under-pinned by the ruthless discipline of the KGB, however, the regime may keep going – and keep looking like an informational dictatorship until it tips into tyranny.

The Russian President has , indeed, come to resemble Shakespeare's Macbeth who - on seeing the ghost of murdered Banquo - confessed he was at a tipping point:

> I am in blood
>
> Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,

Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

Strange things I have in head… *Macbeth* 3:4; 136-141.

So President Putin has finally opted for tyranny. Does this demonstrate that current cultures are 'type-cast' by their 'founding civilisations'? Surely not in general: but Russia may be a special case.

The explicit references Putin has made to history are unreliable[26]; but there are those who support the idea of pervasive cultural typing for Russia nonetheless. In the view of the historian Robert Skidelsky, for example, because serfdom was abolished only in 1861 and the system of Russian autocracy collapsed only in 1917 [only to be swiftly restored]:

> As a result, Russia never experienced the period of bourgeois civilization which, in Europe, established the outlines of the constitutional state. … Russia was always an empire, never a nation-state. Autocracy is its natural form of rule. Skidelsky (2022)

In general, however, cultures evolve through time. Social norms – and institutions supporting them – can change, and this can happen in short order compared with the ages of history referred to in Roland (2020). It appears, in particular, that Darwinian cultural competition via 'multi-level selection' can play a key role in propagating change in social norms, a view supported, indeed, by the empirical evidence of Gorodnichenko and Roland (2017).

Ukraine provides a dramatic illustration of a country that shares deep historical roots with Russia but wishes nonetheless to follow the path of its neighbours to the West. As a TV presenter from Kyiv put it in a BBC interview[27] shortly before the Russian invasion: 'This is a choice of civilisation: being part of Western civilisation means we have the rule of law, high economic standards and freedom of speech and these things Ukrainians are willing to fight for.' Putin claims Ukraine poses a military threat because it's on the Russian border: in truth, it's a cultural threat because what Ukraine aspires to would undermine what Russia has to offer its own citizens.

That the political perspectives of such close neighbours can differ so radically as to provoke fierce military conflict must surely discredit the notion that

[26] Enough for some to recall a joke from Soviet times: *the future is certain; it's the past that's unpredictable!*

[27] With Sarah Rainsford, expelled from Russia in 2021.

sharing a historical heritage is enough to ensure a common culture. Yuval Harari puts this point with passion:

> For many generations, Ukrainians knew little but tyranny and violence. They endured two centuries of tsarist autocracy (which finally collapsed amidst the cataclysm of the first world war). A brief attempt at independence was quickly crushed by the Red Army that re-established Russian rule. Ukrainians then lived through the terrible man-made famine of the Holodomor, Stalinist terror, Nazi occupation and decades of soul-crushing Communist dictatorship. When the Soviet Union collapsed, history seemed to guarantee that Ukrainians would again go down the path of brutal tyranny – what else did they know?
>
> But they chose differently. Despite history, despite grinding poverty and despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Ukrainians established a democracy. In Ukraine, unlike in Russia and Belarus, opposition candidates repeatedly replaced incumbents. When faced with the threat of autocracy in 2004 and 2013, Ukrainians twice rose in revolt to defend their freedom. Their democracy is a new thing…. Every old thing was once new. It all comes down to human choices. Harari (2022)

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**Annex 1 On the historical roots of modern culture: Roland (2020)**

The major part of Roland (2020) consists in establishing the correlates of the cultures of statism and individualism in historical data of the 'founding civilisations' of 97 modern states. From regression analysis (examining, first, the effect of geographical variables on the intensity of trade in ancient times;. and then the institutional and social features associated with higher levels of trade) it is claimed that:

> … we get a pretty good picture of statist versus market systems. Statist systems had a lower intensity of domestic and foreign trade, cities played less of a role and the role of merchants was smaller; legal systems were focused on the relation between ruler and subjects rather than relations between citizens, the institution of private slavery was less present and private land ownership was less developed; social stratification was also less developed and there was more power centralization.
> Our empirical analysis also shows that statist systems were more likely to emerge under geographical conditions where conditions of production were more homogeneous, where transport was less easy but where conditions of taxation were easier.

How to show that these historical roots have prevailed sufficiently over time so as to affect the successor states today? On the basis that 'individualist culture is associated with the culture of citizenship, which has deeper roots in societies that were organized as city-states', evidence is presented showing that current Hofstede average 'individualism' scores are higher in places that used to be organized as city-states rather than as territorial states. [ See text for discussion comparing individualism scores for the US and the UK (average 90 ) with those for China and Russia (average 30).]

Regression analysis is then employed to study the relation between and current Hofstede individualism scores and historical data, taking one variable at a time. Thus, in Table 11, a positive and significant [bivariate] correlation is reported as between private slavery in antiquity and individualism today: the same is true for private property of land. [The latter is, however, the only highly significant correlation that remains so in a multivariate regression. ] A separate multivariate regression of individualism on current geographical variables is reported which shows a positive and significant effect for ease of transportation. When individualism is regressed on a separate set of geographical variables 'all coefficients have the right sign and they are all significant, except for distance to the sea'.

On interpreting these results, the author comments as follows:

They by no means prove causality from ancient institutions to modern culture, but they are suggestive that this might be the case. These results are consistent with our view that ancient market systems fostered individualist culture giving social prestige to individual achievement whereas statist systems bred a collectivist culture awarding social status to conformity and embeddedness.

## Annex 2 On the dynamics of Acemoglu and Robinson (2017): as described by Dixit (2021)

Society and the state are engaged in a dynamic game. Each chooses how much to invest to increase its power. Denote society by subscript 1 and the state by subscript 2. Denote the power levels by $X_i$ and investment levels by $I_i$ for $i$ = 1, 2.

The power levels are like capital stocks that depreciate over time, and investments are like flows. The costs of investment are functions $C_i$ ( $I_i$ , $X_i$ ), with increasing returns in the sense that the marginal cost of investment is a decreasing function of $X_i$ .

Each period's output is a production function $F$( $X_1$ , $X_2$ ); this captures the possibility that a more capable state and a stronger civil society can both enhance efficiency, but at worst (and in AR's starting assumption) output can be a constant independent of the power levels. [In their formal model, even in the more general version, Acemoglu and Robinson (2017, section 5), they consider only the razor's-edge case with neither substitutes nor complements: they assume a linear $F$( $X_1$ , $X_2$ ), so $\frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial X_1 \partial X_2} = 0$ .]

Each period's output goes to the winner of a contest between the state and society. The success probability is a function of $X_1 - X_2$ and single-peaked at 0, so the incentive to invest is strongest for both sides when their power levels are equal. A fresh contest happens each period, and success is independent across periods, so over the long run the division of cumulative output is governed by the probabilities, which evolve over time with $X_1$ and $X_2$.

The authors prove that, depending on initial conditions, the polity converges to one of three types of steady states. [Above the diagonal ] of the figure[28], the state is relatively strong and society is relatively weak. With the scale economies of investment cost, this discrepancy magnifies, and the end

[28] Note that Dixit's labelling has been adjusted here so as to match Figure 4 in this text.

result is the Despotic Leviathan: a polity where civil society is powerless and the state is strong and oppressive.
The opposite happens [below the diagonal] , resulting in the Absent Leviathan: a polity where the state is essentially non-existent, the Hobbesian "Warre … of every man against every man" creates a constant danger to property and even to life, and a society that tries to avoid such total disorder by developing internal norms is locked into their cage.
However, in each of these regions the "winning" side in the steady state does not usually attain its maximum power, namely 1. In the region [above the diagonal ] the steady state can be anywhere along the line segment labelled $S_1$, and in the region [below the diagonal] it can be anywhere along $S_3$. That is why, for example, the despotic state is usually unable to achieve efficient economic outcomes.
In the [diagonal] region —the "narrow corridor" of the title and the Shackled Leviathan of the classification— the two powers are balanced, and each side finds it optimal to make sufficient investment to retain this balance (the Red Queen effect). Powers of both grow, and will eventually converge to the steady state at (1, 1), the point of maximum powers for both. That also yields optimal economic outcomes.

**Annex 3 On Russian governance from 1990 to 2019: Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin.**

The broad perspective of Acemoglu and Robinson (as presented in A&R, Figure 3 p.290) is shown in Figure A1 as the modest reduction in the power of the state as between the point labelled USSR [post-Stalin] and that labelled Russia [2019], denoting the regime that had evolved under President Putin when A&R went to print. To show how this point was reached, however, two interim

steps have  been added to the picture.

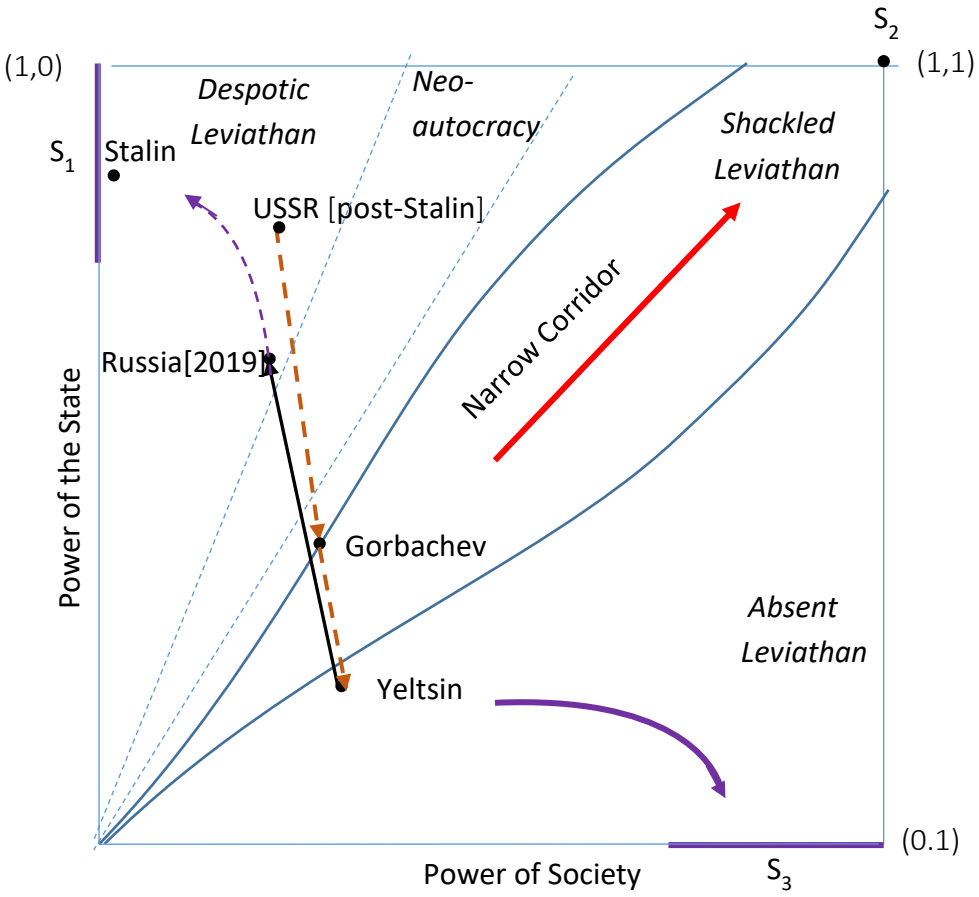


Figure A1 Governance in Russia after collapse of the USSR

First is the attempt by Mikhail Gorbachev as Head and State, and finally President of the USSR, to democratise the USSR  – by modernising the state (with *perestroika* and *glasnost*) and by ending the monopoly of the Communist party. Rather than establishing a neo-autocracy, such changes were designed to take the system into the narrow corridor, as indicated – tentatively - in the figure.

Second is the takeover of power by Boris Yeltsin, who had been elected as Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, and became President of Russia after the USSR collapsed in 1990. *Ex ante*, things looked promising:

> His platform … included a radical program of market reform. Democracy, economic reforms – it looked like the Russian despotic state was getting tamed. A&R ( p.285)

But, with the Russian elite benefitting enormously from the corrupt privatisation of state assets (the 'loans for shares' scheme in particular), these hopes were dashed. For many, indeed, it seemed that the government, though technically powerful, was failing in the essential task of running the country -

as suggested by locating Yeltsin's regime within the region of the Absent Leviathan in Figure 5.

In any event, he was persuaded to leave his post early, designating Vladimir Putin as his successor. Including these interim steps suggests there was considerable instability in how Russia was governed in the 1990s before Putin took over in December, 1999 – and over the next two decades proceeded to lead Russia back to the point labelled Russia[2019].

For discussion of what happens after 2019 see main text.