



## Personalism: A type or characteristic of authoritarian regimes?

*Jeroen Van den Bosch\**

### *Abstract /*

*This paper takes a closer look at those authoritarian political regimes with a leader holding absolute power referred to as either ‘personalist’ or ‘neo-patrimonial regimes’. In the literature, these regimes have been set apart since they exhibit a different behavior than their counterparts that are not under personal rule. This paper proposes another approach and aims to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of such regimes not being treated as a separate type, but analyzed with regard to their personalist element as a characteristic that can be present in various autocratic types. Firstly, this paper gives an overview of the characteristics of personalism and the dynamics by which autocrats acquire such amounts of personal power. Secondly, to provide data for the question at hand, the author links medium-N quantitative datasets of regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa (1972–2010). By linking insights from Hadenius & Teorell, Bueno de Mesquita, Geddes and many other prominent scholars who have contributed to political regime theory, the author investigates the various sources of personalist regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to answer the research question.*

### *Keywords /*

*dictatorship, personal rule, personalist regimes, political regimes, Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## Introduction

The personalist regime is the most stereotypical form of dictatorship. The term raises associations of absolute power in the hands of one man, surrounded by a loyal group of sycophants telling the dictator what he wants to hear and all the excesses, narcissism and paranoia that go with it. Even though there have been periods when this regime type did not use to be the most common, it is now rivaling traditional party-based dictatorships since 2010 (Geddes et al., 2012a: 7–8).<sup>1</sup> What the author considers striking, however, is not so much their number as the variety of regimes that have been classified as personalist dictatorships.

When it comes to classifying regimes, B. Geddes is one of the prominent scholars that has given renewed impetus to the study of dictatorships and their variations within the tradition of polychotomous classifications (not underrating the impact of other (recent) approaches such as Boix et al. (2012), Alvarez et al. (1996), Cheibub et al. (2009), Levitsky and Way (2010), Schedler (2006), etc.). She uses a categorical approach to identify and separate regime types, which has mostly been repeated by other scholars. She treats them as a distinct type with specific characteristics (decision-making processes, longevity, internal design) which shows specific behavior when it comes to repression, conflict, economic policy, etc. (Davenport, 2007; Huntington, 1991; Frantz, 2007; Ezrow, Frantz 2011a; Acemoglu et al., 2004). On the other hand, some researchers, such as Hadenius and Teorell (2007) or Ghandi et al. (2014) started measuring personalism on the basis of degree.

Geddes acknowledges that regimes turn personalist over time, but then in her dataset – for obvious reasons of clarity – she codes all observations of such regime as personalist for the whole period if they do so, ignoring the initial source of power. Hadenius and Teorell in turn just dismiss this dimension and focus on the sources of power, treating personalism as a characteristic that can be present in all regimes. The authors use years of executive tenure – the amount of years a particular person is at the helm – as an indication of personalism. The author cannot agree with this short-hand method of analyzing personalism, as there is no evidence for the fact that rulers are in power with consent of their selectorate or because they have managed to usurp power for themselves. J. Ghandi et al. (2014) then provide the first continuous measure of personalism as a latent trait, which they try to observe statistically; a difficult issue in light of the secrecy surrounding the decision-making process in such regimes (Barros, 2011).

This article will break open the black box of personal rule. First, it will integrate the existing literature on the nature and dynamics of personal power. Secondly, the author will compare two datasets (one by Geddes and the other by Hadenius and Teorell) to see what information comes to light when treating personal rule as a characteristic. The sample will include only countries from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as most personalist regimes can be found there. Finally the author will assess what are the advantages and disadvantages of treating personalism as a type or characteristic.

## Aspects and dynamics of personal rule

Below, the author will describe the behavior and internal operation of those regimes that have turned personalist. The paper will differentiate between traditional regimes and those that have crossed a certain threshold and have fallen under personal rule. Personalism is therefore a characteristic, not a continuous measure. Such regimes can thus be treated as a separate group as they are categorically separated (by the threshold identified by B. Geddes) from their traditional counterparts. Moreover, the author will present some thoughts on how these regimes become personalist.

### *One-man rule*

In personalist regimes one person dominates the military, state apparatus and ruling party (if one exists). There is no internal opposition (left) to successfully challenge the dictator's rule. Moreover, personalist dictators rule with extreme freedom, allowing for eccentric politics. The aim of the ruler is to use power to private ends that can be enjoyed by him and distributed among his protégés (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011a). J. J. Linz was the first to pick up the deviant behavior of unrestrained personalist rule and – borrowing from Max Weber – baptized this type 'sultanistic' regimes. In 1970 Linz wrote: *"We encounter a few regimes based on personal rulership (...) with loyalty to the ruler based not on tradition, or on him embodying an ideology, or on a unique personal mission, or on charismatic qualities, but on a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators. The ruler exercises his power without restraint at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system. (...) binding norms and relations (...) are constantly subverted by personal arbitrary decisions of the ruler, which he does not feel constrained to justify in ideological terms. (...) lack of constraint derived from tradition and from continuing traditional legitimacy distinguishes it from the historical types of patrimonial rule."* (Linz, 2000: 151).

Linz's observations definitely kept the concept alive in the literature of comparative politics. He treated sultanism as a category that differed from authoritarianism, and that – like the latter – should be situated between the ideal types of totalitarian and democratic regimes (Linz, 2000: 143). His definition, however, proved rather unclear, characterizing them as extreme forms of patrimonialism and allowing for only a small number of regimes to be clearly categorized in this way. Even Linz admitted that this type of regime *"cannot be always neatly distinguished from other types of authoritarian regimes"* (Linz, 2000: 154). The identifying criteria of this paper are broader and in line with B. Geddes' classification. This does not mean that there are no other approaches. For instance Bratton & Van de Walle's article on neopatrimonialism also introduces a typology of authoritarian regimes. Here their definition of personal rule/neopatrimonialism encompasses four subtypes, varying according to level of inclusiveness and competition (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994: 471–443).

## Selectorate

A true inspiration for scholars of comparative politics is still Bueno de Mesquita's selectorate theory. The term 'selectorate' denotes those, "*whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics institutionally required to choose the government's leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government's leadership*" (Russett, 2011: 15). Bueno de Mesquita et al. laid the foundations to classify political regimes according to the size of this group vis-à-vis the size of the dictator's inner circle (winning coalition) and the rules of their internal organization, membership and distribution of goods. The winning coalition is then defined "*as a subset of the selectorate of sufficient size such that the subset's support endows the leadership with political power over the remainder of the selectorate as well as over the disenfranchised members of the society*" (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003: 51). While these concepts of selectorate theory have found fertile soil within the research field of political regimes, some aspects of his theory have been criticized. Also this paper argues against a simple measure such as the size of selectorate to distinguish regimes.

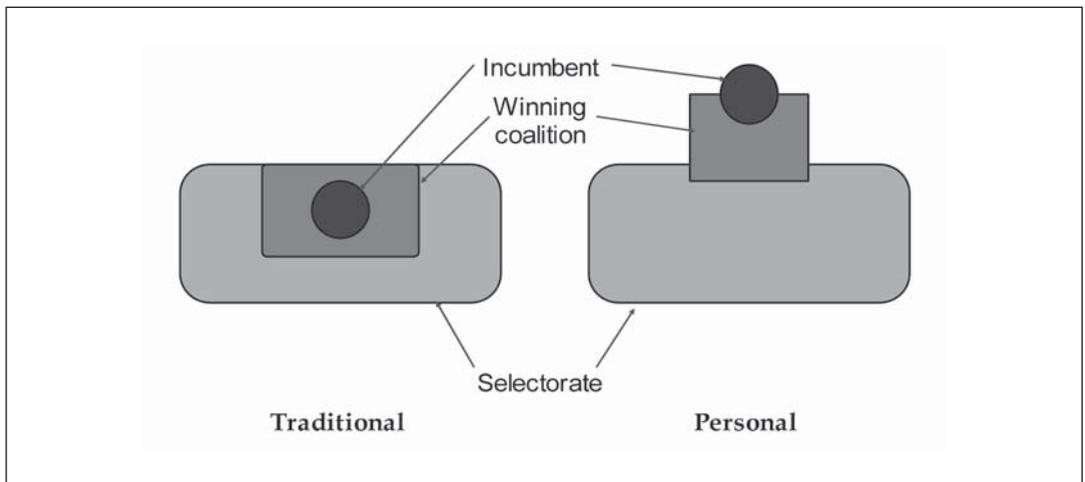
The literature does not provide any clear guidelines on the size of the selectorate in personalist regimes. In general, it is smaller than in other regimes types, often similar in size to that of monarchies. Support, however, can come from diverse segments of society, but they are linked to the regime by select networks of patronage, that can be withheld by the dictator at any time. The leader needs those networks to maintain the loyalty of some key parts of society, but at any rate he does not need all of them all the time. Therefore, these dictators can decide to broaden or shrink the selectorate, if they want to do so. So divide-and-rule tactics by withdrawing patronage is a common strategy for these dictators to remain indispensable for these interest groups, while at the same time spreading a climate of fear and uncertainty (Acemoglu et al., 2004; Roessler, 2011). What is important is that the winning coalition is not necessarily drawn from the selectorate, leaving most interest groups powerless to pursue their interest without their patron and offering vast opportunities for enrichment by the leader's kin, clan or ethnic group, which find themselves serving the dictator as part of the winning coalition. Changes within this coalition are also common as the dictator has the upper hand.

## Winning coalition

Besides fear of repression, a lack of ideology and no restraints on the side of the dictator, personalist regimes are not a one-man show. Even these dictators cannot run a country by themselves. They differ from standard military, one-party and monarchic regimes in that the winning coalition is very small, arbitrarily chosen according to personal friendship, loyalty or ties of kinship. The keyword here is trust, also called affinity – "*the idea that there are bonds between leaders and followers that both can use to anticipate each other's future loyalty*"

(Bueno de Mesquita, 2003: 60). The dictator chooses those people to assist him in governing. However, the balance of power is significantly tilted in favor of such dictators, resulting in even fewer checks on their power (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011a). Often the most loyal of them will perform the function of personal emissaries implementing the leader's instructions as there are almost no institutions left which would be able to do this (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1994: 475). These people are usually 'nobodies' as a matter of speaking – they owe everything to the leader. Without him, they would not have acquired a position of power and if he is ousted the chance of them maintaining their position is rare. As the dictator favors loyalty over competence and distrusts intelligentsia in general, these people often do not possess professional careers and are ill-equipped to manage the tasks of the office bestowed on them.

**Figure 1: The position of the incumbent, winning coalition and selectorate in political regimes**



Source: Author's own work.

Figure 1 provides a graphic presentation of the position of the above mentioned actors in personalist and traditional regime types. In non-personalist regimes the dictator needs the active support of the selectorate, which consists of one or more elite pacts that influence the choice of the winning coalition members and the dictator himself. In return for their support they receive benefits such as economical gain and political influence. The selectorate is internally organized and the institutions through which they influence policy-making are their main source of organization. Not unlike a trade union, their cohesion allows to control and steer the leader. In personalist regimes the situation is different. Members of the selectorate are disorganized, but kept in line and remain loyal through a mix of repression and patronage. As mentioned above, the dictator pulls the strings and he decides “who will eat” and who will not. The selectorate does not usually defect that easily, as the criteria to regain

the dictator's favor are arbitrary and often change in particular cases. Fear and repression remind the selectorate that defection or conspiracy can be very costly decisions.

The position of the winning coalition is also different in both cases. In traditional regimes the winning coalition is made of loyal people that the dictator needs in order to run the country or are put forward by the segments of the selectorate to represent their interests at the highest levels of policy-making. These people are the ones among all the dictator must keep content. They are in the first row to receive the benefits doled out by the regime and often siphon them off to their respective networks in the selectorate. In the case of personalism, the dictator once more has the upper hand. Even to such a degree that he can select people to assume high positions who would be unacceptable to the selectorate such as personal friends and incompetent kin. Because the winning coalition does not necessarily have its roots in the selectorate, it will side with the dictator in decision-making. And even if it did, it would follow him as well, because: "*when the coalition is especially small and the selectorate is especially large, as in many (...) autocracies, the loyalty of coalition members to the incumbent is especially high*" (Bueno de Mesquita, 2003: 68).

As Figure 1 also shows, the position of the incumbent in personalist regimes is completely beyond the sphere of influence of the selectorate. He does not face any direct threat from internal networks. There are no elite pacts that can serve as an opposition network to regain control over the leader. They are deliberately kept disorganized. Personalist dictators usually reshuffle the winning coalition and purge those that have lost the dictator's trust. The dictator dominates the relation and often chooses protégés from outside the selectorate (mostly kin, clan or tribe members) to strengthen his position vis-à-vis the selectorate and to outnumber the members of the winning coalition that are still linked with it.

A nice analogy to the selectorate's behavior in traditional and personal regimes would be Zygmunt Bauman's comparison between the proletariat and precariat: While the proletariat is a united class, exhibiting solidarity among its members and maximizing its organizational capacity, Bauman describes the condition of the precariat: "*as opposed to the proletariat (...) everybody suffers in solitude... The sufferings of 'individuals by virtue of a decree' do not beget a vision of community of interests. Using the old vocabulary deriving from Hegel and adopted by Marx, one could say that precariat has meagre chances of passing from a modality of 'class in itself' to that of a 'class for itself' – that is, a tightly-knit political force. The mutual relations between precarians (...) are governed by the principle of competition rather than solidarity.*" (Bauman, 2013: 25).

The lack of organizational capabilities is self-enforcing in a climate of rivalry that personalist dictators actively cultivate with their divide-and-rule strategies. There are no incentives to cooperate with each other against the dictator. This means that the size of the selectorate in personalist regimes can differ and that its size does not play a role unless this group possesses some organizational power, which per definition they do not have in such regimes. The size of the selectorate does matter when analyzing how exclusive a regime is and how this affects elite factionalization, especially during transitions.

## *Informal rules*

Another defining trait of personal regimes can be found on the institutional level. In most authoritarian regimes informal rules supersede formal ones. Some scholars like G. Helmke and S. Levitsky concur that many outcomes cannot be explained by formal institutional design alone (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; cf. Skaaning, 2006: 8). P. G. Roeder goes even further by stating that informal constraints more often shape actor's incentives in systemic and robust ways than formal rules (Roeder, 1993; cf. Skaaning, 2006: 8). Anyhow, in functional traditional autocracies the winning coalition can set up informal rules of collective decision-making, which are known and endorsed by the selectorate. According to these rules they will arrange policy-making, resource allocation and succession. Depending on the strength of the existing institutions, formal rules complement or strengthen this reality.

Personalist regimes, on the other hand, do not have strong institutions. Their capacity is often kept low as not to give rise to organizational centers of opposition that could challenge the dictator. As described above: decision-making lies in the hands of the dictator. Both trends result in a situation in which the rules of the game in personalist dictatorships are highly informal. It is not even a group of people that makes all the important decisions; they are taken mostly by one man. The personalist dictator rules by decree, often without consultation and trusts his decisions to be implemented by the aid of his loyal followers. He distrusts institutions and does not bestow any autonomy on them and in addition often undermines them from within in order to subject them to his reign. This often leads to the result that the whole house of cards collapses when the dictator is removed.

Some authors have tried to merge the concepts of monarchy and personalism by using the size of the selectorate or the division of power itself as categories for drawing comparisons. For instance, Paul Brooker (2000) argues in favor of this approach and differentiates between traditional monarchies and presidential monarchies. Also more recently, Gustav Lidén, when analyzing the literature on autocracies, proposes Brooker's typology as an alternative approach to distinguish between personal rulers, potentially dismissing the need of a personalist type (Lidén, 2011: 4). This paper, however, argues that there exist more differences between monarchies and personalist autocracies than there are similarities. Merging both concepts based only on the size of the selectorate and the amount of power concentrated in one man seems a hastily drawn conclusion if one looks at the (in)formal rules, the nature of the selectorate, the different exit-options leaders possess and their potential for hereditary transition of power.<sup>2</sup>

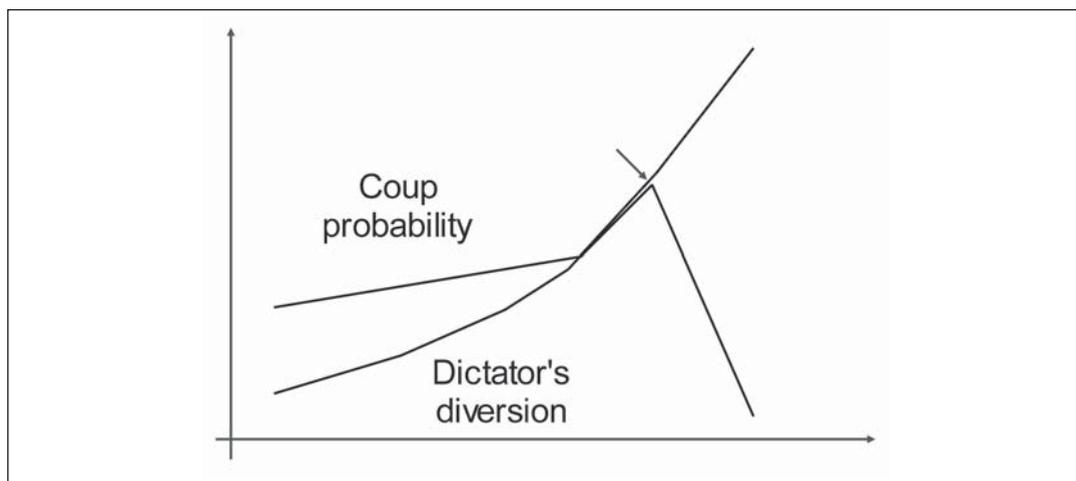
## *Personalization of power*

As personalism is treated here as a characteristic, it is necessary to analyze how such regimes come to power. Very useful is the work of M. Svoboda (2009). He created a model to

measure the strategic behavior of the dictator and ruling coalition and consequently divides autocracies into contested and established power-sharing regimes. Every time the dictator diverts and tries to acquire more personal power at the cost of the ruling coalition (his synonym for the winning coalition), the latter might signal its protest against such a move. As there does not exist such thing as a vote of no-confidence in dictatorships, the only means available to the ruling/winning coalitions are a coup or the credible threat thereof (Svolik, 2009).

Figure 2 gives a clear overview of Svolik's model. When the dictator diverts, coup probability becomes higher, until it reaches almost critical levels. Finally, there is a threshold-moment (marked with an arrow in the figure) after which the dictator has already acquired so much power at the cost of the ruling coalition that the latter is no longer able to credibly threaten with or execute a coup. Svolik labels this form of regime (after this threshold) as an established dictatorship, but such a model in essence encompasses all the aspects of personalist regimes: an all-powerful dictator and effectively eliminated ruling coalition.

**Figure 2: The relation between dictator's diversion and coup probability by M. Svolik**



Source: Author's own work adapted from Svolik (2009: 489).

Through deduction Svolik also finds that the larger a ruling coalition, the less probable it is that the dictator will eliminate one of its members in case of diversion (Svolik, 2009: 487). This might explain why military regimes in particular are especially prone to personalism as they possess very narrow selectorates and consequently small winning coalitions.

Another important aspect is that not all new dictatorships start at the beginning. Of course, there are those in which the dictator needs years to accumulate such an amount of power to transform the country into his personal playground. However, sometimes new regimes under strong leadership emerge in a power vacuum (for instance when a rebel

movement seizes power) and where there are no direct threats from the opposition or former regime. In Figure 2 these regimes would come to power just before the threshold. By eliminating or sidelining two to three key players within their own organization, the dictator can diminish coup threats to such a level that the way opens for the seizure of power. This is especially so if a personalist regime is overthrown by an external or internal actor, and there is no one present beside the usurper to contest the new regime formation. Personalist regimes are most often followed by new forms of personal rule (e.g. Zaire/DR Congo, Chad, Uganda, Central African Republic, etc.).

## Unpacking personalist regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa

Now this article will classify the heterogeneous group of personalist regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa according to their sources of (organizational) power. The author will see what information comes to light when linking the datasets of Geddes (2012a) and Hadenius and Teorell (2007) and updated version in Wahman et al. (2013). Geddes focuses on the question “who rules?” and treats personalism as a type, using a categorical measure to identify the group and separating it from military, monarchic or party-based regimes. Hadenius and Teorell then look at regimes’ organizational sources of power and ignore the dimension of personal rule (Van den Bosch, 2013).

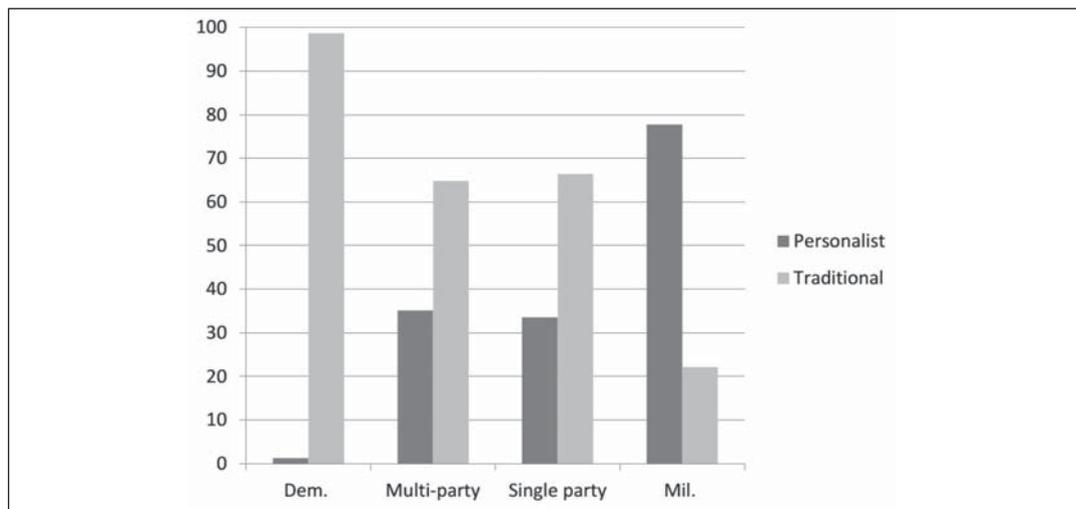
The combination of their datasets provides a medium-N quantitative analysis, in this case focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa. The region’s reputation for yielding to this kind of regimes explains this choice. By marking all regimes classified by Geddes as personalist in Hadenius and Teorell’s dataset, the author is able to make personal rule a (categorical) characteristic of these SSA authoritarian regimes. Hadenius and Teorell’s dataset then focuses on two dimensions: the sources of power, such as hereditary succession or lineage, the actual or threatened use of military force and popular election; and the level of competitiveness: no-party, one-party elections and multi-party elections. “*These three modes of power maintenance correspond to three generic types of regime: monarchy, military regime, and electoral regime. (...) these three types are not mutually exclusive*” and examples of hybrid forms are common: military multiparty, no-party monarchy, etc. (Hadenius & Teorell, 2006: 5–6). Despite criticisms of the fact that Hadenius and Teorell’s distinction between the institutional design (multi-party, one-party or no-party) does not alter the nature of the regime: monarchic, military or civilian (Geddes et al., 2012b: 4), the author finds their approach useful as it answers the question of “where lies the source of power” and also provides a (categorical) measure for the level of inclusion.

Figure 3 shows the different sources of power in personalist and non-personalist regimes. The data cover 45 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa over the time span 1972–2010, with a total sample of 1,586-year observations (N). Monarchies have been left out from the study because there are only two examples in the analyzed time frame. With a total of 41

observations, Ethiopia and Swaziland, none of which Geddes classifies as personalist hybrids, cannot be representative. Another reason for leaving out this regime type is that SSA is hardly the best region to study monarchies, as they (especially culturally) differ from the monarchic archetype which is most common in the Middle East.

The figure shows that democracies are free from the captions of personalism. The only two year-observations that seem to point out otherwise can be traced back to the exceptional case of Burkina Faso in 1978–1979 when Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana did not break his promise to establish a democratic system after four transition years of military rule. In the free and fair elections of 1978 Lamizana was chosen as the head of a civilian government. This new order was undone in November 1980 with a bloodless military coup. Geddes et al. continued to classify Lamizana’s rule as personalist, while Hadenius and Teorell focused on the transition of power from the army to the electorate. The fact that Lamizana got rid of any challengers within army ranks and acquired enough personal power to single-handedly decide on a democratic transition is also proof that his selectorate at that point did not have enough organizational power to go against him.

**Figure 3: Sources of power in personalist and traditional regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa (in %)**



Source: Author’s own work based on the data of Hadenius and Teorell (2007), Wahman et al. (2013) and Geddes et al. (2012a).

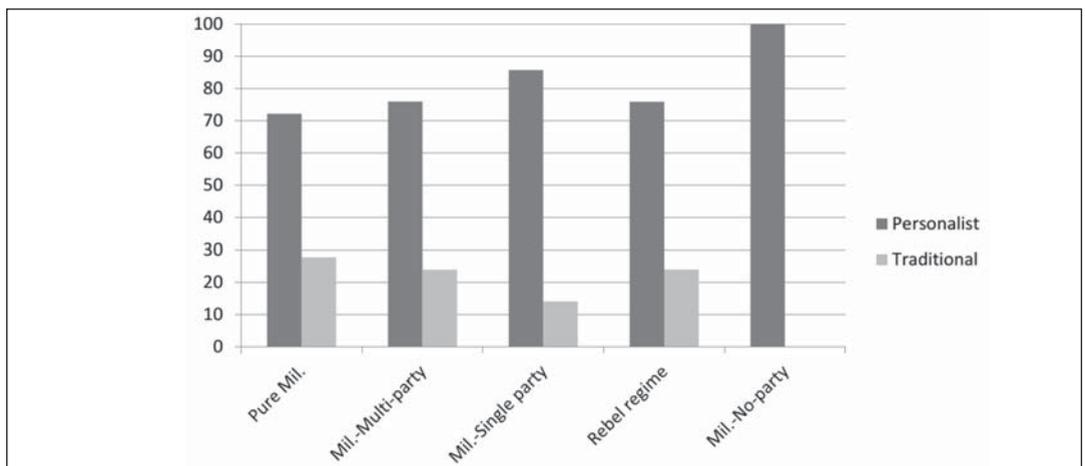
Of all the multi-party and single party regimes in this sample almost 65% and 66% respectively were able to escape dominance by one-man rule. This makes sense intuitively as both regime types possess organizational networks that can counterbalance the dictator. The army, however, has been an exquisite vehicle for personal rule with over 77% of all

observations dominated by personal power. This seems to confirm the findings of Svulik that it is easier to amass personal power when the selectorate and winning coalition are small.

When it comes to hybrid forms of these regimes, all of them were included within the military category in Figure 3. This is because Hadenius and Teorell consider the military element – that is the army as a tutelary body – more dominant than the political party. The literature subscribes to this approach. For example N. Ezrow and E. Franz state that there are two key dimensions that shape the nature of leadership–elite relations in dictatorships. The first dimension is shared membership in a unifying institution (most common are the army or a political party) and the second is control over the security forces. In this second dimension, the army definitely outweighs the prospects of a political party to organize a coup and oust the dictator (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011b: 17–18). The presence of opposition parties then poses an external threat to the regime as a whole.

If we look at the amalgams of military dictatorship through the above lens, the data confirm these findings: The army is the most convenient instrument for the personalist dictator to stay in control, even when other organizational networks such as an authoritarian party or even opposition parties are present. Figure 4 gives the subdivisions of military rule: pure military with no political institutions (of which 72% are personalist), military single-party (85%), military multi-party (76%), rebel regimes (76%) and military rule with no-party elections (100%). Note that the low amount of observations for military no-party regimes (N=25, only 3 countries) does not allow for any robust conclusions. The low number of observations for rebel regimes, however, is not due to their low number of countries (7 regimes in 7 countries), but to their short average lifespan.

**Figure 4: Traditional and personal amalgams of military dictatorship in Sub-Saharan Africa (in %)**



Source: Author's own work based on the data of Hadenius and Teorell (2007), Wahman et al. (2013) and Geddes et al. (2012a).

If one takes a look at the differences in longevity of personalist and traditional regimes according to their source of power, be it the military, the authoritarian party or the pretense of reigning behind the façade of free and fair elections, it becomes clear that personalist regimes live longer (see Table 1) This can be explained by the lower probability of internal coups and by the fact that the main threats these regimes face come from external sources: rebel armies, opposition movements, etc. The findings for military regimes in SSA are impressive: on average personal military dictatorships live around 4.8 years longer, which almost doubles their lifespan in comparison to their non-personalist equivalents.

**Table 1: Average life expectancy of personalist regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa (in years)**

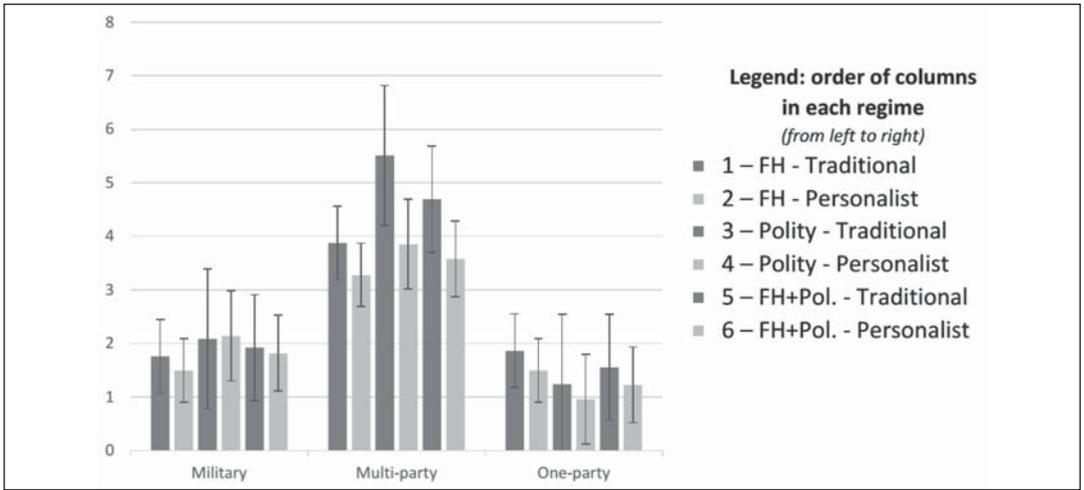
Regime type	Military	Single-party	Multi-party
Traditional	5.63	4.79	5.92
Personal	10.42	5.75	5.39

Source: Author’s own work based on the data of Hadenius and Teorell (2007), Wahman et al. (2013) and Geddes et al. (2012a).

The lifespan of single-party regimes on the other hand seems surprisingly short. This can be explained by the fact that the Hadenius and Teorell’s data only start in 1972, ignoring a decade of African independence in which the (personalist) one-party regime was amongst the most common. This leads for sure to an underestimate of the average lifespan of Sub-Saharan single-party regimes. But even here personal rule slightly lengthens the average duration of these regimes. Multi-party regimes, on the other hand, stand out as personalism does not stretch their reign significantly.

To interpret these data one should acknowledge that most contemporary states in SSA in 2010 were multiparty regimes. Some of them have made a transition to another type in the last five years, but most of them are still present today. The absence of more end dates means it is hard to assess the real life span of such types, which is growing while these regimes persist. So the data for single-party and multi-party are skewed by the range of the dataset, but there is reason to believe that military regimes, being classified as the most unstable, can significantly lengthen their reign if they fall under personal rule.

**Figure 5: The level of repression of dictatorships in Sub-Saharan Africa**



Source: Author's own work based on the data of Hadenius and Teorell (2007), Wahman et al. (2013) and Geddes et al. (2012a).

Figure 5 gives an overview of the (average) level of repression in the three analyzed regime types (military, multi-party and one-party regimes), distinguishing between the traditional ones (dark grey) and those under personal rule (light grey). All scores have been rescaled from 0 to 10 (0 being the most autocratic and unfree, 10 the most democratic and free). There are three measures of repression for every regime type: The first two columns present the average scores according to the Freedom House (FH) measures for traditional and personalist kinds in all three regime types (N=1,231). Columns 3 and 4 then, provide the score of the Polity IV project (N=1,228). The last columns (5 and 6) give the combined FH and Polity scores (N=1,228). This combined measure neutralizes the peculiar tendencies of the individual FH and Polity scores (Hadenius & Teorell, 2005).

The results show that regimes tend to be somewhat more repressive under personal rule, but it is the organizational power of each regime type that determines the level of freedom (mark the low standard deviations). For the combined score (column 5 and 6), personalist military regimes tend to be only 0.3689 points more repressive than their traditional counterparts (standard deviation 1.097). For multi-party regimes and one-party regimes freedom levels are lower by 0.2852 and 0.3271 points respectively (standard deviation: 1.644 and 0.674 respectively). This figure alone already shows how useful it is to differentiate between personalist regimes and how much they do differ in their internal design.

## Variations of Personal Rule in Sub-Saharan Africa

It is clear that the above results show grounds to differentiate between personal regimes by highlighting their source of power, but can the above differences also be explained meaningfully? The author will give an overview to explain each regime variation's tendency towards personalism. The explanation is based on the internal structure and Svulik's model for personalizing power vis-à-vis their selectorate. When applying the categories of Hadenius and Teorell's typology with the insights of Bueno de Mesquita's selectorate theory, adapted by Svulik, it is possible to acquire a clearer overview on what threats regimes face, both internal and external. Figure 5 gives a full overview of the five most common authoritarian regime types in Sub-Saharan Africa. The difference between personal and traditional types is not shown but will be explained in their description.

**Military regimes** (in their pure form) do not allow any political parties or opposition. Traditionally, they are known for their very low level of legitimacy and are usually temporary solutions to acute state disorder. Most of the time the army promises to give back power to the civilians, but when they delay or decide to cling on to power popular dissent rises. As the army has a small selectorate (only the highest officers and some selected outsiders), they often lack the capability to co-opt other segments of the population that could lengthen their reign. Coercion remains the only instrument to maintain their grip on power, although this logically results in more popular unrest and can lead to a split within the selectorate as well. In the second case a coup becomes likely, but also the prospect of democratization as the army has the exit-option to return to the barracks. In traditional military regimes this option is often preferred when the army is internally divided about current policy (Geddes, 1999) (for instance Nigeria 1979 and 1999, or Ghana in 1969).

This picture changes somewhat if the military regime has become dominated by the leader. A personalist leader has somehow eliminated opposition from within the army and functions in a power vacuum where there exist no organized centers of opposition. This is easier in military regimes than in others. The selectorate is smaller, which lowers the chance of organized reaction when some of its members are put aside (or eliminated) by the dictator. These dictators resort to repression to get rid of external threats; something this regime type is most effective at. The fight against internal enemies continues and the selectorate is often purged. A standard example would be the reign of Idi Amin. Most often these regimes are overthrown by an external force or mass popular uprising. Although assassination of the leader would probably also lead to the collapse of such personalist military regime, especially if there is an external threat.

A difference with their traditional counterpart can also be witnessed in the transition of these regimes. When comparing regimes in SSA (N=1,203), the personalist military regime has higher tendency to turn into military one-party type (nine observations versus one for non-personal military regimes). This may mean that such dictators want to break the influence of the armed forces by playing them out against another nexus of power (the party), or



**Military multiparty regimes** in SSA mostly appear in conflict-ridden countries in which the regime seeks international support or aims to lower the tension by offering multiparty elections (e.g. the Republic of Congo in 2002, Rwanda after the genocide in 1994, Sudan in 2001). Some of these regimes move on to a limited multiparty type when the military leaders try to continue their reign through a dominant political party. It is in essence a clever way for those dictators that need more legitimacy and think they can control the transition process. They can also open up the political scene to channel popular dissent in divided opposition parties, which is very common in countries with no history of political participation. The personalist version of this regime type is no different in this case. The personal ruler is probably even more confident that he can keep the upper hand during the transition, as the most dangerous organization (the army) is firmly under his control. In the long term, the presence of opposition parties raises the prospects of democratization. However, if the opposition gets out of control, the political arena can be closed at any time and parties outlawed.

From the global data of Hadenius and Teorell **one-party regimes** show a more complex pattern of change (Hadenius & Teorell, 2006: 18). When they weaken, or simply decide to, they can allow opposition parties to form and take their chances on an electoral platform. Of course they still have many methods to keep electoral luck on their side. On the other hand, if the authoritarian party makes a mess of the country or drastically steps on the toes of the army by cutting its budget or creating more loyal alternatives, the army can decide to step in and take over, resulting in the emergence of a military regime. As described above, one-party regimes have a broad inclusive electorate and tend to have an impressive survival record. If they become dominated by a personal ruler, the army will usually be identified as the main threat to his rule and consequently weakened (and underpaid) by the ruler. The creation of a well-equipped special presidential guard can take over the army's function of securing the leader while their loyalty is not in doubt. This regime type might be the most long-lasting under personal rule or – in other words – the best way to consolidate personal power.

The last regime type that has grown in number, not only in SSA, but also across the world is the **limited multiparty regime**. The ones identified in Hadenius and Teorell's model mostly fit the definition of A. Schedler's 'electoral authoritarianism', although a smaller group among them would definitely fit Levitsky and Way's description of 'competitive authoritarianism.' They are mostly a post-Cold War phenomenon. The third wave of democratization nudged many autocracies to take on a democratic façade. Some introduced free elections, but manipulate the playing field; others just created the illusion of multipartism by creating their own opposition. None of the examples in the database can be classified as democratic. To stay in power, these authoritarian parties must have a decent system to distribute rents, as its members have the chance to cross over to opposition parties. This means that they should be more sensitive to foreign pressure or economic crises when such affect the regime's patronage networks.

Hadenius & Teorell's article "Pathways from authoritarianism" concluded that this regime type is the most common stepping-stone towards democracy (Hadenius & Teorell,

2007). Although some of these regimes proved quite long-lasting. This research also shows that such a model can exist with a personalist leader at the helm. In addition, a closer look at the database shows that personalist multiparty regimes in SSA do *not* turn into democracies. Only two cases have been found of such personalist limited multiparty regime (Madagascar in 1991 and Ghana in 2001), while the findings for SSA give much more cases of non-personalist limited multi-party regimes that resulted in democracy (Botswana 1973, Ghana 1980, Gambia 1987, Kenya 2003, Lesotho 2002, Madagascar 2003, Mali 2000, Senegal 2002, Sierra Leone 2007, South Africa 1994 and Zambia 2007). Of course not all of them remained democratic, but the fact that transitions to democracy happen regularly in traditional autocratic regimes and seldom in personalist ones nudges the choice back into favor of Geddes' method of treating personalism as a regime type.

Notwithstanding, the above examples have shown that various regime types feature personalism as a characteristic. Although much more research is needed, it is clear that the approach of distinguishing them between traditional or personalist yields a viable regime classification. The analytical potential of this approach can be defended as some of its differences are meaningful, such as: the preferred organizational base of personalist regimes, its organizational evolution as these regimes consolidate over time, their different levels of repression. Even when the data regarding their longevity were inconclusive and some of the variations made analysis more difficult: for instance when comparing traditional and personalist limited multi-party regimes and their mode of transition – it is clear that in some cases the personalist element has more significance than the organizational source of power it shares with its traditional counterpart.

In conclusion, the author would like to repeat the article's main question: How should we treat personalism, as a type or characteristic of political regimes? The differentiation of personalist regimes by looking at their sources of power or their way of inception could be a useful approach of acquiring a better understanding of these regimes' internal working; especially if researchers focus on democratization processes and the interaction of various actors within regimes. However, this research does not go further. This approach is limited to the domestic dimension. It does not directly offer a contribution to analyze the deviant foreign policy of such regimes or their behavior in the international arena.

Therefore, the author would like to place these findings in its context: While depending on their research, scholars might find it useful to crack open the black box and differentiate between personalist regimes when analyzing internal dynamics. When the scope of their research reaches beyond this domestic scene some might say that such an approach might contribute to confusion and unnecessarily complicate the unit of analysis. And they might be right. For all external dimensions, Geddes et al.'s classification can provide a sound and satisfying theoretical framework.

On the other hand, more and more studies are popping up that link the domestic and external realms that are building analytical bridges between the internal design and these regimes' behavior in the international arena (for instance Chiozza & Goemans, 2011;

Acemoglu et al., 2004). By treating and analyzing personalization of power in various regimes as a recurrent and universal dynamic, it might be possible to identify and extract some mechanisms that would benefit studies on democratization, development and conflict. In the end, few personalist regimes start off with a dictator that already possesses such individual power.

This article makes a modest contribution to regime theory by exposing various forms of personalist regimes. Even when the purview remains limited to the realm of domestic politics, for now, the combined insights of Svoboda, Bueno de Mesquita and many others provide a parsimonious explanation for the various manifestations of this regime type, its internal dynamics and some of its transitions. The author does not claim that this categorical dimension of typologies (traditional vs. personalist) is the only possible approach, but even the above results show that there is room for a more nuanced analysis of the phenomenon. Despite using a different approach, Ghandhi et al. (2014) show that the research field is advancing in this direction and that there will be a growing need to break open the black box of personalism.

## Notes /

- 1 B. Geddes has identified 139 cases of personal rule between 1946 and 2010. Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced most of them (Geddes, 2012a).
- 2 Hadenius and Teorell show that monarchies are amongst the most stable political regimes on this planet with an average lifespan of 25.4 years (Hadenius & Teorell, 2006: 13). By rule they have a stable selectorate: the royal family and selected aristocracy, of which only members of the royal dynasty can become the head of the state. Strong institutions and highly formalized rules legitimize the traditional authority of such dynasties and their continuity. Because personalist regimes do exactly the opposite, they have no established mechanism to arrange succession within the family. This does not mean that this is impossible in other authoritarian regimes, as the Duvaliers in Haiti or the Somoza family in Nicaragua have proven; just that personal rule on its own is not a sufficient characteristic to arrange succession in absence of institutions or formal rules. Keeping in mind that real monarchies are dinosaurs among political regimes and that their number has been dwindling over the years, the mere fact that they are a reality even today shows how durable this regime type is and proves that they have found a way to adapt themselves to the ever-changing world, at least in the Middle East, where the majority of them can still be found.

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