1 | *Introduction*

The proletariat ... must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters.

Vladimir Lenin (1917), *The State and Revolution*, Chapter IV

Autocrats delegate the elimination of political opposition to coercive agents. In doing so, they enter a Faustian pact. Secret police are vital for enforcing social order and safeguarding autocrats' power. But they also pose an inherent threat to their masters. Take Vladimir Lenin, for example, ideological grandfather of Central and Eastern Europe's communist dictators. As leader of the Bolsheviks, he called for "the cruelest revolutionary terror" against the enemies of their regime.[1] These enemies were not in short supply. In 1917, Russia was the most backward of the warring European empires. Its tiny urban working class was politically divided, and the socialist zeal of its millions of peasants was questionable. Strikes, sabotage, and a civil war would all batter the Bolsheviks' fragile authority. Even the Marxist theory underpinning the movement did not predict its success under such conditions.

Lenin's answer to social disorder and regime instability was coercion. Less than two months after the October Revolution, he tasked Felix Dzerzhinsky with the creation of an agency to combat opposition to his infant regime. Dzerzhinsky, a Polish-Lithuanian Marxist who had himself suffered at the hands of the Tsar's political police, became notorious as the architect of the *Cheka*, the first Soviet secret police force – in his famous words, "the sword and shield of the revolution."[2] Headquartered on Moscow's Lubyanka Square with offices across the

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[1] Quoted in Dallin and Breslauer (1970, 13).
[2] The Cheka's full name was the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage. Its colloquial name derived from its abbreviated Russian title, VChK (Leggett, 1981, Sukalo, 2021).

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country, the Cheka acquired wide-ranging powers to investigate, arrest, interrogate, try, and execute its masters' suspected opponents. In 1918, the agency embarked on a campaign of indiscriminate, gratuitous violence. The Red Terror claimed thousands of victims, from state functionaries suspected of counterrevolution to landowners or middle-class families summarily executed as "enemies of the people." For many Bolsheviks, especially Lenin, the Cheka was indispensable. The secret police subjugated political opposition and consolidated their regime from its beginnings.

After the Second World War, communist governments used Soviet-style secret police agencies to repress their opponents across Central and Eastern Europe. Lenin's Cheka was only the first of many. It was also an archetype of coercive institutions that lie at the center of all dictatorships, not only communist regimes. Violence is not the only tool by which dictators seek to remain in power. They have recourse to diverse mechanisms of rule including various institutional structures of cooptation and control, and the strategic distribution of patronage and economic rents. Nonetheless, violence is the ultimate arbiter of power in autocracies. The agents who wield that power naturally play a central role in authoritarian rule.

While indispensable, coercive agents are inherently threatening to dictators, who must devise means to control them. Under Lenin's successor Josef Stalin, the secret police came to occupy an even more powerful position in Soviet politics and society. The Cheka became the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, or NKVD.[3] This was the agency behind the wanton Great Terror of 1936–1938. During those grim years, the secret police eliminated all opposition to Stalin, first from the ranks of the Communist Party – including the agency itself – and later the entire Soviet Union. The NKVD organized humiliating show trials and executions of leading figures in the Politburo and military. It liquidated the majority of the Communist Party membership and terrorized the entire Soviet population with arbitrary mass arrests, imprisonment, and murder. Twice, the leadership of the NKVD was purged. Stalin eliminated his once-trusted lieutenants as he came

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[3] The agency's full name was Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Dyel (Werth, 2009).

to dread their power at the top of the secret police. Fear, coercion, and violence emanating from the NKVD underlay the Stalinist brand of uncontested personal dictatorship. Stalinist politics and repression dominated the Soviet Union for almost thirty years and were imposed on Central and Eastern Europe after the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.

Stalin's dismissals of his highest-ranking secret police chiefs illustrate the fundamental problem of authoritarian rule: constructing and controlling the secret police. Genrikh Yagoda, NKVD chief from 1934, dutifully staged show trials and executions of Stalin's elite rivals – his long-standing Bolshevik party comrades. Nonetheless, Yagoda and his agency had sufficient authority and autonomy for the dictator to doubt their absolute loyalty. Yagoda was replaced and executed in preparation for the impending Great Terror in 1936. His successor, Nikolai Yezhov, was a still-more committed Stalinist henchman. He purged Yagoda's NKVD officer corps and led the agency through the untold horrors of the Terror. Yet he too fell under suspicion of insubordination by Stalin, who claimed he planned to assassinate him. In 1938, Yezhov was replaced by his ambitious deputy Lavrentii Beria. This notorious figure was relatively untainted by the violence of the preceding years. Just as importantly, Beria had been working conscientiously to undermine his former boss from within his own agency. As the successive liquidations of his loyal lieutenants vividly illustrate, even Stalin struggled to resolve the perennial question, "who will guard the guardians?"[4]

Today, the scale of atrocities committed by authoritarian coercive institutions rarely approaches that of the Soviet regime. Nonetheless, these agencies remain central to authoritarian politics. Famously, Russian President Vladimir Putin was a career officer of the Soviet State Security Committee (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti, KGB), the direct successor to Beria's NKVD. Putin was serving in a KGB office in Dresden, East Germany, when that Soviet-allied regime collapsed in 1989. He also briefly directed the Federal Security Service (FSB), the KGB's successor institution in post-Soviet Russia, from 1998 to 1999.

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[4] Conquest (1985, 1990). The original use of "who will guard the guardians?" is attributed to Juvenal's *Satire* VI.

Russia's once-formidable Soviet security agencies fragmented and at-rophied during the 1990s. Since transitioning from the former Cheka headquarters on Lubyanka Square to the Kremlin in 1999, Putin has overseen their rejuvenation. The FSB and other institutions are now significantly better resourced. They work to protect Putin's regime not only by combating terrorism and foreign espionage, but by harassing dissidents and government critics, and restricting the activities of journalists, opposition parties, and civil society organizations.[5]

Coercive institutions' role in authoritarian politics endures. So does dictators' fundamental problem of monitoring and controlling their activities. In China, one prominent domestic security agency – the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) – was originally modeled on Stalin's NKVD. The Chinese communist secret police even constructed their first prisons following Soviet experts' designs. The MPS enjoyed growing resources and authority through the 1990s and early 2000s. It gained favor as the Chinese Communist Party responded to the Tianmen Square uprising in 1989 and the simultaneous fall of allied governments in communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This trend was particularly pronounced under the oversight of Zhou Yongkang, Chair of the Party's political-legal committee (PLC) from 2007 to 2012 and one of China's most powerful figures. However, Xi Jinping ousted Zhou and significantly reformed China's security institutions after his ascent to General Secretary in 2012. The PLC chief was implicated in a broader corruption scandal, stripped of his party positions and arrested. Xi curtailed the power of Zhou's former fiefdom by replacing the PLC with a new National Security Commission under his own leadership. These personnel changes and institutional reforms were widely interpreted as Xi's method for establishing his personal authority over China's powerful internal security apparatus.[6] As the clash between Xi Jinping and Zhou Yongkang illustrates, all dictators face the problem of controlling individuals and institutions tasked with coercion, even the leaders of the most institutionalized and durable regimes.

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[5] See, for example, Waller (2004), Soldatov and Borogan (2010), and Galeotti (2016).
[6] Guo (2012), Wang (2014a, b), Wang and Minzer (2015), Lampton (2015), Greitens (2017).

1.1 The Puzzle: Variation in Coercive Capacity in Communist Central and Eastern Europe

This book engages a compelling and vexing empirical puzzle: Why did the size and activities of security agencies vary so dramatically – both within countries and through time – under the communist dictatorships of Cold War Central and Eastern Europe? Explaining this variation sheds new light on the perennial problem of constructing and controlling coercive institutions under authoritarian rule.

The world of authoritarian governments is diverse. But the state socialist regimes that ruled Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania from 1945 to 1989 were very similar. Their elites were all firmly committed to the same revolutionary, anti-capitalist Marxist-Leninist ideology. In every country, a single communist party held a monopoly over both political and economic power, including a centrally planned economy. In classic totalitarian fashion, state and party institutions were fused, with the latter dominating the former. All of these regimes were characterized by a high degree of state capacity, or ability to penetrate, control, and shape society. And they were interdependent in the same geographic and geopolitical context. They were established under the tutelage of the Soviet Union in the wake of the Second World War, integrated into the Warsaw Pact military alliance in 1955, and subject to significant Soviet influence until 1989.[7]

These regimes also shared the core pillar of social order and political stability that is the focus of this book: their coercive institutions. I define coercive institutions as agencies responsible for domestic *repression*, or violence against challengers to the regime; and *security intelligence*, the gathering of information about these challengers.[8] The socialist dictatorships of Central and Eastern Europe all relied on

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[7] See, for example, Arendt (1966), Naimark and Gibianskii (1997), and Bunce (1999, 20–25).

[8] Goldstein (1978, xxvii), Gill (1994, 6). The terminology of coercive institutions follows Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller (2005, vii–xli), Art (2016, 353), and Chestnut Greitens (2016, 12). However, other authors use the terms *secret police* (Friedrich and Brzezinski, 1965, 175), *violence specialists* (North, Wallis, and Weingast, 2009, 18), *security apparatus* (Hassan, 2017, 382), and *security services* or *repressive apparatus* (Svolik, 2012a). I do not use the term *intelligence organization* (Boraz, 2006) because although the agencies that I study here did engage in foreign espionage and

Table 1.1 *State security institutions in socialist Central and Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*

Country	Colloquial name	Formal institution
East Germany	Stasi (MfS)	Ministry for State Security (1950–53, 1955–89); State Secretariat for State Security (1953–55)
Romania	Securitate	Ministry of Interior (1945–52, 1957–89); Ministry of State Security (1952–57)
Bulgaria	Durzhavna Sigurnost (DS)	Ministry of Interior (1946–65, 1968–89); Committee for State Security (1965–68)
Czechoslovakia	Státní Bezpečnost (StB)	Ministry of Interior (1946–89); Ministry of National Security (1950–53)
Poland	Służba Bezpieczeństwa, Bezpieka	Ministry of Public Security (1945–54); Committee of Public Security (1954–56); Ministry of Interior (1956–89)
Hungary		Ministry of Interior (1946–48, 1953–89); State Security Authority (1948–53)

state security agencies modeled on Soviet institutions to carry out these tasks.[9] I list the colloquial names and formal institutional designations of these agencies in Table 1.1. In Poland, the Bezpieka was constructed by Red Army officers in the final months of the Second World War. In

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counterintelligence, not all domestic coercive agencies do, and I am primarily interested in authoritarian regimes' domestic coercive activities.

[9] The relevant coercive agencies in the Soviet Union were the People's Commisariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), 1934–46; People's Commisariat for State Security (NKGB), 1943–46; Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), 1946–54; Ministry of State Security (MGB), 1946–53; Committee for State Security (KGB), 1954–91. See (Hilger, 2009, 44–80).

the rest of the region, agencies were put in place by local communists under the close supervision of the Soviets. All of these security forces carried out the tasks of political policing including surveillance, arrest, interrogation, torture, imprisonment, and – particularly during the early postwar period – murder of regime opponents.[10]

The secret police did not work alone in communist Central and Eastern Europe. These regimes experienced periodic outbreaks of severe social unrest and violent mass opposition – most notably in 1953, when unrest was widespread, and in Poland during the 1970s and 1980s. During such episodes, the secret police were assisted in repression by the armed forces. The Peoples' Armies of Central and Eastern Europe were capable, constructed under Soviet supervision to follow the model of the Red Army, and under relatively strict Soviet control through the institutions of the Warsaw Pact. However, they were organized to fight a war against North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces, not detect and repress political opposition. More worryingly for ruling parties, the loyalty of army conscripts was suspect. Repeatedly – in East Germany in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956 – communist elites turned to Soviet military units to suppress mass opposition, fearing their own forces would refuse to complete the task. In Poland, a similar policy was seriously considered in 1980–1981. The secret police were the most effective and politically reliable coercive institutions at the disposal of the ruling socialist regimes. For this reason, they were their predominant instrument of repression during the Cold War.[11]

The communist secret police agencies' similarities went beyond their activities, which are unfortunately all too familiar to observers of authoritarian politics around the world. Due to their shared Soviet inheritance, their institutional structures were also almost identical. These were unitary coercive agencies. Each regime relied predominantly on a single repressive institution for the vast majority of their period in power. They combined the tasks of domestic repression, foreign espionage, and counterespionage under one roof. They served as

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[10] It is the use of these measures in the name of a specific individual, party or movement, rather than the state, which distinguishes authoritarian coercive institutions from their counterparts under democracy. See, for example, Marx (1988), della Porta and Reiter (1998), and Gill (1994, 48–90).

[11] Adelman (1982), Kramer (1984), Barany (1993).

one-stop shops for combating threats to ruling communist parties, whether from dissident intellectuals or foreign intelligence agencies such as the West German Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst, BND) or the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Their internal architectures were based around directorates devoted to specific tasks, following the model of Soviet agencies such as the KGB. Within each secret police agency, there were directorates responsible for counterespionage, or combating infiltration by foreign intelligence agencies; political surveillance, targeting domestic opponents; and technical tasks such as encryption and record-keeping.[12] All these agencies' organizational structures were also very similar. Their specialized directorates existed at the center, in the agency headquarters in the capital and were replicated in offices across the country so that each resembled a miniature version of headquarters. And these were not exclusive organizations. They recruited staff and informants from a relatively broad swathe of the population – with the important exception of Jews and other ethnic minorities during some periods. They sought to penetrate deeply into all segments of society to detect and repress opponents to the ruling Communist parties.[13]

Despite these wide-ranging similarities in regime and coercive agency structures, the size and capabilities of these agencies varied dramatically across cases and through time. This divergence is puzzling, especially because the extent of variation before 1953 was very limited.[14] Data on officer and secret informant numbers demonstrate that the death of Soviet leader Josef Stalin that year was a major turning point in the development of coercive institutions across the Soviet empire in Central and Eastern Europe. Consider Figure 1.1, which shows the number of secret police officers employed by each of the six coercive agencies in the region at three points in time: Shortly before Stalin's death on March 5, 1953; after the conclusion of the post-Stalinist upheavals across the region, in 1960; and at the fall of the regimes, in

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[12] For more details, see Tables 3.2 and 8.1.

[13] Kamiński, Persak, and Gieseke (2009). The discussion of organizational fragmentation and exclusivity is due to Chestnut Greitens (2016).

[14] This is not to say that there was no variation at all across the secret police agencies before 1953. As Pucci (2020) very ably demonstrates, the agencies were far from identical. Nonetheless, compared with *after* Stalin's death, a relatively uniform regime of repression was imposed by all governments in the region before 1953.
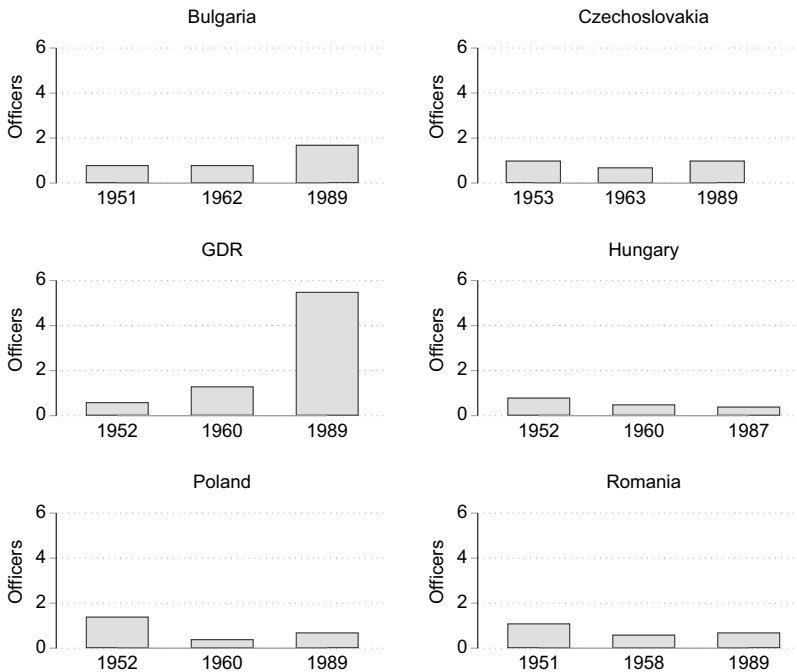
Figure 1.1 Officer numbers in coercive institutions per thousand citizens, 1951–1989

1989.[15] In the early 1950s, before Stalin's death, the agencies employed very similar numbers of personnel. Figures varied from a minimum of 0.6 officers per thousand citizens in the German Democratic Republic, where the Ministry for State Security or Stasi had only been established as an independent institution in 1950, to a maximum of 1.4 in Poland, where the Bezpieka had been under the control of the notoriously violent former Soviet secret policeman, Stanisław Radkiewicz, since 1945. The other four agencies were of a very similar size.

The post-Stalinist upheaval began immediately after the dictator's death in 1953. It lasted until Soviet military intervention ended the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Significant mass unrest gripped almost every country in the region and led to leadership transitions within

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[15] Due to limitations in coverage, I cannot always show figures for the same year for every case. For details on measurement and sources of the data shown in this section, see Chapter 8 and Appendix C.

every ruling party except the GDR and Romania. After this wave of political instability subsided, the very similar coercive institutions of the region had begun to diverge. By 1960, variation in the size of the secret police agencies in Central and Eastern Europe had dramatically increased. Poland's Bezpieka, which had been the largest of the agencies in 1952, had shrunk its officer numbers to less than a third of their former complement. The East German Stasi, by contrast, had more than doubled its officer corps since the end of Stalinist period. The Bulgarian Durzhavna Sigurnost (DS) remained a similar size while the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Romanian agencies had all declined in terms of officers compared to their total populations.

This divergence in agency size persisted and grew through 1989. On the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the socialist dictatorships, variation in the size of the agencies had increased further still. The Stasi had grown out of all proportion to its equivalent institutions elsewhere, employing 5.5 officers per 1,000 citizens, more than three times as many as the next largest, in Bulgaria (1.7 per 1,000). The Hungarian coercive apparatus had shrunk since 1960 to become relatively small, employing less than one-tenth the number of staff of the Stasi. The agencies of Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia employed similar numbers of staff, significantly more than their counterpart in Hungary but far fewer than in East Germany or Bulgaria.

Numbers of secret informants – individuals who had formally agreed to covertly collect and convey information to each agency – followed a similar pattern to that seen in full-time officers. I illustrate this variation in Figure 1.2. Before Stalin's death, Bulgaria had by far the densest network of informants, with 7.5 of every 1,000 citizens registered with the Bulgarian DS. The Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian informant networks were less than half the size, and the East German Stasi and Czechoslovak Státní Bezpečnost (StB) both employed relatively small numbers. In the wake of Stalin's death, the GDR's coercive apparatus began to grow and draw on a larger network of informants. Between 1953 and 1960, the StB also increased its informant numbers, while in Hungary and Poland, the networks shrank significantly.[16] By 1989, on the eve of their collapse, the Romanian and Bulgarian regimes' coercive

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[16] Unfortunately, there are no data on informant numbers for Romania or Bulgaria for this time period.
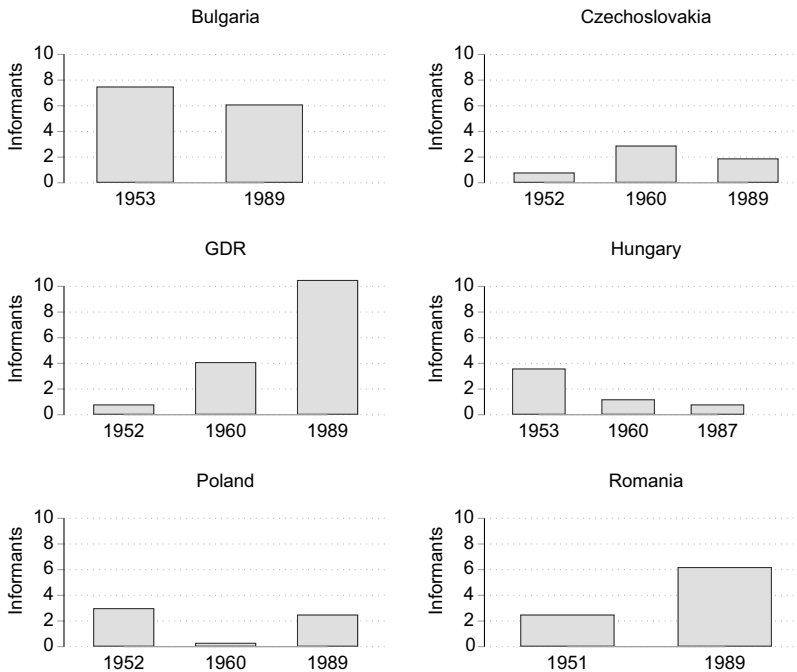
Figure 1.2 Secret informants in coercive institutions per thousand citizens, 1951–1989

agencies had informant networks more than twice as large as that of Poland's. Poland's network had increased significantly since 1980, due to the rise of the Solidarity opposition movement and imposition of martial law. The Stasi's network was the largest in the region, almost double the size of those in Romania and Bulgaria. The Czechoslovak, and particularly Hungarian, informant networks had shrunk since 1960 and were comparatively small.

Dictators' problem of controlling their coercive subordinates is compounded when those subordinates are powerful and threatening. The coercive institutions of socialist Central and Eastern Europe played similarly central roles in these regimes' strategies of repression and the enforcement of social order. Why, then, did some of these governments – most notably East Germany, but also Romania and to a limited extent Bulgaria – grow their security forces to become very large after 1953, while others drew them down to become relatively small? This puzzle becomes still more compelling when we consider that those

governments who reduced their coercive capacity did not do so with
impunity. In Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, communist gov-
ernments that curtailed their secret police forces' size and capacity
were confronted with significant opposition and social disorder that
destabilized their regimes.

1.2 The Effect of Coercive Capacity on Social Order

In Uwe Tellkamp's (2008) novel *Der Turm* depicting life in 1980s East
Germany, guests at a fiftieth birthday party in Dresden tell jokes in
hushed voices as they wait in line for the buffet. A surgeon mocks the
East German government's subservience to the Soviet Union: "Why
does *Pravda* only cost ten cents and *Neues Deutschland* cost fifteen?
For *Neues Deutschland* you have to add five cents translation costs."[17]
The guests' chuckles are almost immediately silenced, however, by the
approach of a colleague who is a known Stasi informant. Hastily,
a politically correct joke is concocted to deflect his attention. But a
sinister, threatening mood overshadows the festivities thereafter. As de-
picted here in fiction, but also in fact, East Germans' everyday lives
were profoundly affected by the ubiquitous officers, informants, and
surveillance devices of the Ministry for State Security.

 The kind of pervasive secret police surveillance fictionalized by Tel-
lkamp in *Der Turm* was produced by the large, capable coercive
institutions of East Germany, Romania, and to a lesser degree, Bul-
garia. The size of coercive institutions is a significant determinant of
the type and degree of repression implemented by an authoritarian
regime. It therefore affects patterns of opposition, or social disorder.
This is a complicated relationship. The path by which institution size
affects repression is not direct. Delegation problems both among elites
and within the agency cause significant slippage between the goals of
the ruling coalition, their coercive subordinates, and the actions of of-
ficers and informants on the ground. Agency size and goals are, of
course, not the only determinant of social order under authoritarian-
ism. Dynamics of elite dissent and mass mobilization are affected by
a multitude of factors including the level, fluctuation, and distribution

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[17] *Neues Deutschland*, or "New Germany" was the official daily of the Socialist
    Unity Party government. It was quite common for the SED party elite to be the
    target of private jokes and sarcasm by the 1980s (Fulbrook, 2005, 182–183).

of economic resources; the solidarity and collective action potential of opposition groups; and spillover effects of social disorder abroad. The ways in which repression affects social order are also complex, diverse, and difficult to predict.

Nonetheless, the variation in coercive capacity that I explore in this book – differences in the number of officers and secret informants employed by the state security agencies of socialist Central and Eastern Europe – is interesting in and of itself, but not *only* in and of itself. My theory of coercive institution design begins with a dictator aiming to preserve order among elites and the mass population. The size of agencies and the degree or type of social order prevailing under an authoritarian regime are therefore *theoretically* linked. However, agency size and social order are also *empirically* linked. Variation in the size of coercive institutions across Cold War Central and Eastern Europe translated into varying regimes of repression: "regularized practices of repression and the internalized expectations about the ways in which authority will respond punitively toward challenging acts" (Beissinger, 2002, 326). Diverging regimes of repression were associated with variation in social disorder both among elites and the mass population.

A Stalinist regime of repression was rolled out in all states in the region after the Second World War. It focused on eliminating political and ideological competition to Communist parties, combating foreign espionage, and violently enforcing unpopular policies such as agricultural collectivization. It produced social disorder in the form of state terror, torture, and killings as the security services enforced communist rule. But the Stalinist coercive agencies were surprised and relatively powerless when confronted with revolutionary opposition in the wake of the Soviet dictator's death in March 1953. In the mid-1950s, all governments in the region, except Romania, experienced mass social disorder. For the East German, Hungarian, and Polish regimes, this was significant enough to fundamentally threaten their viability. Many previous theories of coercive institution design predict that these institutions respond in similar ways to similar threats. But after 1953, there was significant *divergence* in coercive agency size across countries that had all experienced mass unrest. This divergence in coercive capacity translated into differences in the degree of social disorder across the region. The large coercive agencies of East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria carried out extensive surveillance of opponents. They engaged

in preemptive repression which was associated with lower levels of social disorder. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and especially in Poland, smaller coercive agencies were less preemptive in their repressive strategies. These countries saw greater levels of social disorder which were met with more overt violence.

Differences in regimes of repression and social disorder across the region after the mid-1950s can be illustrated empirically in different ways. For example, by an examination of the scope and methods of repression implemented by the agencies. Institutions with smaller numbers of staff and secret informants engaged in less-extensive surveillance and preemptive repression than the largest security services. In the GDR, for instance, the Stasi moved toward a "universal security" doctrine that aimed not only to combat manifest opposition, but eliminate "political-ideological diversion" after Stalin's death. As staff numbers grew from the early 1960s, they were concentrated in directorates responsible for surveillance and investigations. The agency's methods shifted away from overt violence directed at relatively large numbers of individuals, toward preventive surveillance and covert interventions to detect and eliminate specific regime opponents. By the 1970s, Stasi officers, informants, and electronic surveillance had penetrated all areas of East German life, with the partial exception of individuals' immediate families. In the 1980s, as the regime came under mounting financial pressure, the Stasi was forced to reduce its staff and informant growth rate overall. But the agency still significantly increased the number of officers in frontline operational units responsible for domestic repression.[18]

By contrast, in Czechoslovakia the scope of the activities of the Státní Bezpečnost declined along with the agency's size after the mid-1950s. As in the GDR, the most violent methods of interrogation and torture were abandoned, and agricultural collectivization was no longer imposed through state coercion. However, unlike in East Germany the number of individuals under surveillance and investigation declined significantly after the death of Stalinist party leader Klement Gottwald in 1953. Despite a temporary increase in surveillance activity in the wake of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the number of individuals monitored by the StB dropped further through the 1950s to

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[18] Gieseke (2000, 239–242, 285–288, 387–397), Gieseke (2006, 134–161).

the mid-1960s. The agency carried out fewer investigations, detained fewer political prisoners, and moderated their treatment. Instead of aiming to preempt disorder as in the GDR, a system of local People's Militias was created – fast-response armed police units independent of the StB – and incorporated in nationwide plans to suppress protests, strikes, and rioting. After a wave of repression in the wake of the brief reformist Dubček government and the Soviet invasion in 1968, the StB confronted individuals predominantly with nonviolent coercion such as repeated interrogations and harassment to break their opposition to the regime.[19] The East German and Czechoslovak examples illustrate a pattern which can be observed across socialist Central and Eastern Europe: The large coercive institutions in the GDR, Romania, and Bulgaria engaged in more time- and manpower-intensive covert surveillance that preempted political resistance. Smaller agencies in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary concentrated their limited resources on combating opposition after it emerged.

Differences in regimes of repression across the region can also be illustrated anecdotally by the experiences of individual dissidents. Wolf Biermann (2016), for example, a 1960s GDR guitarist and singer, rose to international prominence for his songs full of harsh criticism of the SED regime. From the start of his career, he was the target of extensive surveillance by the MfS. Men in unmarked cars regularly observed his apartment for days on end. Stasi officers attended his early concerts, visiting backstage to remind him only to sing the few songs that had been approved by the party. Less discreetly, in October 1965 a brigade of Stasi troops physically blocked him from entering a concert hall to perform in Berlin. His associates were recruited as informants by the MfS. Biermann suspected that some of their apartments were bugged with concealed microphones. Denounced by the SED as a class traitor in late 1965, he could no longer publish or sing in public. Although he was never arrested or imprisoned, he remained a target of at least seventy individual Stasi secret informants. Over two hundred professional officers used hidden cameras and microphones to spy on him. His file in the MfS archive ran to over 70,000 pages. The surveillance was so ubiquitous, oppressive, and obvious that in 1966 Biermann composed the *Stasi-Ballade*, an ironic ode to the "poor Stasi dogs" who had to

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[19] Blažek and Žáček (2009, 423–425, 430, 447–457), Bárta (2017), Sivoš (2017).

keep watch on him even "in snow- and rainstorms." Eventually, while on a visit to West Germany in 1976, Biermann was summarily stripped of his East German citizenship. He was not allowed back to the GDR until the dying days of the SED regime in 1989. Biermann's experience illustrates how the Stasi used nonviolent methods of surveillance and coercion to isolate dissidents and prevent them from organizing or mobilizing larger groups against the regime, for years if necessary.

Václav Havel was a Czech playwright and author of the famous denunciation of totalitarianism, "The Power of the Powerless." He became the first President of both post-Communist Czechoslovakia and, subsequently, the Czech Republic. Under the dictatorship of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Havel was loosely associated with a Prague movement of artists, filmmakers, and writers who challenged the party's intellectual monopoly during the early 1960s. As part of broader efforts to monitor potential opponents among the intelligentsia, Havel was assigned the code name "Tomis III" by the StB. Secret informants attended his theater productions and infiltrated his circle of friends. Havel was repeatedly interviewed by StB officers looking for information on his family and associates in the theater and arts. His contacts to western diplomats, writers, artists, and publishers were of particular interest. For a short time in 1965, he was even considered for recruitment as an informant to the Statní Bezpečnost. Suspicious of Havel's motives, however, StB officers installed concealed microphones in his apartment in 1966 to monitor meetings of dissident writers who opposed the cultural policies of the regime. One of these devices was discovered by Havel in early 1969.[20] Havel became a prominent opposition leader only under the reactionary "normalization" government led by Gustáv Husák. He and his associates were subject to continuous monitoring, harassment, public denouncements, and interrogation by the regime. One of Havel's cofounders of the Charter 77 dissident group, Jan Patočka, died after severe beatings at the hands of StB interrogators in 1977. Thereafter, Havel was continuously monitored and harassed by StB officers who took the remarkable step of building a watchtower across the road from his country house. In January 1980, he was convicted of subversion and sentenced to four and a half years in prison (Zantovsky, 2014, 169–261). Havel's experience

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[20] Začek (2012), Zantovsky (2014, 89, 121).

illustrates how the Czechoslovak StB allowed dissident groups considerable freedom to organize, compared to their counterparts in the GDR. However, the agency was also more obvious and violent in its repression of intellectuals than the Stasi. These patterns of repression correspond with an argument linking larger coercive institutions, such as those in the GDR, with more labor-intensive, pervasive, and pre-emptive surveillance and repression than smaller coercive institutions such as those in Czechoslovakia.

In East Germany and Romania, foreign scholars also experienced the thorough surveillance characteristic of these countries' large coercive agencies. Timothy Garton Ash (1997), for example, studied in East Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He learned after viewing his Stasi file in the 1990s that he was known to the agency under the code name "Romeo." He was suspected of working for a British intelligence agency. Aside from routine searches of his person and property by border guards, he was kept under surveillance by the "Operational Personal Control" directorate of the MfS. This included observation by Stasi officers, who wrote detailed reports about his movements and personal relationships. He was also observed by secret informants, including his academic advisor at the Humboldt University. Katherine Verdery (2018), an anthropologist who conducted research in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s, was known to the Securitate under the code name "Vera." She was the subject of an almost 3,000-page file that she was able to access in 2007. Like Garton Ash, she was strongly suspected of being a spy, collecting data on behalf of the US government and encouraging resistance to the Ceaușescu regime. During multiple visits to the country over the course of more than a decade and even back home in Baltimore, Verdery's movements, acquaintances, conversations, and even personal diaries and academic research were painstakingly monitored and recorded by the Securitate's vast network of officers and informants.[21]

The effects of different regimes of repression on social disorder and contention can be illustrated by the frequency and tenacity of

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[21] Access to the archives of the former coercive agencies has varied greatly across the region. The ability of individuals to view their own files, and of researchers to work with material from broader archives, has been influenced by complex developments in domestic politics. See, for example, Bruce (2008), and Stan (2004, 2009).

intraelite factionalism and conflict. Here, the comparison of East Germany and Czechoslovakia is also instructive. Ruling SED elites in the GDR saw only fleeting moments of disunity and contention after the mid-1950s. In the immediate wake of Stalin's death and the revolutionary uprising of 1953, a faction in opposition to party leader Walter Ulbricht did emerge within the Politburo, but it was swiftly crushed (Stulz-Herrnstadt, 1990; Thomson, 2017). Although Ulbricht was unwillingly replaced by his protegé Erich Honecker as leader in 1971, this transition occurred without generating instability at the top of the party. Honecker was Ulbricht's hand-picked successor and had the clear backing of the Soviet leadership (McCauley, 1986). The party elite weathered generational changes, geopolitical shifts, and the growing economic crisis from the mid-1970s with remarkable stability. Eye-witness accounts by members of the political elite and the Politburo point to a striking consolidation of power by Honecker which was unchallenged until the very dying days of the regime in 1989. This process was facilitated by the party leader's strong personal control over the coercive apparatus and his use of its resources to monitor the activities of Politburo members.[22]

By contrast, after 1953 the Czechoslovak leadership was divided for significant periods of time between the leader of the Communist Party (KSČ) and the President as head of state. The country also experienced more intraelite division around issues such as economic policy, rehabilitation of purged party members, and censorship. This resulted in greater turnover of leading figures. Most dramatically, the reformist party leader Alexander Dubček held power for the fifteen months of the Prague Spring before the Soviet invasion of August 1968. His ascendancy was a manifestation of deep divisions among Czechoslovak political, cultural, and intellectual elites which had been unresolved since the early 1960s and which had no parallel in East Germany. Unsurprisingly, intraelite contention declined markedly after the violent 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovak domestic politics which ousted Dubček. This is illustrated by the almost twenty-year tenure of his successor, Gustáv Husák. Husák worked assiduously to consolidate

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[22] See the accounts of former Politburo member Günter Schabowski (Sieren and Koehne, 1990) and press secretary of the GDR Attorney General, Peter Przybylski (1991).
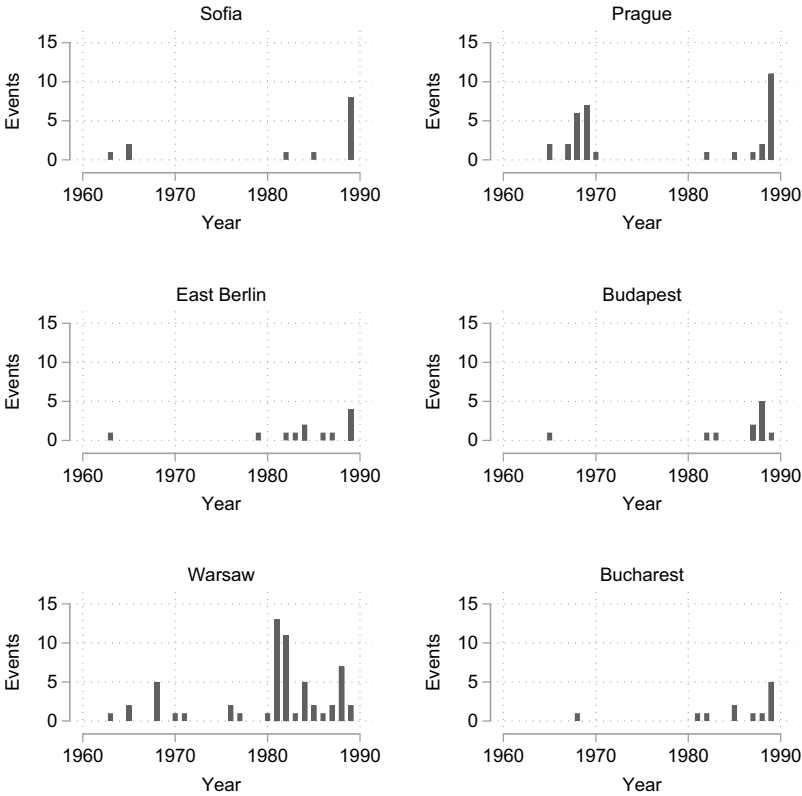
Figure 1.3 Major social disorder events in Central and Eastern European capital cities, 1960–1989

his power as leader of the KSČ by preventing the rise of rival factions, gaining the trust of Moscow and eventually added the position of President to his leadership of the party.[23]

Variation in social disorder under these socialist dictatorships can also be illustrated by the frequency of demonstrations, protests and violent mobilization after regimes of repression diverged in the 1950s. In Figure 1.3, I present data on the number of these events in the national capitals of the region from 1960 to 1989.[24] Regimes with

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[23] Skilling (1976), Wightman (1986), Macháček (2016).
[24] Thomson et al. (2023).

large coercive institutions saw strikingly low levels of social disorder. In Sofia, Bulgaria, only very small protests were reported before 1989, and they were predominantly directed at foreign governments' embassies, not the ruling party. In GDR's capital, East Berlin, almost no popular mobilization was reported before the wave of mass opposition to the regime in 1989, except for small demonstrations by students and peace activists. The Romanian regime under Ceauşescu was famously toppled by a revolutionary uprising in Bucharest in 1989, but the capital had seen only a few instances of demonstrations against the Communist government since 1960. In Budapest, Hungary, very little contentious mobilization was reported until the immediate prelude to the fall of the regime, despite the country's relatively small coercive apparatus. However, the Czechoslovak capital Prague saw significant mass social disorder during the demonstrations preceding the Prague Spring in 1968. Polish students in Warsaw held large demonstrations in 1968; the capital saw large-scale strikes and worker unrest at the Ursus tractor factory in the mid-1970s; and mass demonstrations of opposition to the Communist regime were commonplace in Warsaw from the beginnings of the independent trade union movement in the early 1980s. These two regimes with relatively small coercive institutions witnessed the greatest levels of mass disorder during the post-Stalinist era.

Variation in the capacity of secret police agencies across Cold War Central and Eastern Europe is puzzling due to the wide-ranging similarities of the communist regimes and their geopolitical circumstances. The idiosyncrasies of each case offer limited explanatory power. East Germany might be expected to have a larger coercive agency given that it was directly adjacent to Western powers and had relatively strong state institutions in general, for example. But before 1953, East Germany's security agency was no larger than that of other communist regimes. And by the 1980s, the Stasi had a lot in common with the very capable Securitate in Romania, where state institutions were notoriously weak and the threat from the west was relatively remote. As this single example illustrates, the divergence in coercive capacity across the region after 1953 vexes any explanation based on any country's specific qualities. The divergence is still more surprising when we consider that those governments that reduced the capacity of their coercive institutions after 1953 were challenged by significantly greater levels of social disorder. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, in particular, levels of elite and

mass disorder threatened the very survival of the communist regimes. The puzzle therefore is not only why the size of security agencies diverged, but why some governments reduced capacity – and maintained it at relatively low levels – while risking political instability not witnessed in neighboring countries with larger coercive institutions.

1.3 Elite Cohesion and Coercive Capacity

The striking, puzzling divergence in coercive agency size and capacity that emerged across communist Central and Eastern Europe was caused by breakdowns in *elite cohesion*, the ability of ruling coalitions to collectively monitor and control the actors in charge of their secret police.[25] Elite cohesion in these regimes was subject to a dramatic and unanticipated shock when the Soviet dictator Josef Stalin – whose policies and style of governance served as a model across the region – died in March 1953. In Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, Stalin's death triggered transitions from Stalinist to post-Stalinist ruling coalitions. Incumbent party leaders, their elite allies, and their policies were suddenly cast into disrepute and replaced. Post-Stalinist transitions caused breakdowns in elite cohesion by disrupting adherence to collective norms around the use of coercion and violence among ruling elites. This disruption led to distrust of coercive subordinates and measures to reduce the capacity of coercive institutions in those states that experienced a post-Stalinist transition.

Ruling elites' ability to coalesce around a common strategy for the use and management of violence is central to authoritarian politics because autocratic regimes – even when highly ideological and institutionalized like in communist Central and Eastern Europe – are not monolithic. Incumbent dictators, however powerful, cannot rule alone. They rely on the cooperation and assistance of a broader ruling coalition such as leaders of a political party, Politburo, royal family, military *junta*, or cabinet. However, individual members of the coalition have selfish interests that diverge from those of the group. They might favor

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[25] Levitsky and Way (2012) define elite cohesion as "rulers' ability to maintain the loyalty and cooperation of allies within the regime." My definition of elite cohesion is somewhat narrower: because I argue that loyalty and cooperation are generated by the suppression of dissent through coercion, I focus on the use and control of violence.

parochial regional, ethnic, or personal connections; or simply want to minimize their own contributions while extracting as many benefits as possible from the regime. These rebel elites will undermine or exploit collective governance efforts in pursuit of self-serving interests. They could even stage a coup against the incumbent dictator rather than cooperate with loyal members of the ruling coalition.

Insubordination by rebellious elites and uprisings by the masses threaten the viability of authoritarian regimes. The solution to these threats is coercion: The prospect and use of physical force to ensure compliance with the directives of the ruler. However, this policy requires elites to delegate surveillance and punishment – both of other elites and the mass population – to a special class of subordinates: coercive agents. Coercive agents stand apart from other elites because they have the ability to threaten and use violence, and to gather information to justify punishment. They lead institutions such as the military, state security or secret police agencies, and use the capabilities of those institutions to deter defection by rebel elites and prevent mass social disorder. The secret police agencies of socialist Central and Eastern Europe described above are canonical examples of coercive institutions. Led by members of the communist elite, these agencies – along with the People's Armies and sometimes Soviet forces – were instrumental in eliminating opposition to the dominant parties' ruling coalitions. In the early years of these regimes, this involved repression of social democrats and members of rival factions within communist parties, and large-scale arrests of real and suspected political opponents, foreign spies, or saboteurs. After the mid-1950s, levels of violent repression declined across the region and the scope of institutions' activities diverged. However, their core goal of preventing elite rebellion and suppressing mass social disorder remained the same.

The recruitment of coercive agents like secret police chiefs or Ministers of Defense by incumbent elites immediately presents the problem at the core of authoritarian politics. Without a popular mandate or a third party to enforce agreements, and with only weak prohibitions on the use of force, violence is the ultimate arbiter of power under autocracy. Coercive agents are autocrats' violence specialists, hold significant political power, and therefore pose an inherent threat to the position of incumbent leaders. Careful selection of these agents or sophisticated monitoring and punishment mechanisms are not guarantees against insubordination because they are not backed by force. The delegation of

violence to coercive agents induces an acute principal-agent problem for members of the ruling coalition, creates an inescapable threat to their masters and peers, and fuels an environment of suspicion and fear that can undermine collective governance and escalate into elite disorder.

To illustrate the problem of delegating violence within authoritarian regimes, consider Mieczysław Moczar, Polish Minister of the Interior in charge of the feared Bezpieka from 1964 to 1968. Moczar was a prominent figure in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) dictatorship. He was also the former leader of a communist partisan group that had opposed the Nazis in the marshes of Eastern Poland during the Second World War. Under the PZPR regime, he led a large and influential association of military veterans and fellow partisans. He distinguished himself as a hard-line nationalist who led an anti-Semitic party purge and violently crushed student protests in 1968. Working within the Bezpieka before becoming minister, Moczar assembled a faction of loyal security and military elites. With their support, he opposed party leader Władysław Gomułka, a post-Stalinist reformer who himself had been arrested and interrogated by the secret police in the early days of the communist regime. In a lengthy intraparty power struggle, Moczar unsuccessfully attempted to wrest power from Gomułka in 1968, and again from his successor, Edward Gierek, in 1971. Ultimately defeated, the former secret police chief's power waned. He and dozens of allies were purged from influential positions within the party and Ministry of the Interior.[26] Moczar's use of his position to construct an opposition faction among security elites and his dogged attempts to seize the party leadership powerfully illustrate the dangers coercive agents can pose to incumbent dictators.

Challenges by a powerful coercive agent like Moczar are the stuff of dictators' nightmares. But not all coercive agents betray their autocratic principals. Consider the Pole's counterpart in the neighboring German Democratic Republic, Erich Mielke. Mielke was head of the infamous Ministry for State Security for over thirty years from 1957–1989. A steadfast servant of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), Mielke had been a zealous communist since his early twenties. He spent almost fifteen years in foreign exile to avoid arrest for the murder

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[26] Bromke (1969, 1971), Laeuen (1972).

of two police officers in Berlin in 1931.[27] He attended party academies in the Soviet Union, witnessing first hand Stalin's Great Terror; served in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War; and spent most of the Second World War in internment camps in southern France before returning to Berlin in June 1945. Mielke then immediately took up key positions in the security services of the nascent socialist regime in East Germany. He would eventually serve all four SED party leaders. Under Mielke's direction, the Stasi grew to be a much larger and more capable agency than Moczar's Bezpieka, with networks of secret informants and surveillance devices reaching into every corner of East German society. However, neither Mielke nor his apparatus ever challenged the predominance of their political masters. Instead, the Stasi's *chekists* – as officers called themselves in reference to Dzerzhinski's Bolshevik secret police – loyally followed their self-proclaimed mission to serve as the "sword and shield" of the party. Indeed, the obedience of Mielke and his agency was so complete that they did not resist the about-face of the SED regime in the Fall of 1989, when the Stasi's tested tactics of repression were disavowed in the face of growing mass opposition that swiftly led to the collapse of the socialist dictatorship.[28]

Mielke and Moczar represent two divergent solutions to dictators' problem of delegating and controlling violence. Mielke's unflinching loyalty despite his leadership of the most powerful state institution in the GDR stands in stark contrast to Moczar's forceful insubordination toward party elites in Poland. Rebellious secret police chiefs like Moczar are unlikely to be delegated significant coercive capacity, and will pursue different strategies of repression to those favored by loyal subordinates like Mielke, who are likely to be granted more resources and independence by their autocratic masters. However, the difference between these two chiefs is also puzzling: What explains why Mielke was loyal while Moczar was disloyal, that is, what causes variation in ruling elites' ability to control coercive agents?

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[27] Mielke was convicted of these murders after German reunification in 1991 and sentenced to six years in prison. He was released on probation in 1995, and was never convicted of any other crimes. He died in 2000 in Berlin-Höhenschönhausen, not far from the notorious prison in which the Soviet army and then the Stasi detained, interrogated and tortured political prisoners from 1945 to 1989 (Otto 2000).

[28] Otto (2000), Gieseke (2006).

The ability of ruling elites to control their coercive agents depends on their cohesion. Because they hold the means of violence, coercive agents escape the authority of any single member of the ruling coalition, including the dictator. Control of these subordinates depends on cooperation by individual members of the coalition to *collectively* monitor and sanction coercive agents. Although coercive agents stand out among elites because of their capabilities in violence and security intelligence, many members of the ruling coalition can contribute to the monitoring and punishment of coercive subordinates. They can observe insubordination by these agents via formal lines of reporting, the state bureaucracy, party institutions, or social networks. Often, multiple coercive agencies coexist under a single regime. They can mobilize force against a rebellious rival. Secret police chiefs' operational discretion or access to information and resources can be curtailed by other members of the ruling coalition. Coercive agents may hold a preponderance of coercive capacity vis-a-vis individual elites, but the ruling coalition as a group holds sufficient means to monitor and punish individual coercive agents who threaten regime stability.

Here, the case Moczar is instructive. The state socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe were highly institutionalized. They had elaborate formal procedures to ensure the subordination of the state security apparatus to the communist party. They were also very ideological. Elites – especially individuals like Moczar who led the secret police – knew each other to be strongly committed to a shared set of ideals and goals. These were inauspicious conditions for insubordination by a coercive agent. Nonetheless, divided Polish elites were unable to prevent repeated attempts by Moczar to seize power when he had the backing of powerful allies within the secret police and the military. As his example illustrates, at the limit, even the most careful selection of, and stringent oversight over, coercive agents cannot restrain them under an authoritarian regime where violence is the ultimate guarantor of power. Instead, the ruling coalition must pool its capabilities and cooperate to monitor and control the activities of coercive agents.

The capacity of the elite to collectively control coercive agents is impossible to observe directly. Cohesive elites deter and prevent challenges: Effective control of coercive agents is evident in the *absence* of insubordination. Observable dynamics within authoritarian ruling coalitions provide suggestive evidence of how the elite can collectively contain threatening actors, however. To return to the Moczar case,

through the 1960s the Polish secret police chief accumulated enough power to have critics within the Politburo purged and to openly challenge the party leadership. His Bezpieka violently repressed students and workers in defiance of the Minister of Defense. Party and military elites were sufficiently alarmed by his insubordination to form a coalition that worked inconspicuously against Moczar. The secret police chief's allies were steadily demoted and replaced, especially within the military. His public statements were met with silence or contradiction by leading party figures. He was excluded from important party meetings, public events, and state visits abroad. Eventually, Moczar was stripped of his key responsibilities in the security and defense establishment, and shifted to an inconsequential administrative role within the party. Despite the former secret police chief's control of, and support from, coercive institutions, a coalition of party and military leaders was able to contain him and, eventually, "whoever held the party apparatus in their hands ... was stronger" (Laeuen, 1972, 38).

Elite cohesion and control of coercive agents emerge as the solution to a coordination problem. They are facilitated by institutions, broadly conceived to include formal and informal rules, norms, and decision-making procedures.[29] Members of the ruling coalition are all better off if they coalesce to deter insubordination by coercive agents, and these subordinates' threats can only be contained through cooperation among elites. However, individual incentives to neglect the task of threat containment, or ally with rebellious coercive agents – combined with uncertainty about the course fellow coalition members will follow – make elite cohesion elusive. Indeed, as the example of Moczar illustrates, even a coalition of powerful elites can move only slowly, covertly, and uncertainly to thwart the threat of a potent and rebellious coercive agent. Formal and informal institutions provide focal points for cooperation by the ruling coalition, undergird elite cohesion, and determine their ability to control the specialists in violence to whom they delegate coercive capacity.

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[29] Unlike Levitsky and Way (2012) and Lachapelle et al. (2020), I argue that elite cohesion within ruling parties can be generated not only by violent, revolutionary struggle but can be imposed on ruling coalitions by powerful external actors and sustained by local elites even after these powerful allies' influence is reduced.

Stalinism was a set of political, economic, and social structures that emerged in the Soviet Union beginning with the First Five Year Plan, 1928–1932 (Fitzpatrick, 1986, 357). It formed the institutional basis of elite cohesion in communist Central and Eastern Europe until 1953. Stalinism restructured the USSR's economy through the rapid development of heavy industry and resulting neglect of consumer goods production; and through the collectivization of agriculture and resulting food shortages and famine. It restructured the state along totalitarian lines by subordinating it to the Communist Party and incorporating all independent civil society organizations within the party-state. Soviet society was transformed by the Stalinist project because it plunged many into extreme poverty and eliminated whole social groups such as independent "Kulak" farmers, small business owners, artisans, and the traditional or "bourgeois" intelligentsia. It created a new system of privilege and a new ruling class. The Soviet Union's leaders were party-state elites or *nomenklatura*, overachieving Stakhanovite industrial workers, and technical experts such as agronomists managing collective farms, for example. Stalinism was enforced through violence coordinated and committed by the large and powerful secret police, resulting in purges of the party and state bureaucracy, and terror against the population at large.[30]

Stalinism was exported to the postwar regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. Party elites who had come of age as revolutionary communists, suffered repression for the cause, and spent the 1930s and Second World War in the Soviet Union were impressed by, and indoctrinated with, Stalinist ideals. They had witnessed first hand the rapid changes wrought upon the USSR by Stalin's policies, the violent consequences for those perceived as obstacles to the Stalinist project, and in many cases attended party schools and training courses where they were instructed in the merits and methods of Stalinist rule. Stalinism therefore arrived in Central and Eastern Europe with the first generation of postwar communist leaders as a fully formed, "ready to wear" set of normative and institutional structures of authoritarian rule, or even more broadly as a radical, "civilizational" vision.[31] It was encouraged and enforced at the barrel of a gun by the Red Army and

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[30] See, for example, Conquest (1985, 1990), Fitzpatrick (1986, 1999), Service (2005).

[31] Kemp-Welch (1999, 3), Kotkin (1995), Tismaneanu (2009, 3–4).

NKVD who ensured that communist parties and their leaders attained power to pursue their Stalinist goals.[32] There were significant differences in timing and emphasis – there was no single Stalinist master plan applied to every regime in the region. However, the core Stalinist policies were followed everywhere: a fusion of party-state institutions; central control of the economy through nationalization and five-year plans; investment in heavy industry; agricultural collectivization; and harsh repression of opponents by a powerful secret police force. In the Central and European dictatorships, these policies were merged – in the age of "high Stalinism" through 1953 – with cults of personality around communist party leaders, or "little Stalins" (Apor et al., 2004).

Formal and informal institutions enable coordination among elites. Breakdowns in elite cohesion lead to sanctions of coercive agents that reduce coercive capacity. When ruling coalitions' collective monitoring and punishment mechanisms are strong, elites deter insubordination by coercive agents. Cohesive elites seldom have to make good on threats to bring their secret police chiefs to heel through sanctions. When cohesion breaks down, cooperative equilibria among elites are disrupted, insubordination cannot be deterred and rebellious subordinates are subject to disciplinary measures. Elites' sanctions of coercive agents directly impinge on their ability to do their jobs. They restrict their operational autonomy or access to information or resources. Breakdowns in elite cohesion lead to greater sanctioning of coercive agents, and therefore to reduced coercive capacity.

The death of Josef Stalin in March 1953 was a shock to ruling communist coalitions across Central and Eastern Europe. In some states, it caused a post-Stalinist transition and deep breakdown in elite cohesion. Soviet authority over the governments of the region and preferences for Stalinist policies were immediately called into question. Communist party leaders, who were closely associated with Stalinism, were threatened by rival factions that emerged within their ruling coalitions. Mass unrest spread from Bulgaria to Czechoslovakia and East Germany, escalating along the way. Four regimes experienced a post-Stalinist transition – a change in the individual leader of the ruling communist party during the period of upheaval between Stalin's death and the Soviet removal of the revolutionary Hungarian government in

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[32] Naimark and Gibianskii (1997), Naimark (2010), Tismaneanu (2009).

November 1956. In the GDR and Romania, however, Stalinist leaders Walter Ulbricht and Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej survived to reassert themselves and their policies over intraelite challengers. Post-Stalinist transitions were associated with repudiations of previous leaders' policies and broader purges of party elites. They caused breakdowns in ruling coalition members' ability to collectively monitor and sanction coercive agents, and these breakdowns in elite cohesion led to lasting reductions in coercive capacity. Where Stalinist leaders endured, on the other hand, breakdowns in elite cohesion were not as acute and coercive capacity continued to grow after 1953.

Poland and the GDR clearly illustrate the divergence in elite cohesion and coercive capacity across regimes after 1953. In Poland, the post-Stalinist transition occurred in 1956 when the hard-line party leader Bolesław Bierut died suddenly and was replaced by Władysław Gomułka. Gomułka was an ardent opponent of Stalinism. For this reason, he had himself been imprisoned by the secret police in the late 1940s. Although Gomułka recognized the vital role of the Bezpieka in ensuring regime stability, he and the broader ruling coalition were very distrustful of the agency. Its staff and employee numbers were dramatically reduced from their pre-1953 levels, its independence within the state bureaucracy was curtailed and, until the rise of Moczar, party functionaries with no prior experience in political policing were put in charge. These moves thwarted the independence and capacity of the Bezpieka. They came on the heels of a major disruption to leading personnel and deterioration of mass attitudes toward the agency. But they did not bring the institution under control: Polish post-Stalinist party elites could not coalesce around a clear repressive policy. Insubordination by senior Bezpieka personnel such as Moczar continued. It had to be addressed by further measures that reduced the capacity of the state security agency. Indeed, the size and capacity of the Bezpieka stagnated – despite the mass unrest that repeatedly rocked the Polish dictatorship through the late 1960s and 1970s – until the agency came under the control of the military after General Wojciech Jaruzelski became leader of the PZPR regime in 1980.

In the GDR, leader Walter Ulbricht narrowly avoided losing power and there was no post-Stalinist transition. To be sure, Ulbricht's position was severely threatened after a nationwide revolutionary uprising on June 17, 1953. But he was saved by a mercy dash to Moscow and a move to support him by the Soviet elite. After June

17, Ulbricht immediately replaced his Stasi chief, demoted the agency
within the state bureaucracy, and curtailed the most violent repres-
sion. Nonetheless, he retained his Stalinist policy commitments and
reinforced his hard-line coalition within the Politburo. By 1955, the
Stasi was restored to its status as an independent Ministry and two
years later, Ulbricht promoted his long-time ally and experienced po-
litical policeman, Erich Mielke, to Minister for State Security. There
was never a full reckoning with, or repudiation of, the violent Stalinist
repression of the early 1950s in East Germany. Instead, a consensus
prevailed among the party elite that pervasive surveillance and a large
Stasi officer corps were essential to the stability of the regime. This
cohesion among the party elite was associated with dramatic growth
of the East German coercive apparatus under Mielke's loyal leadership
through the end of the regime.

   Shocks to elite cohesion caused by the fall of Stalinist leaders proved
difficult to reverse. Achieving durable cooperation, monitoring, and
control of coercive agents is very challenging. New, post-Stalinist rul-
ing coalitions emerged, and they did not engage in the same violent
intraelite struggles that characterized the early years of communist
rule in Central and Eastern Europe. But they proved unable to collec-
tively control their coercive agents. Without the backing of the USSR
or the clear precepts of Stalinism as a guide, post-Stalinist elites re-
duced the size and capacity of their coercive agencies, accepting greater
risks of social disorder in the bargain. Nationwide insurrections like
those seen in Poland repeatedly in the 1970s were not the norm. How-
ever, the post-Stalinist transition in Hungary led to sweeping reforms of
the coercive apparatus, the 1956 revolution, and permanently reduced
coercive capacity. In Czechoslovakia a relatively incapable security ser-
vice allowed a network of dissident organizations to emerge in the
1960s–1970s, as we have seen.

   The core of the argument laid out above – and in greater detail in
Chapter 2 – is summarized in Table 1.2. Before Stalin's death in 1953,
patterns of elite cohesion, coercive capacity, and social order were very
similar across communist Central and Eastern Europe. Cooperation
among elites was bolstered by the external authority of the USSR and
Stalinist institutions, both formal and informal. After 1953, the author-
ity of the Soviet Union declined significantly across the region, though
of course there was variation in this decline. East Germany and Poland
retained outsized strategic importance in the Soviets' confrontation

Table 1.2 *Summarizing the argument*

| | Pre-1953 | Post-1953 | |
	Stalinist coalition	Stalinist coalition	Post-Stalinist coalition
Soviet authority	●	○	○
Elite cohesion	●	●	○
Coercive capacity	●	●	○
Social order	●	●	○

Filled circles indicate positive values; hollow circles indicate negative values.
Post-1953 Stalinist coalitions: East Germany, Romania. Post-Stalinist coalitions:
Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland.

with the West, and both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were occupied by USSR forces in 1956 and 1968, respectively. Nonetheless, Soviet authority was not the sole determinant of elite cohesion and coercive capacity: After the retreat of Soviet influence beginning in 1953, cohesion persisted and coercive capacity was maintained where Stalinist leaders and their ruling coalitions retained power. Where Stalinists fell, elite cohesion suffered and coercive capacity was truncated. Remarkably, and with only the partial exception of Poland under military rule after 1980, coercive capacity was not rebuilt in the three decades until 1989 where the shock of Stalin's death removed Stalinist ruling coalitions.

1.4 Previous Explanations

Coercive institutions have long played a central role in theories of authoritarian rule. Early analyses of the socialist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe characterized them as totalitarian, an entirely new form of authoritarian regime also encompassing the fascist dictatorships of Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy.[33] Coercion played a central role in these regimes, in the form of the "terror" that gripped

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[33] Previous analyses of terror under the Communist regime in the Soviet Union informed these analyses, for example that by Moore (1954, 154–178). Arguments linking fascist and socialist dictatorships had been made earlier by Hayek (1944) and Popper (1945), for example.

the region immediately after the war. For Friedrich and Brzezinski (1965, 172–182), the use of the secret police was a constitutive element of totalitarianism because these governments perpetually perceived new, threatening groups deserving of persecution or elimination. Theorizing totalitarianism based on the experience of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Arendt (1966, 420) argued that the secret police were "the power nucleus of the country" under these regimes. This was justified by ruling parties' ambitions of universal domination, which could not be realized through the military. Unlike the army, with its traditional remit of international warfare, secret police forces are more amenable to influence by elite cadres of totalitarian parties. They can be used to continually invent and persecute "objective enemies" both domestic and foreign.

These first analyses of totalitarianism correctly highlighted the violence and power of coercive institutions under these regimes. However, writing in the 1950s and 1960s from the western side of the Iron Curtain, these authors could not accurately perceive differences among, and changes within, the coercive institutions of totalitarian Central and Eastern Europe that I examine here. Their theories are therefore relatively static, only hinting at the significant changes that began in the mid-1950s and were not clearly apparent to observers outside the agencies and ruling elites in the region.

Problems acquiring accurate data on the socialist secret police agencies also hampered subsequent studies of these institutions during the Cold War. Dallin and Breslauer (1970) developed a functional theory of "political terror" under Communist dictatorships.[34] Here, the regime uses coercion to address threats and carry out tasks which vary through a life cycle of political development. Therefore, repression varies from the "takeover" phase, when the regime has the primary goal of eliminating powerful adversaries to ensure its own survival; through the "mobilization" phases, when the regime is attempting to control society and achieve industrialization and agricultural collectivization, or transform society through projects such as Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution; to the "postmobilization" phase, when the regime aims primarily to maintain the status quo.

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[34] It is worth noting that the ideas expounded by Dallin and Breslauer (1970) echo Arendt's (1966, 421–423) earlier, but brief discussion of stages in the development of totalitarian secret police.

An analytical lens built on this life cycle of political development and repression was applied to the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe, generating the most significant scholarly insights into their coercive institutions before the fall of the Berlin Wall.[35] Many of these insights remain valid despite recent strides in archival research on the secret police forces of the region. The distinction between what I refer to as a Stalinist regime of repression – the takeover and mobilization phases in the Dallin and Breslauer (1970) framework – and post-Stalinist regimes of repression – or the post-mobilization phase – is important and informs my argument in this book. However, developments in agency size and activities I describe above remain puzzling in light of this earlier theorizing. The universal life cycle of political development and repression approximates the developments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, but not in East Germany and Romania, which never entered the postmobilization phase.[36] Because the life cycle framework stipulates that phases of political development determine coercive agency size and repressive activities, but does not clarify the origins or timing of each phase, this approach struggles to explain the divergent trajectories of the agencies across the region after the mid-1950s.

More recently, the burgeoning political science literature on authoritarian politics has turned its attention to coercive institutions.[37] Most analysts take the problem of delegating violence as their starting point, as I do. Endowing actors with coercive capacity creates a potentially dangerous power center at the heart of the regime. Explanations of variation in coercive institution design, size, and activities revolve around two primary factors. The first is the nature and magnitude of

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[35] Dallin and Breslauer (1970), Adelman (1984, 1991).

[36] Indeed, this was noted in the Romanian case by Bacon (1984), which illustrates that significant insights into these coercive agencies were possible before access to archival sources was available. Specific data, for example on the number of employees or secret informants employed by each agency, were not reliable, however. See, for example, the estimates of the size of the Czechoslovak StB in Rice (1984), which diverge significantly from data collected by researchers in the archives after 1989.

[37] Theories of authoritarian politics such as those by Wintrobe (1998), Boix (2003), Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), and Svolik (2012b) all include a role for repression and coercive institutions. However, I discuss studies focused explicitly on these institutions, rather than general theories of authoritarian rule.

political *threats* to the dictator. Svolik (2012a), for example, argues that the type of repression implemented by an autocrat – specifically the role of the military versus other agencies of repression – is determined by the magnitude of mass, organized, and potentially violent opposition facing them. The greater this threat, the more influence and autonomy granted to the military. However, this approach sheds only limited light on the Central and Eastern European cases I explore here. As discussed above, mass opposition to these regimes after the mid-1950s was most pronounced in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland where the coercive agencies were relatively small. In Poland, the threat of the independent Solidarity trade union movement did lead to a significant militarization of the regime under General Wojciech Jaruzelski after 1980 (Kemp-Welch, 2008, 302–331). A decisive reduction in the size of the Bezpieka came in the 1950s and persisted despite significant mass unrest from the late 1960s. Militarization under Jaruzelski came later and brought increased investment in the Bezpieka rather than its subordination to the army (Dudek and Paczkowski, 2009). Other shifts toward smaller coercive institutions also cannot be explained as a response to growing mass threats and a decision to rely more on the military as a means of authoritarian control. Almost all states in the region experienced significant mass opposition in the mid-1950s, but only half responded by reducing the size of their secret police agencies. In East Germany, for example, a revolutionary uprising in 1953 led the regime to increase the size and capacity of the Stasi rather than lean more on the military for repression (Thomson, 2017).

Chestnut Greitens (2016) also argues that threats to authoritarian regimes determine the shape of their coercive institutions. When faced with greater challenges from within the elite, dictators will create multiple overlapping security agencies with personnel drawn from a narrow group of trusted insiders. These fragmented, socially exclusive agencies commit greater, less-discriminate violence against civilians. When popular threats are dominant, dictators will create unified agencies with personnel more representative of the population at large. These agencies tend to generate less violence. Following this logic, we would expect to see severe cases of subordination by coercive agency chiefs such as Mieczysław Moczar in Poland lead to the creation of multiple coercive institutions and rivalries among them. However, in all of the cases examined here, there was only one predominant

coercive agency for the duration of the dictatorship. In addition, we should see instances of mass unrest lead to greater recruitment of staff and informants broadly representative of the population at large. However, as discussed above, major instances of popular opposition only led to these outcomes in some cases, most notably East Germany. In Romania, a very large network of informants was recruited despite a lack of popular mobilization against the regime, while in Poland the informant network was not restored after its collapse in the mid-1950s despite significant mass opposition to the government. In sum, explanations of coercive institution design and activities rooted in threats to authoritarian regimes cannot explain the dynamics of the Central and Eastern European secret police agencies explored in this book.

The second factor central to previous explanations of coercive institutional design is the problem of *monitoring* coercive agents. Dictators are unable to perfectly observe and control the behavior of those whom they entrust with the task of repressing political opposition. Policzer (2009), for example, argues that different approaches to this problem lead to variation in the type and extent of repression implemented by autocrats. Regimes that rely more on internal monitoring implement "bureaucratic coercion" that is more widespread and violent than "transparent coercion" under the watch of external monitors. As fruitful as this theory is for explaining Latin American cases, it does not go as far in helping us understand dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe. These regimes relied primarily on monitoring by the coercive agencies themselves and the party bureaucracy. Variation in the size and activities of these coercive institutions is not associated with comparable shifts in monitoring mechanisms. In addition, there is little evidence that external monitoring led to an abatement in the level or extent of repression under these regimes. Some scholars have pointed to human rights commitments under the 1975 Helsinki Final Act as an important driver of political change and democratization in the region (Thomas, 2005). However, this occurred through normative change driven by domestic dissidents, not monitoring of the secret police by external actors. There is little evidence of more than cosmetic changes in regimes' repressive activity in response to the Helsinki Accords.

A large and growing historical literature on the communist secret police in Central and Eastern Europe complements social scientists' attempts to explain variation in these institutions. This study would not have been possible without the utilizing data generated by decades

of painstaking research in the declassified archives of the coercive agencies. Historians, in general, have different goals than scholars of authoritarian politics. They aim not only to explain the development of the communist secret police agencies, but also to understand and reappraise agencies' roles in their respective nations' troubled histories of authoritarian rule.[38] Although many historians are informed by, and work with, broader theories of totalitarianism, Sovietology or social history, their primary goal is not to develop universally applicable explanations of coercive institutions.[39] This is reflected in their methodology, which almost always restricts analysis to a single agency and often to one agency in a single time period.[40] When analyzing cases individually, historians can only assess how a single coercive institution changed through time – growing larger or smaller, or more or less violent, for example. Although details of related events such as changes in the party leadership can be explored, claims about cause and effect are impossible without comparison across cases. Furthermore, analysis of a single case overlooks factors that influenced all communist regimes in the region and their coercive institutions – for example, changes in Soviet policy or in dynamics of the Cold War rivalry between the USSR and United States. My comparative study across cases therefore leads to significant novel insights into the causes of variation in coercive institutions that have not been previously explored by historians.

1.5 A Multi Method Difference-in-Differences Research Design

In this book, I make significant contributions to both our theoretical and empirical understandings of intraelite politics and coercion under

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[38] This is illustrated by the name of the German federal agency tasked with historical research on the GDR, the *Bundesstiftung aur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*, literally "Federal Foundation for Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship."

[39] See, for example, Gieseke (2000, 11–48), Hrubý (2017).

[40] Some comparative insights can be gleaned from historical volumes combining several single case studies by different country experts, such as Kamiński, Persak, and Gieseke (2009), McDermott and Stibbe (2010), and Gyarmati and Palasik (2017a). However, these insights are implicit and it is rare for historians to consider more than one case at a time. Pucci (2020) is exceptional in her recent comparative account of the early years of the East German, Czechoslovak, and Polish secret police agencies. Dimitrov (2023) is an excellent comparative study of the Bulgarian and Chinese coercive institutions.

authoritarian regimes. The theoretical and empirical innovations of the project go hand in hand. My novel account of elite cohesion and coercive capacity summarized above is motivated by puzzling empirical variation in the size and activities of the communist secret police agencies in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. I test this theoretical argument by integrating qualitative and quantitative data in a novel research design based on the well-known difference-in-differences framework. Because this empirical analysis allows me to make very credible claims about the causal effect of shocks to elite cohesion on coercive capacity, it buttresses my theoretical contention that elite cohesion – rather than other factors such as political threats – determines the regime of repression imposed by authoritarian regimes.

The book follows a novel, integrated multimethod difference-in-differences research design combining several complementary analyses to support a small number of causal inferences.[41] At its core is a counterfactual causal logic asserting that post-Stalinist transitions produced reductions in coercive capacity, because if they had not occurred capacity would have followed a similar trajectory to that seen in countries which did not actually see transitions.[42] Simply put, if elite cohesion in the GDR and Romania had suffered the same kind of shock as that experienced elsewhere during the post-Stalinist period, the capacity of these regimes' coercive institutions would have been reduced in line with that of other states in the region.

My counterfactual causal claims are supported, firstly, by a strategy of controlling for confounding factors. The regimes selected for comparison here shared wide-ranging similarities, which I discussed in more detail above. If the only feature distinguishing the cases in which coercive capacity declined from those in which it did not is the experience of a post-Stalinist transition, we can be relatively certain that transitions are the cause of these declines, following Mill's Method of Difference or the logic of a "most similar systems" research design. This is a straightforward way of approximating an experimental ideal by controlling for confounding factors through

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[41] See, for example, Seawright (2016) and Beach (2020).
[42] This counterfactual understanding of causality is due to King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) and Angrist and Pischke (2009), for example.

careful case selection and comparison, and is the method underlying all comparative political analysis.[43]

I take the counterfactual causal reasoning a step further and improve upon careful case selection and control. The most similar systems logic is integrated within a difference-in-differences research design that explicitly leverages variation in outcomes not only across cases, but also *through time* to identify the effect of post-Stalinist transitions on coercive capacity. One important assumption that underlies the difference-in-differences research design is that of parallel trends. Outcomes – in this case, coercive capacity – are similar for treated and nontreated cases – in this case, for those states that experienced post-Stalinist transitions and those that didn't – before the treatment occurs. From my discussion of variation in coercive capacity in socialist Central and Eastern Europe above, readers will recall that security agency size was developing very similarly in all states before Stalin's death in 1953. These trends are illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 above, and assessed quantitatively in Figure 8.3 in Chapter 8. Coercive capacity was reduced in the group of states that experienced a post-Stalinist transition only *after* 1953. This strengthens my claim that post-Stalinist transitions caused variation in coercive capacity. Similar trends across the two groups before 1953 would plausibly have continued if the causal treatment of a post-Stalinist transition did not occur.[44]

Moreover, post-Stalinist transitions occurred randomly across cases, further strengthening my research design by making it approximate a natural experiment (Dunning, 2012). My research design might fail to account for important confounding factors that affected the size of coercive agencies, such as historical legacies of prewar institutions. Alternatively, some unobserved factor could have caused countries to experience post-Stalinist transitions, such as an inherent weakness in their ruling coalitions. The occurrence of post-Stalinist transitions might have been determined by the size of the coercive apparatus. Natural experiments avoid these pitfalls in research design by allowing us to compare outcomes across a treatment and control group – here,

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[43] See, for example, Mill (2012 [1843], Book VI, Chapter VII), Przeworski and Teune (1970, 32–34), and Lijphart (1971). In fact, the socialist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe are suggested as particularly promising cases for comparative qualitative research by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 126–128).

[44] See, for example, Angrist and Pischke (2009, 227–233).

the group of cases experiencing a post-Stalinist transition and those cases that did not – where the treatment is as good as randomly assigned, even if this randomization process is not controlled by the researcher. Stalin's death in March 1953 was an unexpected shock to the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, setting in motion complex political dynamics that in four out of six cases generated a transition to a post-Stalinist leader. However, the outcome of the post-Stalinist upheaval in each country had little to do with pre-1953 political dynamics and contained a considerable random component. It can therefore be considered a natural experiment, when the researcher does not have control over treatment as in a true experiment, but causes are as good as randomly distributed across cases.

Difference-in-differences research designs are most commonly implemented using quantitative data. Part III of the book follows this well-known model, estimating differences in secret police chief tenures and agency size across groups before and after Stalin's death using regression models including country and year fixed effects. The analyses in this part of the book test two different mechanisms or links in the causal chain between elite cohesion and coercive capacity. In Chapter 7, I assess the effect of breakdowns in elite cohesion on the use of sanctions against coercive agents. I test whether post-Stalinist transitions caused secret police chiefs to be replaced more frequently than Ministers of Defense. In Chapter 8, I assess the effect of breakdowns in elite cohesion on coercive capacity. I test whether post-Stalinist transitions caused reductions in the number of full-time officers and secret informants employed by secret police agencies.

More innovatively, Part II incorporates comparative historical analyses of Poland and the GDR within the difference-in-differences framework. Like difference-in-differences studies, comparative historical analysis is typically concerned with demonstrating causality and explaining changes in outcomes through time (Rueschmeyer and Mahoney, 2003, 6). Unlike typical difference-in-differences studies, which carefully test causal relationships at the individual or subnational level, comparative historical analysis is traditionally concerned with large-scale outcomes such as democratic transitions or revolutions (Mahoney and Thelen, 2015, 5). Here, I use comparative historical analyses to demonstrate a causal relationship between elite cohesion and coercive capacity and to tease out the causal mechanisms linking cause and effect. I also use the qualitative analysis to test key assumptions underlying the quantitative difference-in-differences models.

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies complement one another when integrated within an overarching research design in this way, allowing for convincing causal analysis of macro-level phenomena.

Poland and the GDR were selected for comparative historical analysis in Part II because they are comparable treated and untreated cases, respectively. Polish elites were rocked by a post-Stalinist transition when Bolesław Bierut was replaced by Władysław Gomułka in 1956, while East Germany's government remained under the control of Walter Ulbricht and his Stalinist allies despite a nationwide uprising in 1953. However, the qualitative case studies also follow a difference-in-differences logic. They are each disaggregated temporally into periods before and after 1953, allowing us to examine dynamics in elite cohesion and coercive capacity explicitly across pre- and posttreatment periods. The case studies use detailed qualitative evidence to test the parallel trends assumption: that the causal variable – elite cohesion, or collective adherence to norms governing the use of violence – and my outcome variable – the capacity of coercive institutions – were on similar trajectories in both cases before Stalin's death. They can alleviate concerns that coercive capacity might have started to change in post-Stalinist cases before the shock of 1953. The historical accounts of these cases also demonstrate that the treatment of a post-Stalinist transition was highly contingent and occurred as-if randomly, rather than being determined by a confounding factor that also affected coercive capacity, some underlying feature of each regime, or by the size of the coercive apparatus itself. Comparative historical analysis, a compelling research design in itself, plays an important secondary role here by helping to test assumptions underlying the difference-in-differences analyses in Part III.

The quantitative difference-in-differences and qualitative comparative historical analyses here also complement each other in several other ways. The quantitative models relatively precisely estimate the effect of post-Stalinist transitions on the number of officers and informants employed by each agency. They allow me to assess average changes across all six cases included in this study that would be difficult to assess qualitatively. However, these quantitative estimates are fleshed out by the qualitative evidence on Poland and the GDR, which describe in much greater detail how post-Stalinist transitions affected relations among ruling communist elites and how changes in the size of agencies translated into variation in repressive outcomes

on the ground. Finally, comparative historical analysis complements the difference-in-differences framework by adding a keen attention to, and analysis of, the mechanisms linking post-Stalinist transitions to declines in coercive capacity. There is often a tension between qualitative, mechanism-focused, and quantitative, counterfactual-based research. My research design gives equal weighting to both. Quantitative evidence is supplemented by historical case studies that unpack the most theoretically salient elements of the causal process and trace exactly how they worked in Poland and the GDR.

The empirical richness of this study is unlikely to be replicated in other contexts. Details of the structures, leadership, size, and work of the communist state security agencies that I analyze here go well beyond what is typically known about authoritarian coercive institutions, which for obvious reasons are very opaque and difficult to study. The context of Soviet-dominated communist Europe is now, thankfully, a historical artifact, and we cannot extrapolate directly from the phenomena studied here to contemporary developments in the same regimes. Nonetheless, my theoretical argument and empirical findings have general applicability. This is due, not least, to the strength of the empirical research design. By excluding confounding factors and carefully identifying the effects of elite cohesion on coercive capacity, my empirical analyses convincingly support my theoretical argument. This argument, in turn, applies to all authoritarian regimes, where by definition politics hinges on the use and control of violence and shocks to elite cohesion should be expected to have significant effects on coercive capacity. Furthermore, although communist rule in Europe ended in 1989, it continues in cases such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba; and in the various states of the former Soviet Union, coercive institutions are structured very similarly to their former parent agency, the KGB. Dynamics among elites and between them and their coercive agency chiefs in communist and post-Soviet regimes are mostly likely to resemble those studied here and to display similar effects of elite cohesion on coercive capacity.

1.6 Plan of This Book

This book is laid out in three parts. The first comprises this Introduction as well as the theoretical Chapter 2. Here, I lay out the book's argument and give readers a preview of my empirical analysis. Readers

most interested in my explanation of how variation in elite cohesion causes variation in coercive capacity and social order can focus their attention on Part I of the book.

Part II is a comparative historical analysis of the Polish and East German cases. Here, I show in detail how post-Stalinist transitions occurred, and did not occur, in Poland and the GDR, respectively. I also show how these transitions affected the cohesion of communist elites and their ability to construct capable coercive institutions. Finally, I discuss how Polish elites' inability to construct a capable secret police force contributed to endemic social disorder and eventually revolution in that country, while East Germany witnessed diametrically opposed outcomes. This Part of the book will be most useful to readers interested in these specific cases, or in tracing in detail the causal chain leading from post-Stalinist transitions through elite cohesion to declines in coercive capacity.

Part III takes the findings in Part II to the rest of the region. I use quantitative data to test the theoretical argument laid out in Chapter 2. First, I show that post-Stalinist transitions led to more frequent sanctioning of secret police chiefs. Secret police chief tenure under post-Stalinist coalitions was significantly shorter than under Stalinist coalitions. Second, I show that post-Stalinist transitions were associated with persistent stagnation in the capacity of coercive institutions. Under post-Stalinist coalitions, secret police agencies employed significantly fewer full-time officers and secret informants. This Part of the book will be of most interest to readers who want to see the broadest possible test of my theoretical argument, including data from as many cases as possible.

The book concludes with several Appendices. These include detailed descriptions of the institutional development of the secret police agencies analyzed here and their leaders. They also include discussions of data sources and the models used in Part III.