

# Varieties of Dictatorship

There are many different types of dictatorship.

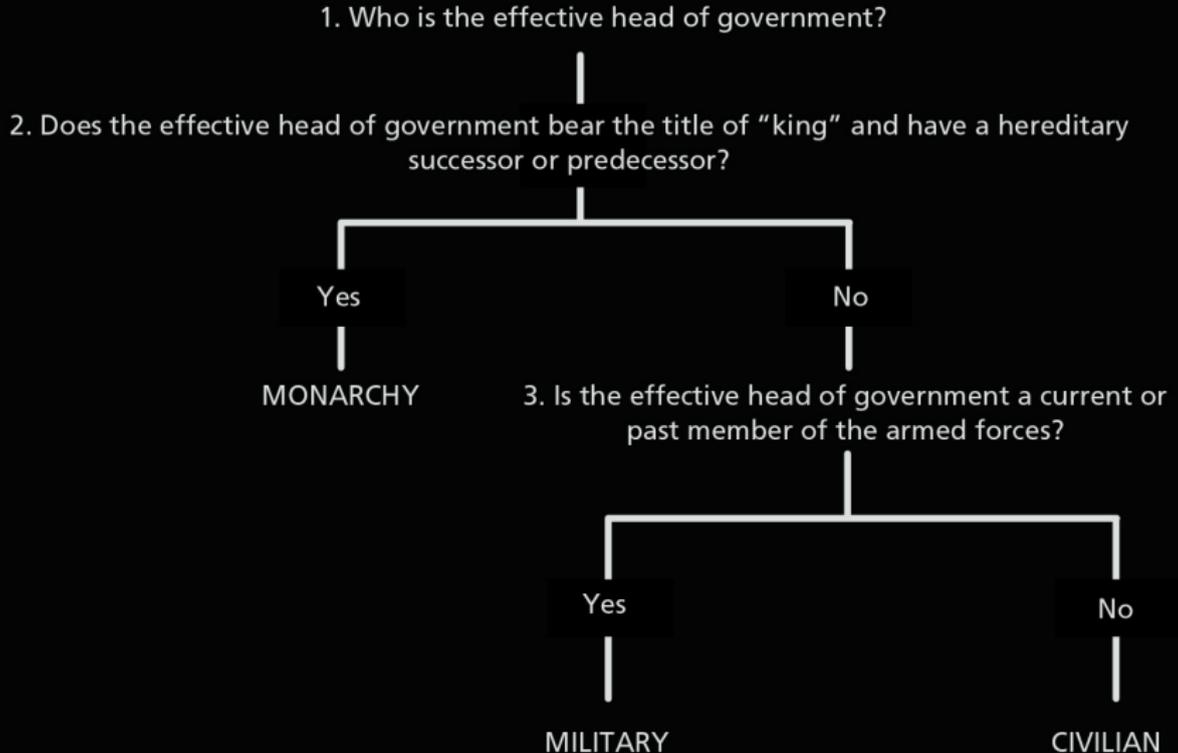
One common typology classifies dictatorships based on the characteristics of their 'inner sanctums' or 'support coalitions.'

## A Three-Way Classification:

1. A **monarchic dictatorship** is an autocracy in which the executive comes to and maintains power on the basis of family and kin networks.
2. A **military dictatorship** is an autocracy in which the executive relies on the armed forces to come to and stay in power.
3. All other autocracies are **civilian dictatorships**.

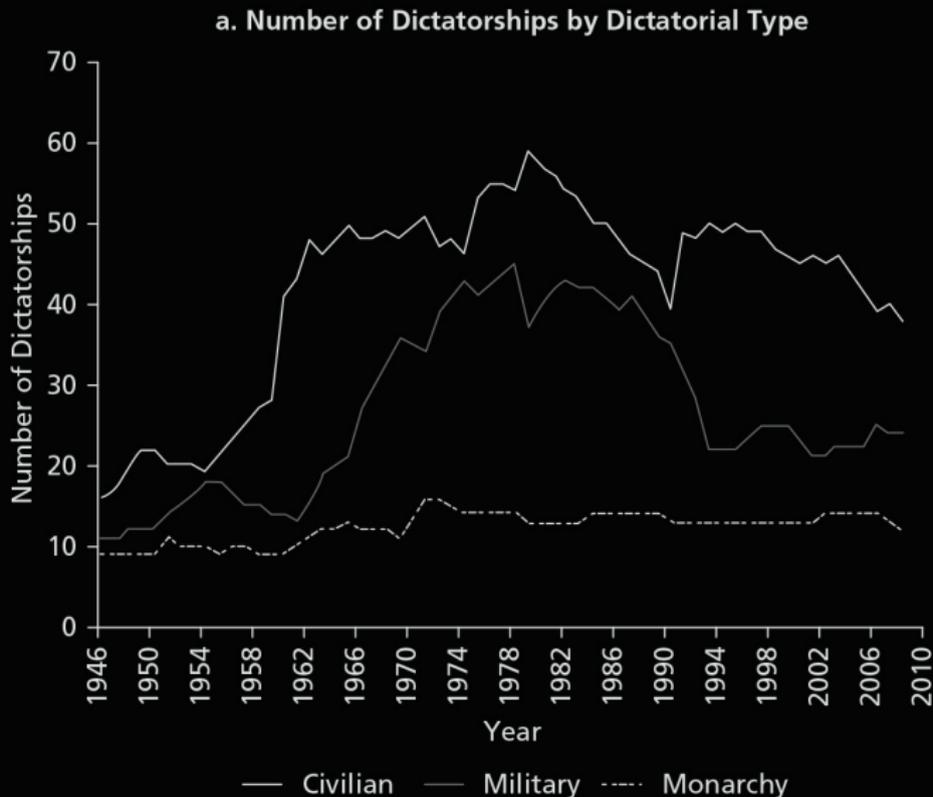
**FIGURE 10.1**

## **Classifying Dictatorships**



**FIGURE 10.2**

## Monarchic, Military, and Civilian Dictatorships, 1946–2008



Dictators need to keep their support coalitions happy to stay in power.

An implication of this is that dictators will be replaced by defecting members of their support coalition.

The persistence of an authoritarian leader's *type* when the particular authoritarian leader is removed is why we often talk of dictatorial *regimes* rather than just dictatorial *leaders*.

**TABLE 10.1****Leader Succession in Three Types of Dictatorial Regime,  
1946–1996**

Type of current dictator	Type of successor				Total
	Monarchy	Military	Civilian	Democrat	
Monarchy	11	6	4	1	22
Military	0	89	38	52	179
Civilian	2	53	103	29	187
Total	13	148	145	82	388

## Monarchic Dictatorships

- Monarchic dictatorships suffer from less violence and political instability than other forms of dictatorship.
- Monarchic leaders survive in office longer than other authoritarian leaders.
- Monarchies have more stable property rights and experience faster economic growth than other types of dictatorships.

Monarchies have developed a political culture where a leader's promise to distribute rents is particularly credible.

- Clear rules on who is an insider and who is an outsider.
- Rules and norms on how rents are to be shared among members of the royal family.
- Institutions to monitor the actions of the ruler and enforce norms regarding the distribution of rents.

## Military Dictatorships

- Military dictatorships tend to have short durations and are more likely to end with negotiations as opposed to violence than other types of authoritarian regime.
- Some evidence that military dictatorships are more likely to leave behind competitive and democratic forms of government than other types of dictatorship.

The value associated with giving up power is considerably higher for military dictatorships than for other forms of dictatorship.

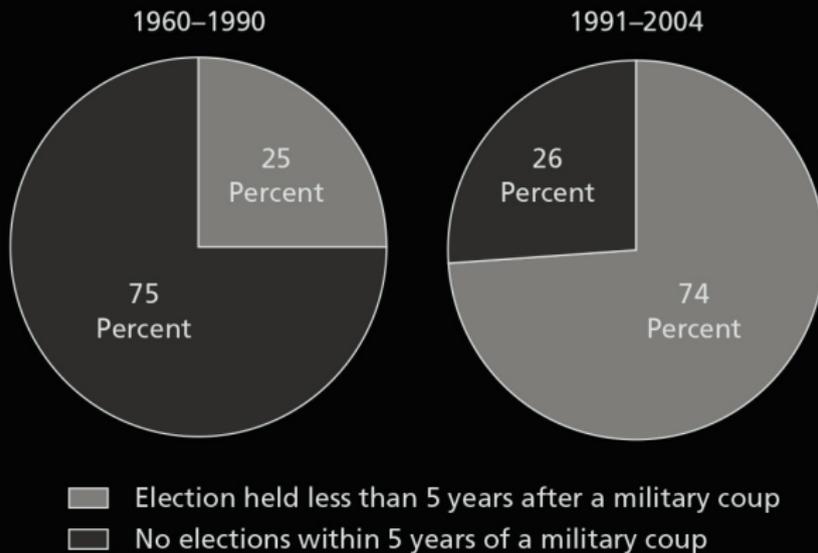
The fact that the military has all the 'guns' means that it retains a credible threat to re-intervene in politics.

The military can give up power safe in the knowledge that whoever wins the elections will still have to take account of its preferences.

In many cases, the military will negotiate the handover of power to make sure that its interests are protected.

**FIGURE 10.3**

**The Timing of Elections after Military Coups**



Unlike monarchic and military dictatorships, **civilian dictatorships** do not have an immediate institutional base of support; instead they have to create one.

Many civilian dictators do this with the help of **regime parties** or **personality cults**.

Two subcategories of civilian dictatorships:

1. A **dominant-party dictatorship** is one in which a single party dominates access to political office and control over policy, though other parties may exist and compete in elections.
2. A **personalistic dictatorship** is one in which the leader, although often supported by a party or military, retains personal control of policy decisions and the selection of regime personnel.

## Dominant-Party Dictatorships

- After authoritarian monarchies, dominant-party dictatorships are the longest-lived dictatorships.
- Majority factions within regime parties tend to try to co-opt minority factions rather than exclude them from power.
- Regime parties often engage in electoral fraud to deter regime party defections and discourage opponents.
- Economic downturns can create problems with stability for dominant-party regimes because they reduce the resources available for buying off potential rivals.

## Personalist Dictatorships

- Personalist dictatorships tend to be characterized by a weak or nonexistent press, a strong secret police, and an arbitrary use of state violence that keeps the population living in fear.
- Many of these dictators cultivate elaborate personality cults in an attempt to maintain the loyalty of their support coalition and the citizenry more generally.



## Kim Jong-il (1994-2011)

- North Korea, Part I, click [▶ here](#)
- North Korea, Part II, click [▶ here](#)
- Cult of Personality I, click [▶ here](#)
- Cult of Personality II, click [▶ here](#)

What role do personality cults play in keeping civilian dictators in power?

- Creations of narcissistic and megalomaniacal leaders who wish to be flattered and deified.
- They create loyal citizenry – ‘true believers’ – by producing false beliefs in the population through state indoctrination.

But . . .

The **dictator's dilemma** is that he relies on repression to stay in power, but this repression creates incentives for everyone to falsify their preferences so that the dictator never knows his true level of societal support.

## Signalling story

- Personality cults can provide a *credible* signal of support.
- The dictator can try to gauge his true support by finding the point at which the population is no longer willing to publicly accept his *incredible* claims.
- Personality cults also make it hard for opposition groups to organize and coordinate their actions.

## Personalist Dictatorships

- The leader's faction frequently keeps tight control over the spoils of office.
- Personalist dictatorships are more likely to end in violence than other types of dictatorship.
- Personalist dictatorships tend to become unstable only when there is an economic catastrophe, when the security apparatus and military defect, or when the leader dies and the system of patronage based around him collapses.

There are **two fundamental problems of authoritarian rule**:

1. The problem of authoritarian power-sharing
2. The problem of authoritarian control

The **problem of authoritarian power-sharing** focuses on intra-elite conflict.

When a dictator first comes to power, there is an agreement on how to share rents among the members of his support coalition.

**But** there is no independent third-party actor to enforce this 'power-sharing' agreement.

The dictator always has an incentive to alter the power-sharing agreement to his benefit.

The only thing stopping the dictator from grabbing more power is the ability of the support coalition to replace him via a coup.

When the threat to remove the dictator is credible, we have a **contested dictatorship** where power is shared between the dictator and his allies.

When the threat to remove the dictator is not credible, we have a **personalist dictatorship** where power lies only in the hands of the dictator.

The support coalition only has **limited information** about whether the dictator is actually violating the power-sharing agreement.

Coups are costly.

The **uncertainty about the dictator's actions and the reluctance of the support coalition to rebel** creates incentives for the dictator to try to gain more power.

In this account, personalist dictatorships arise when the support coalition repeatedly fails to act in response to a series of power grabs by the dictator.

When the support coalition cannot fully monitor the dictator's actions and cannot be confident that the dictator is following the agreement rather than trying to surreptitiously consolidate power, they might either launch an unnecessary coup or, through inaction, find that they have been marginalized (or worse).

Political institutions can help solve the **monitoring problem** at the heart of intra-regime conflict.

- Legislatures and parties can provide a forum for exchanging information and deliberating about policy.
- Having formal rules and protocols makes it easier to see when they have been violated.

Dictatorships adopt institutions such as legislatures and political parties to reward their allies in the support coalition and to co-opt members of the opposition.

**But** they also adopt them to help solve **informational problems** within the authoritarian elite.

Information on its own is not sufficient to create a stable power-sharing arrangement.

The support coalition still needs the ability to **credibly punish** the dictator if he reneges on the agreement.

This requires a roughly equal balance of power between the dictator and his support coalition.

Thus, a stable authoritarian power-sharing agreement requires institutionalization **and** a fairly even distribution of power between the dictator and his support coalition.

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This has implications both for when we'll see dictatorships institutionalize and for the effectiveness of authoritarian institutions.

**Strong dictators** have no need to institutionalize. If there *are* institutions, they will not constrain the dictator.

**Weak dictators** have an incentive to institutionalize. Institutions will constrain the dictator.

If dictators have **middling strength**, then institutionalization will improve the monitoring capacity of the support coalition.

- If the balance of power is equal, then the institutions will constrain the dictator.
- If the dictator has more power, then the constraining effect of the institutions will decline over time.

The **problem of authoritarian control** focuses on conflict between the elite and the masses.

There are two distinct strategies to solve the **problem of authoritarian control**.

1. Repression

2. Cooptation

Repression is a double-edged sword.

- Strengthening the military and police can help the dictator control the masses.
- Strengthening the military and the police gives them leverage over the dictator.

This trade-off depends on the level of societal opposition.

If **societal opposition is high**, only the military has the institutional capacity to put down violent unrest.

The military will demand policy concessions, large budgets, and institutional autonomy.

The military will not need to intervene openly in politics.

There will be a system of **military tutelage**.

If **societal opposition is low**, then the dictator can afford to keep the military weak.

The dictator will give few resources to the military but reward a small and loyal 'palace guard'.

The military will not be able to intervene in politics.

There will be a system of **civilian control**.

If societal opposition is moderately high, then things get interesting.

The military may threaten to intervene to obtain concessions, but the dictator may call the military's bluff.

The military may intervene in politics if miscalculations are made.

There will be a system of military brinkmanship.

Is a military coup a sign that the military is strong?

Is a military coup a sign that the military is strong?

The story here is that a really strong military has no need to intervene openly in politics.

This is another example where power is often at its greatest when it is least likely to be observed.

Rather than repress the masses, the dictator can try to coopt them.

Dictators often create institutions such as parties and legislatures to coopt opposition groups.

But why create institutions to coopt opposition groups rather than buy them off directly?

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One possibility is that the dictator's promise to provide direct transfers is not credible.

A second possibility is that institutions can give the masses a stake in preserving the regime.

# Selectorate Theory

All leaders are motivated by the desire to gain and maintain office.

If all leaders have the same goals, why do we get variance in outcomes?

Some environments encourage leaders to behave in ways that benefit society, whereas other environments encourage them to behave in way that benefit only themselves and a few others.

The key factor is how the leader is **selected**.

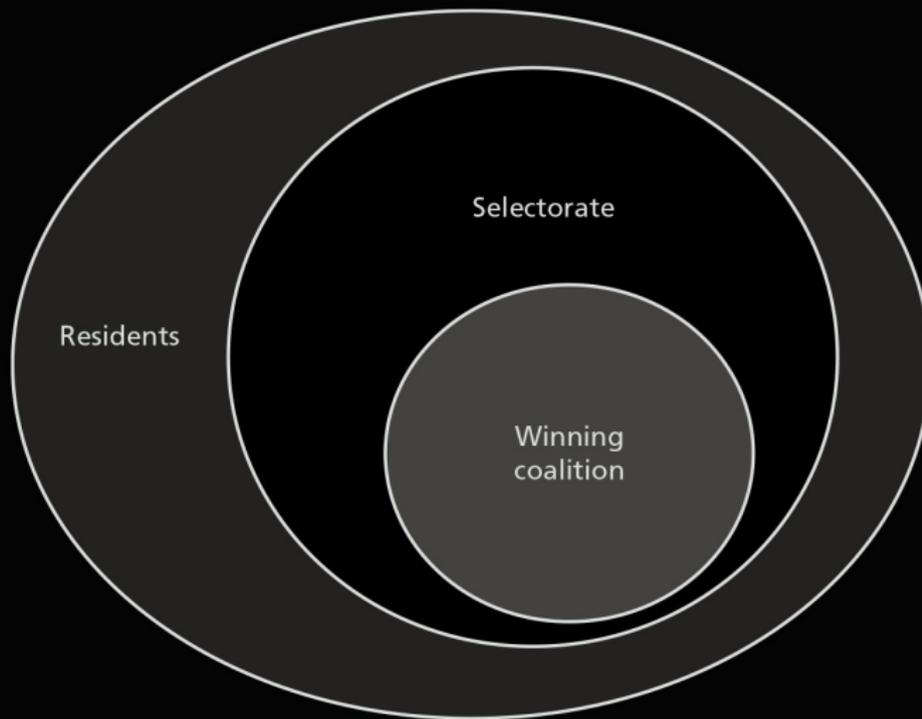
**Selectorate theory** characterizes all governments by their location in a two-dimensional institutional space.

1. The **selectorate** is the set of people who can play a role in selecting the leader.
2. The **winning coalition** includes those people whose support is necessary for the leader to stay in power.

The **disenfranchised** are those residents who do not have a legal right to participate in choosing the government.

**FIGURE 10.4**

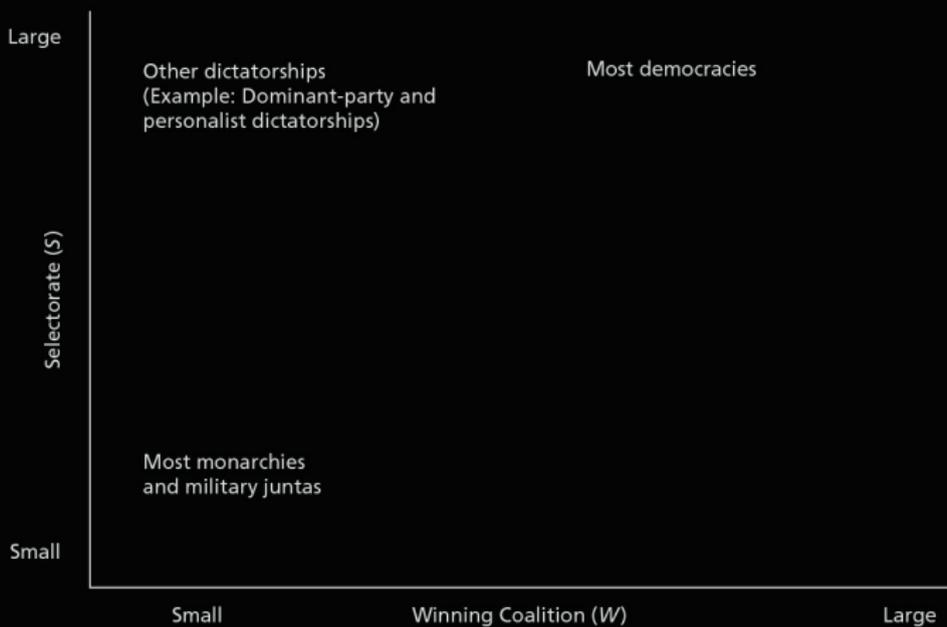
**The Institutional Environment in Selectorate Theory**



**FIGURE 10.5**

## Selectorate Theory and Regime-Type Locations

### a. Theoretical regime-type locations



Leaders must keep their winning coalition satisfied to stay in power.

Leaders can distribute:

1. Public goods, which can be consumed by everyone.
2. Private goods, which can be consumed by the winning coalition.

The leader chooses a tax rate to generate revenue.

A **challenger** also makes an offer regarding public goods, private goods, and the tax rate.

Whoever makes the best offer obtains the support of the winning coalition and is selected as the leader.

Two factors are key:

1. The loyalty norm,  $W/S$ .
2. The size of the winning coalition,  $W$ .

# Loyalty Norm

Individuals in the winning coalition who are disgruntled must weigh the costs and benefits of defecting.

Defectors have no guarantee they will be in the next leader's winning coalition and, thus, risk losing access to private goods.

The probability of being in a leader's winning coalition is  $W/S$ .

$W/S$  generates a loyalty norm.

- When  $W/S$  is small, members of the winning coalition are extremely loyal to the incumbent leader.
- When  $W/S$  is large, members of the winning coalition will be less loyal.

The size of the loyalty norm affects the performance of leaders.

### Society A

- Tax revenue = \$1 billion.
- Winning coalition = 1,000.
- Selectorate = 100,000.
- $W/S = 0.01$ .

### Society B

- Tax revenue = \$1 billion.
- Winning coalition = 1,000.
- Selectorate = 10,000.
- $W/S = 0.1$ .

The leaders of both societies **could** give \$1 million to each member of their winning coalitions. **But ...**

## Society A

The probability of being in the challenger's winning coalition is  $W/S = 0.01$ .

$$\text{Expected payoff (Defect)} = (0.01 \times \$1,000,000) + (0.99 \times \$0) = \$10,000$$

While the leader could give \$1 million to each member of the winning coalition, he need only give them slightly more than \$10,000 to stop them defecting.

## Society B

The probability of being in the challenger's winning coalition is  $W/S = 0.1$ .

Expected payoff (Defect) =  $(0.1 \times \$1,000,000) + (0.9 \times \$0) = \$100,000$

While the leader could give \$1 million to each member of the winning coalition, he need only give them slightly more than \$100,000 to stop them defecting.

Leaders in small  $W/S$  systems with strong loyalty norms like society A have greater opportunities to engage in kleptocracy and corruption.

- **Corruption** is when public officials take illegal payments in exchange for providing benefits for particular individuals.
- **Kleptocracy** is when corruption is organized by political leaders with the goal of personal enrichment.

Unlike leaders in large  $W/S$  systems who have to perform well to maintain the loyalty of their winning coalitions, leaders in small  $W/S$  systems have incentives to produce poor public policy.

# Size of the Winning Coalition

Leaders always prefer to buy the support of the winning coalition with private goods.

- Challengers cannot credibly commit to give defectors access to private goods.

But using only private goods is not always possible.

As the size of the winning coalition,  $W$ , increases, the value of the private goods going to each member decreases.

#### Society A

- Tax revenue = \$1 billion.
- Winning coalition = 1,000.
- Maximum value of private goods = \$1,000,000.

#### Society C

- Tax revenue = \$1 billion.
- Winning coalition = 1,000,000.
- Maximum value of private goods = \$1,000.

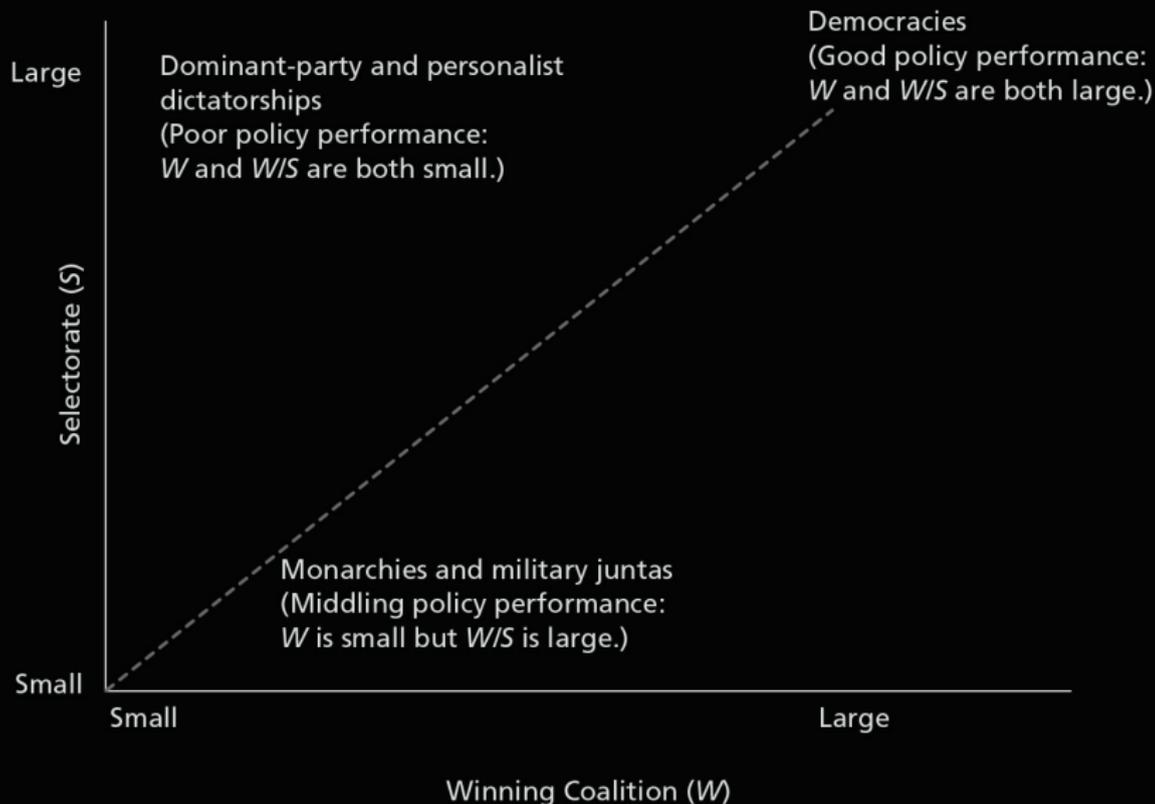
At some point, it becomes more efficient to buy the support of the winning coalition with public goods rather than private goods.

- Leaders in small  $W$  systems provide private goods.
- Leaders in large  $W$  systems provide public goods.

Public goods increase with the size of the winning coalition.

**FIGURE 10.6**

## Selectorate Theory and Government Performance



Civic-minded leaders are neither necessary nor sufficient to produce good economic performance.

- Civic-minded leaders confronted with a small  $W$ , small  $W/S$  system will produce poor public policy if they want to stay in power.
- Selfish leaders confronted with a  $W$ , large  $W/S$  system will produce good public policy if they want to stay in power.

## Institutional preferences.

- Leaders like to set up political systems with small  $W$  and small  $W/S$ .
- Members of the winning coalition like to set up political systems with small  $W$  and large  $W/S$ .
- Members of the selectorate and disenfranchised like to set up political systems with large  $W$  and large  $W/S$ .

**TABLE 10.3****Effect of  $W$  and  $W/S$  on Six Indicators of Material Well-Being**

## a. Economic growth

Dependent variable: Economic growth rate

## Independent

## Variables

	Model 1	Model 2
$W$	0.02*** (0.005)	
$S$	-0.004 (0.005)	
$W/S$		0.02*** (0.004)
Constant	0.01*** (0.004)	0.009*** (0.003)
$N$	3,772	3,772
$R^2$	0.01	0.01

## b. Wealth

Dependent variable: Log of GDP per capita

## Independent

## Variables

	Model 1	Model 2
$W$	2.30*** (0.22)	
$S$	-0.67*** (0.17)	
$W/S$		1.83*** (0.19)
Constant	6.97*** (0.15)	6.66*** (0.13)
$N$	3,813	3,813
$R^2$	0.35	0.32

c. Education

Dependent variable: Government spending on education as share of GDP

**Independent**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<i>W</i>	2.07*** (0.37)	
<i>S</i>	-0.44 (0.27)	
<i>W/S</i>		1.8*** (0.30)
Constant	2.86*** (0.23)	2.63*** (0.21)
<i>N</i>	3,313	3,313
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.12

d. Health care

Dependent variable: Government spending on health care as share of GDP

**Independent**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<i>W</i>	4.09*** (0.61)	
<i>S</i>	-0.35 (0.51)	
<i>W/S</i>		3.95*** (0.49)
Constant	3.04*** (0.32)	2.80*** (0.33)
<i>N</i>	1,204	1,204
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.22	0.22

e. Infant mortality

Dependent variable: Infant mortality  
(deaths per 1,000 live births)

**Independent**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<i>W</i>	-101.5*** (8.3)	
<i>S</i>	10.1 (6.3)	
<i>W/S</i>		-96.4*** (7.2)
Constant	113.1*** (6.7)	119.4*** (6.4)
<i>N</i>	3,365	3,365
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.33

f. Life expectancy

Dependent variable: Life expectancy at birth  
(in years)

**Independent**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<i>W</i>	24.6*** (1.9)	
<i>S</i>	-2.6* (1.4)	
<i>W/S</i>		23.1*** (1.5)
Constant	49.0*** (1.3)	47.5*** (1.3)
<i>N</i>	2,692	2,692
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.34	0.33

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