**Lessons from History on the Failure of Authoritarian Rule**

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Throughout the history many empires, nations and governments that have been born and then died. One lesson endured through the ages is this: An authoritarian one-person show that crushes individual rights cannot be stable. It usually backfires with a bang, sooner rather than later. This article retells the historical myth of those weaknesses and blemishes common to all repressive regimes[[1]](#footnote-0). There are endless examples in ancient and modern societies to prove its truths. Understanding generally how bad oppression is for organisations, understanding that man will struggle against tyranny. Its consideration: history's scythe ultimately cleaves through authoritarian rule.

The birth and death of past empires can shed light on the fate awaiting us now that we have rejected oppressive government. The Roman Empire, for instance, reached the zenith of its power by military conquest and centralized authority. But as the Roman rulers became more and more authoritarian, repressing dissent and invading the personal freedoms of individuals, they planted seeds that would eventually bring their downfall. The dictatorial regime's oppressive burden helped cause internal strife and economic collapse, which brought down the seemingly eternal empire. The Qin Dynasty's repressive rule under Emperor QIn Shi Huang severely alienated most of China[[2]](#footnote-1). The emperor's cruel policies, such as burning books and building the Great Wall with forced labour, epitomized what authoritarianism can be. Eventually, the dynasty's repressive policies planted seeds of rebellion, which would undo his work. Before long, a successor to more benevolent rulers emerged.

The age of the Enlightenment was a turning point in human history, as it overturned centuries-old autocratic rule. John Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau espoused the ideas of individual rights, separation of powers, and social contract. These ideas provided the intellectual foundation for subsequent revolutionary movements against monarchical oppression, including America in 1776 and France in 1789. The success of these revolutions established that a united and enlightened citizenry was not to be frightened by oppressive governments. The birth of the United States as a democratic republic and the establishment of the French Republic confirmed in no uncertain terms that human longings for freedom and self-determination are indestructible. Those monarchies who tried to stifle these winds of change suffered internal strife and the overwhelming force of masses yearning for release.

During the 20th century, there surfaced some of history's most brutal regimes, among them totalitarian governments like Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany, Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao Zedong's China[[3]](#footnote-2). Of course, the facade of strength and control was only temporary; its oppressive nature made it necessarily unsustainable—Hitler's totalitarian regime was erected on the foundations of racism and militarism. The result was a terrible human tragedy which destroyed World War II in its wake. The Third Reich's rule of systematic exploitation and genocide came to an end as the forces wrought by fascism converged in international unanimity with the worldwide resistance against oppression.

But Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's authoritarian rule included purges, mass executions and the crushing of dissent. As the Soviet Union faced economic stagnation, internal conflict and stirrings for independence among its satellite states, such oppressive governance was bound to reveal itself as fundamentally flawed. This collapse eventually came in 1991, with the fall of that system whose architects had sacrificed individual rights on behalf of state control. In the early years, while Mao Zedong was still alive and China's Communist Party had just seized power from Chiang Kai-shek, terms such as transitional period best described this recent history. But after these disasters, even with his death in 1976, many problems needed addressing--all These egregious aspects of Mao's rule, costing millions upon millions of lives and spawning all manner of economic inefficiency, clearly exposed the limitations authoritarianism.

The examples from modern times only show the ultimate failure of such oppressive rule in confronting determined and persistent people. Beginning in 2010, citizens throughout the Middle East and North Africa came out into the streets to expel regimes that had used fear as a means of control for decades[[4]](#footnote-3). The name given to it was Arab Spring. Mass uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya demonstrated that even the apparent stability of authoritarian rule could not stifle forever desires for freedom or justice.

Another moving example is the protests in Hong Kong over recent years. As the Chinese government successively chipped away at Hong Kong's autonomy and civil liberties, its people took to the streets in large demonstrations. These protests, however sporadic and short-lived they might have been, were sparked by a longing for democratic ideals and showed that even in this period of domination by a robust authoritarian regime, the human spirit is never altered[[5]](#footnote-4). Apart from political effects, repressive rule comes at a high price for societies. Where free expression, innovation and individual initiative are suppressed, the economy suffers stagnation. Such communities are more economically vibrant, encouraging creativity and enterprise in all different fields of endeavour. On the other hand, countries with oppressive regimes that value control over people's lives only experience economic stagnation and a brain drain while lacking creativity. The centralized planning and restriction of intellectual freedom made it difficult for the Soviet Union to be economically efficient. Countries that adopted free-market principles and individual liberties did well.

To sum up, the direction of human history tells a compelling story that explains why an oppressive government is doomed to fail. The lessons from ancient empires to contemporary societies are clear: The human spirit craves freedom, fairness and individual rights. However stable and self-controlled authoritarian regimes are, they cannot last forever in suppressing these basic desires. The upheaval of the Enlightenment, with its intellectual underpinning for democracy, started a wave of revolutions that overthrew tyrannical monarchies. In the 20th century, totalitarian regimes that plunged their people into great misery were defeated. Examples from today include the Arab Spring and protests in Hong Kong, which show that since humanity emerged on this earth, it has not been satisfied with long periods of oppressive rule. In addition, the socio-economic fallouts of authoritarian misrule underline the relationship between political liberty and economic success. Countries that stress individual rights and freedoms are more likely to be innovative, productive--and happy.

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