PART I
ONE

The Dark Spaces of Politics

Ad mala patrata haec sunt atra theatra parata. [Dark theaters are suitable for dark deeds.]

A motto of the Papal Inquisition, ca. 1233

Coercion—the threat to employ brute physical force and the actual employment of such force—is central to politics. In a foundation that stretches from Hobbes to Weber, it defines our basic political institutions. But despite its importance, analyzing how various types of coercive institutions operate—and why they differ across time and space—remains difficult. Coercion often takes place in the dark spaces of politics, concealed from public scrutiny. Even in relatively open societies, coercive institutions such as the police and military forces tend to be secretive and mistrustful of any efforts by outsiders to oversee their operations. In more closed societies, such as those ruled by authoritarian regimes, secrecy is the norm, making coercion in these cases that much more difficult to observe and understand.

This book is motivated by the conviction that understanding the coercive tyrannies that are common in the dark spaces of politics is both urgent and possible. The urgency is straightforward. Authoritarian regimes have been by far the most successful and common sorts of regimes in history, and recent events in places such as China, Russia, Belarus, Zimbabwe, Iran, and Pakistan, among many others, show that authoritarianism shows no sign of going into history’s dustbin any time soon. Democracy has made great advances in recent decades, yet by 2007 only 90 of the world’s 192 countries were classified as “free countries” that enjoy the civil liberties and political rights associated with democratic regimes (Freedom House 2008). Authoritarianism is also not
restricted to states. Many if not most armed nonstate groups, including guerrillas, rebel groups, criminal gangs, terrorists, and national liberation movements, are more authoritarian than democratic (Policzer 2006). Such groups routinely exercise de facto, if not de jure, control over large numbers of people and territory. Anyone who cares about the welfare of people forced to live under the tyrannies common in the dark spaces of politics must at some point attempt to understand coercive force, whether employed under authoritarian regimes or by authoritarian nonstate groups.

The task of understanding authoritarian coercion is less than straightforward. When secrecy is the norm and dissent regularly punishable by death, information on coercive institutions is not often freely available. But despite such constraints, a surprising amount of information is available on the operations of coercive organizations like the military and police forces under authoritarian regimes. In some cases, independent monitors, such as human rights organizations, have built impressive archives of crimes committed under different dictatorships. In other cases, dictatorships themselves produce and keep records that become available at some future point.

It is also possible to learn about authoritarian coercion without discovering a previously untapped archive. Indeed, preexisting information can be analyzed in new ways to shed new light on old problems. For example, all authoritarian rulers face a crucial dilemma regarding coercive institutions like the military and the police. On the one hand, they have to create an organization powerful enough to help them achieve their goals, such as gaining and maintaining power, pursuing their enemies, and controlling the population. On the other hand, the military and police cannot be made so powerful that they threaten—or even depose—the ruler. Authoritarian rulers need to calibrate their need for a powerful coercive apparatus against their interest in self-preservation and maintaining control. A great deal has been written about the (often massive) violence and human rights abuses in various authoritarian regimes, but the dilemma that authoritarian rulers confront in organizing coercion is a fundamental issue of governance that has received little scholarly attention.
Asking new questions of familiar data can result in surprising findings. For example, authoritarian strongmen often justify their rule with the promise to “get rid of politics” by replacing corrupt or ineffective civilian politicians with a more disciplined cadre. But a close look at the organizational dilemma faced by authoritarian rulers belies this justification. At one level coercion in authoritarian regimes might be thought of as the least political of activities precisely because it takes place in the dark spaces of politics, well beyond the scrutiny of overseers such as parliamentary representatives, judicial authorities, and members of civil society. In most authoritarian regimes these institutions are immeasurably weaker than those in democracies, if they exist at all. Yet politics does not take place only in formal institutions like parliaments. Even in closed dictatorships rulers must decide how to resolve the dilemmas inherent in organizing coercion, which involves trade-offs among different organizational options. Such trade-offs are unavoidably political. They require foreclosing some options and opting for others, often at great political cost. In other words, contrary to authoritarian rulers’ own claims and justifications, organizing even the most emblematic of authoritarian functions—coercive force—requires making inherently political choices.

At one level, rulers in any political system face similar choices. Democratically elected rulers as well must calibrate the organization of military and police forces so that they can exercise coercion effectively but without running amok as they do so. Yet there is a difference. Because authoritarian regimes are fundamentally repressive—because coercive force in many ways defines the nature of their governance—the stakes involved in calibrating the organization of coercion are much higher for them. Dictators can often summarily execute their enemies, an option not available to democratic rulers. At the same time, dictators can themselves be summarily executed by their enemies if they lose their grip on power. Coercive institutions are critical to maintaining that grip, yet designing and organizing these institutions is fraught with pitfalls, often involving choices between life and death.

Dictatorships normally shroud their coercive practices in secrecy, but peering behind the shroud—by obtaining whatever information is
available and by asking the right questions—reveals wide variation in how rulers in these regimes organize coercion. In some cases, they construct highly bureaucratized hierarchical institutions (such as a secret police force) with the power to gather information on all aspects of the state, including the lives of its citizens. In others they rely on a varied and decentralized set of agents, such as independent task forces or death squads, which operate with a great deal of autonomy and over whose activities rulers have little direct knowledge. In some cases executives monopolize power by repressing all alternative sources of power. In others at least some alternative power sources are tolerated: for instance, in the other branches of the state, in the media, or in the form of some limited political opposition. Here the coercive institutions operate under accordingly greater constraints, watched over by a wider range of actors. Moreover, sometimes coercive institutions remain relatively stable throughout a single regime’s tenure in power, and other times they fluctuate widely as one autocratic ruler replaces another.

This book develops a framework to make clearer sense of the different ways coercive force can be organized in different regimes and at different points in time. The point of departure for this framework is the observation that no ruler can rule alone. Even in highly centralized regimes, rulers rely on others to carry out orders and implement edicts. Ruling thus involves the sharing and delegation of power, which in turn requires rulers to work out the terms of these relationships. Some rulers may not want to share power, with the possible result that disputes arise with those who are excluded. Other rulers are happy to share power, but they must coordinate this with great care. Nevertheless, whoever the rulers happen to be, and however they happen to rule, they face a common fundamental problem: that of monitoring the operations and behavior of their own agents, the very people they entrust with carrying out certain unsavory tasks. This is certainly not the only problem of ruling or of building and running an organization: among other things, rulers have to decide how and where to recruit agents, how to train them and finance their operations, and how open or closed to make their organization. Yet monitoring agents’ performance is a fundamental problem of ruling, one that all rulers face.
Rulers need to gather information to assess the behavior of their agents, and then they must evaluate whether it conforms to their own goals. Rulers have essentially two options for this. They can choose to gather information from within their own organization through such mechanisms as reports or databases, or from outside information sources such as the press, the courts, or even watchdog groups. I call the first strategy \textit{internal monitoring} and the second \textit{external monitoring}.

Plotting degrees of internal and external monitoring along vertical and horizontal axes (using criteria such as the quality and frequency of reporting) yields a readily measurable typology of the different organizational options, and we can use this to analyze the organization of coercion across different cases.\textsuperscript{3} Rulers can rely on internal monitoring to the exclusion of external monitoring or on some combination of the two.

There are costs and benefits to different monitoring choices. For example, reliance on only one overarching internal monitoring source makes rulers vulnerable to the problem of bias. By contrast, external monitoring requires rulers to accept limitations on their power by relaxing constraints upon the activities of other groups and institutions outside the executive that may or may not support the ruler. The costs and benefits of different monitoring options can prompt rulers to rely more heavily upon one information source or the other, which in turn affects both the quality and severity of coercion in an authoritarian regime.

Authoritarian coercion can take unexpected twists and turns. For example, if external monitoring is truly “external,” even authoritarian rulers are not entirely capable of directly controlling or regulating it. Because it involves independent actors such as watchdogs or citizens’ organizations, external monitoring is often highly contested. Authoritarian rulers can decide whether to tolerate or ban these groups altogether, but by definition they cannot control the operations of external monitors once they exist. One of the key differences between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes is the existence of at least limited pluralism in the former (Linz 1975). This means that there is likely to be a politics of external monitoring in authoritarian regimes, turning on the conflicting interests between rulers who want to retain control and independent watchdogs.
who want to oversee the government’s coercive practices. Like politics in other areas, the outcomes of these conflicts can be quite surprising and at the same time highly consequential for future interactions among the opponents.

Even more central to this book, the information gathered by external monitors in some cases reverberates inside authoritarian regimes. Others have documented how information gathered by watchdog or “advocacy” groups can pressure authoritarian regimes into restraint by publicizing their abuses (Sikkink 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998). This book complements such research by focusing on how information of this nature helped shape one particular regime’s repressive institutions, but it also departs from that research in significant ways. First, it shows how information gathered by external monitors can have unintended consequences inside an authoritarian regime. Rulers can use such information to monitor and even regulate the activities of their own coercive agents. For example, for a government that wants to maintain its operations secret, a watchdog’s report on human rights abuses committed by the government’s own agents is a signal that secrecy has not been achieved. This does not mean that watchdogs deliberately collude with authoritarian rulers; rather, the watchdog’s information in some cases can have unintended consequences inside the regime, depending on the goals and intentions of the government.

Why should this matter? Human rights advocacy groups commonly assume that calling attention to abuses is part of a linear process whereby “naming and shaming” automatically results in fewer abuses. More information, in other words, should result in less violence. Otherwise, why publish information about a government’s abuses? Yet we still know very little about how such information actually interacts with the internal debates or decisions of an authoritarian or indeed any other type of regime. In some cases, as suggested above, rulers may have an interest in restraining their repressive apparatus: for example, if they seek support from a community that might withhold it as a result of a watchdog’s report. In other cases, however, more information may result in more rather than less violence: for example, if a “shamed” ruler decides to crack down on his enemies even more harshly in order to avoid future embarrassment. The connections between information provided by
monitors and the behavior of coercive organizations, this book suggests, can reveal a great deal about this darkest side of authoritarian regimes.

The second way this book departs from the work on transnational advocacy networks follows from the first: the principal focus is not the advocacy networks but on how particular authoritarian regimes organize coercion at different times. In some cases external information shapes a regime’s coercive operations, and in other cases it does not. But in most cases, external information is refracted through domestic institutions and intraregime politics, sometimes with uncertain consequences.

Until now I have outlined the problem of authoritarian coercion in general and largely abstract theoretical terms, but this book examines how one particular authoritarian regime grappled with the dilemmas inherent in the organization of coercion. The early part of the military dictatorship in Chile (which lasted from 1973 to 1990) offers a rich case study for analyzing the organization of coercion. During a period of great institutional flux between 1973 and 1978, coercive institutions were organized in three different ways. When they overthrew the Allende government in a violent coup in September 1973, all four branches of the armed forces carried out widespread campaigns of unrestrained terror and repression, from mass arrests to summary executions. By 1974, the application and organization of coercion came under tighter central control under a single secret police agency, one given broad powers not only to carry out its own operations but also to oversee those of the other branches of the military and police. And less than five years after the coup, between 1977 and 1978, a second shift took place. The junta replaced its notorious secret police with a different organization that operated under greater restraint. This resulted in even fewer people killed or arrested. Although violent suppression of opposition groups continued until the end of the regime in 1990, after 1978 the regime carried out coercion under greater constraints, and new independent actors made use of increasing opportunities to contest the regime’s coercive practices. Through the lens of internal and external monitoring, this book examines the causes of the different ways in which the Chilean dictatorship organized coercion.
This book adopts an unapologetically narrow focus on a single case, especially targeting a period of great institutional flux during the early part of the regime. The fundamental advantage of this single in-depth case study is its ability to trace how one factor or mechanism evolves and shapes outcomes over time (Russett 1974; Abbott 1992; Bennett 1997; Ragin 1997). This book shows how the key actors during each of the periods I discuss faced a distinct set of problems with respect to organizing coercion and how they addressed these by drawing on a limited set of organizational alternatives. The trade-offs involved in the various alternatives meant that in most cases the principal actors managed to address one set of problems while at the same time creating a series of new ones. In other words, a single case study such as this can show how the problem of organizing coercion operates as a mechanism, with distinct causes and consequences over discrete periods of time.5

Another important benefit of a single case study is that it can serve as a test for the large body of already accumulated knowledge about the particular case (Eckstein 1975; Ragin 1997; George and Bennett 2005). A great deal has been written about the military regime in Chile and about its main historical turning points, including the creation of some of its major coercive institutions. My aim in this book is not to contribute another history of the regime but to focus primarily on one five-year period of significant institutional flux. Through tests of alternative hypotheses and counterfactual analysis,6 this book explains why and how the regime organized its coercive institutions at different points in time, specifically tracing the rise and fall of the main repressive agency, the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA).

The authoritarian regime in Chile is a case that most analysts assume can be satisfactorily explained by existing arguments, which include examinations of international pressures, factionalism within the regime, and personal power accumulation by Pinochet, but none of these arguments have been subjected to a systematic test. In some cases, these hypotheses do a reasonable job of illuminating certain aspects of the organization of coercion, such as explaining why some sectors may have been interested in a particular form of coercion, or in shifting from one to another, but they fall short in important ways. Perhaps most significantly, they do not disaggregate the conflicts and strategic inter-
actions among different actors over how to organize and reorganize coercion. Some sectors may have been interested in particular forms of coercive organization, but even powerful actors in a strong authoritarian regime like Chile’s did not always get what they wanted. Indeed, an examination of the clashes over organizing coercion reveals winners and losers, as well as paths taken and others foreclosed.

One hazard of a single case study is the danger of focusing on a mechanism that may be highly significant in one case but not in others (Lieberson 1992; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). To avert this hazard, the book is grounded in a theoretical framework, sketched above and presented in greater detail in chapter 2, that can be used beyond the Chilean case. Principally, it is built around categories that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of the possible ways to organize internal and external monitoring in coercive organizations. There is a limited set of organizational options that are clearly distinct from one another, and all conceivable cases can be plotted as having more of one or less of another. Thus we can compare and contrast how different cases, across different times, organized their coercive institutions. Indeed, in chapter 8 I demonstrate this by analyzing the organization of coercion in three different authoritarian regimes: Argentina between 1976 and 1982, South Africa under apartheid, and East Germany.

The bulk of the book (chapters 3 through 7) explains how the Chilean regime used data from both internal and external monitors to adapt the organization of coercion in Chile after the 1973 coup. Chapter 3 describes the volatile initial period, characterized by breakdowns in hierarchy, ideological conflicts inside the military prior to the coup, and confusion as to exactly which powers the junta had taken as a result of the coup. Not surprisingly, given the extent to which the armed forces used executive power to control the state and the country, they were able to drastically limit the level of external monitoring of state coercion. More surprising is the absence of a high level of internal monitoring, given the long-standing traditions of military discipline and hierarchy.

The new military regime ran into trouble when the different branches of the armed forces failed to coordinate their activities in crucial areas. Often one branch did not know what the others were doing or which prisoners were being held where. Even inside the army, the largest
and most powerful branch, officers disagreed on key issues, including whether a state of war existed to justify their actions. In some places local commanders took a hard line against opponents and prisoners, while in others they adhered to strict codes of conduct. This led to divisive internal fights over how to apply coercion, a crisis made all the more threatening amid growing international pressure against the new regime over its many human rights violations.

By early 1974, as chapters 4 and 5 show, the organization and application of coercion shifted dramatically. Coercion came under tighter central control under a single new agency, the DINA, which operated until 1977. The DINA was given broad powers not only to carry out its own operations but also to oversee those of the other branches of the military and the police. Under the DINA, coercion was applied more consistently according to the regime’s goals. Fewer people were targeted, and assassinations were carried out in a much more strategically secretive manner. The DINA carried out hundreds of “disappearances,” which gave the regime a thin curtain behind which to deny responsibility for the human rights violations that were increasingly being reported.

An analysis of internal monitoring under the DINA, however, reveals only a slight increase in the regime’s ability to scrutinize the actions of its coercive agents. The DINA centralized functions and was given broad powers but still did not achieve very high levels of internal monitoring. As it grew in power and as its operations broadened in scope (even extending to acts of international terrorism in South and North America, as well as in Europe), the DINA ran amok. Policing the police became an increasingly urgent problem for the regime.

External monitoring increased somewhat during this time, making the DINA’s excesses all the more apparent. Groups of human rights lawyers working under the protection of the Catholic Church presented hundreds of recursos de amparo for those who had been detained by the regime. Even though the courts ignored the overwhelming majority of these petitions, all the information collected by human rights groups on each of the cases—gathered from witness accounts and from former prisoners—formed the basis for what increasingly became the most systematic record of the regime’s coercive activities (Frühling 1983, 1984).
Observers inside Chile and abroad relied on this information to report on human rights violations and to pressure the regime.

Chapter 6 analyzes a second shift in the organization of coercion, which took place from 1977 to 1978. In 1977 the DINA was replaced by a different institution, the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI), which was initially staffed by former DINA officials. However, in 1978 this group was dismissed by Pinochet and his cadre of advisors at the same time as other reforms to the coercive apparatus were implemented. Most critically, restrictions on civil liberties were relaxed, and the CNI came under tighter central control as it worked under stricter civilian supervision inside the regime. These reforms resulted in a marked drop in the number of people killed by the state’s coercive agencies.

This shift is commonly explained as a response to international pressures (especially from the United States, then pursuing a more aggressive human rights policy under President Carter), or as a result of the push by soft-liners to institutionalize the regime, or both. However, an analysis of the organization of coercion suggests a more complex set of factors. The broad political-level factors, such as the changing balance of power among international or domestic actors or the push to institutionalize the regime, at best explain why the regime may have been interested in reorganizing coercion. But they fail to provide an adequate account for how this reorganization was carried out or for explaining which direction it took.

Chapter 7 shows that internal monitoring increased after 1978 as the regime imposed greater constraints on the CNI and supervised its activities more closely. For example, instead of reporting directly to the president, as the DINA had done, the CNI reported to a civilian minister of the interior. This civilian ministry was staffed by a new cadre of advisors to the junta, who had expressed their discontent with the high levels of repression under the DINA. While they favored strong authoritarian rule, they made clear their desire to rein in the worst abuses of the regime and to end Chile’s status as an international pariah.

More surprisingly, the regime eased restrictions on civil society organizations after this time. This had the effect of de facto permitting a higher level of external monitoring, with new and unexpected consequences. New human rights organizations joined the church-based
groups in monitoring coercion and in some cases established unprecedented information-sharing networks with the CNI itself. The fact that an authoritarian regime would offer to share information with its supposed enemies is an astonishing outcome that merits further explanation.

As indicated above, in chapter 8 I briefly compare the organization of coercion in Chile with similar processes in three other authoritarian regimes: Argentina during the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (1976–82); East Germany between the creation of the Stasi (in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and the collapse of the regime in 1989; and South Africa under apartheid, especially between the Soweto uprising (in 1976) and the beginning of the transition to democracy in the mid- to late 1980s. The Argentine and East German dictatorships were subject to similarly low levels of external monitoring but sharply different levels of internal monitoring: very low in Argentina and very high in East Germany. The absence of external monitoring in both cases permitted coercive agents to operate freely and without restraint. The different levels of internal monitoring meant that coercion in East Germany was tightly controlled and centrally directed, while in Argentina it operated as a blunt weapon with few internal restraints.

By contrast, in South Africa, particularly after the Soweto uprisings of the 1970s, the regime adopted and utilized a high level of external monitoring, a transition similar to that which occurred in Chile, and with some of the same consequences. The judiciary and the media challenged the apartheid regime’s coercive practices, and the regime at first secretly and later more openly shared information on coercion. Indeed, the South African regime went further than Chile, insofar as it increasingly coordinated activities with the opposition, eventually joining it in a transitional government.

Because I focus only on authoritarian regimes, none of the cases discussed in the book displays an especially high level of external monitoring. While many human rights groups and individuals attempted to monitor and expose the practices of these brutal regimes, countless others lost their lives in the process and were unable to report on the actions of state officials. Only recently has much of this information become
readily available. And because I have focused on only four authoritarian regimes (and on only one case in depth) I have not covered all the possible combinations that varying levels of internal and external monitoring might yield. However, as I argue in my conclusions in chapter 8, the framework can be applied to a range of other cases, from authoritarian to democratic regimes. Indeed, this book provides the foundation for a more systematic analysis of the huge variation in coercive institutions, along with the causes and consequences of their utilization.

Finally, it bears stressing that the goal of this book is to understand how authoritarian regimes organize and in some cases reorganize their coercive institutions. The premise of this exercise is not to excuse repression under dictatorship but precisely the opposite. If we are to have any hope of improving the lot of people forced to live under the tyranny of authoritarian rule, we have no choice but to try to shine a light on these, the darkest spaces of politics.