Chapter 11: Mindsponge-based theoretical reasoning on the political psychology that begets and empowers a dictator

Quan-Hoang Vuong

The term “dictator” may have a strong impression on many of us because it is usually associated with destructive consequences, like the Holocaust directed by Adolf Hitler and the Great Purge ordered by Joseph Stalin. Yet, little is known about how a dictator-to-be can harness the power and rise into power. This chapter proposes a psychopolitical mechanism that enables a dictator-to-be to harness the power generated from disinformation-induced hysteria. The conceptual framework is constructed using the mindsponge-based analytical framework and the SM3D theory (Serendipity-Mindsponge-3D). The framework can help examine cases of dictatorship and prospect potential dictators, which gives our societies insights and preparations to reduce the possible rise of dictatorship in the future. This chapter is placed at the end of the book to wrap up the process of describing and discussing the mindsponge thinking approach in the book from simplicity to complexity.

1. Introduction

The term “dictator” was originally a neutral word used as an emergency legal appointment in the Roman Republic (1). However,
through many historical events, a dictator is often regarded as an individual who acquires total power through tyrannical actions, such as mass terror and ideological indoctrination.

Two typical figures of a dictator in the 20th century were Hitler and Stalin. Under the ruling of Hitler, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically carried out the Holocaust – the genocide of European Jews during World War II – to pursue Hitler’s ideology, which “depicted the Jews as uniquely dangerous to Germany” (2). The Holocaust resulted in the murders of around six million Jews across German-occupied Europe through mass shootings and extermination in concentration camps (3). As for Stalin, his widely-known cruelty derived from the Great Purge (or the Great Terror) campaign to solidify his absolute power within the party and the state. The campaign was designed to eliminate Stalin’s political rivals in the Soviet government, Red Army, and military high command and solidify control over civilians through fear, leading to around 950,000 – 1.2 million deaths during 1937-1938 (4).

In modern times, although dictators still use violence as a strategy to maintain power, it has been used sparingly compared to previous regimes. New-style dictators focus on influencing public beliefs and manipulating them into supporting their agendas by controlling the information channels. Three key strategies are often implemented for monopolizing the information supplies: persuasive propaganda, co-optation of elites, and censorship of independent media. As repression in the modern world is more costly in terms of economic and public aspects, dictators tend to avoid using violent methods if the mass beliefs are still not out of control (5). Despite certain differences between now and then, one point remains consistent: methods used by dictators need to be associated simultaneously with violence (e.g., mass killing, assassination, repression) and lies (e.g., propaganda, censorship, indoctrination).
For a person to become a dictator and hold enormous power to conduct lies and violence, that person will need to acquire huge political support from the crowd, and finally, almost everybody. Of course, some people will not be persuaded by those political ideals or the feasibility of the so-called actionable programs. Still, those are much fewer than the supportive crowds, and they have little choice but to suppress their own opinions and voices. But we all appreciate that harnessing this kind of absolute power is both difficult and, thus, difficult to understand. For example, before becoming the *Führer* (or chancellor of Germany), Hitler had been an unsuccessful artist whose applications for admission to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna were rejected twice. With such a painful past, how could he amass tremendous political and public support and rise to the peak of power?

As a result, the following questions arise:

*What constitutes the psycho-political mechanism that enables a dictator-to-be to harness the power generated from disinformation-induced hysteria successfully? What will guarantee its success, and why? Then what does the ‘transformed’ society look like?*

The current chapter marks a full circle after going through the book’s content, from conceptualization to statistical analysis. Now, we are back to conceptual inquiry, pushing it deeper and further, and forming a more integral view. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to proposing a conceptual framework to answer the above question. The chapter is structured into four sections. The first section introduces the question about the psycho-political mechanism behind the rise of a dictator. The second section reviews the current state-of-the-art using bibliometric analyses and narrative reviews. In the third section, the conceptual framework is constructed using the information-based process of the mindsponge mechanism. Finally, implications and further developments of the framework are discussed.
5. Questions for further studies and final remarks

5.1. Questions for further studies

Based on the conceptual framework of the dictator in this chapter and the suicidal ideation mechanism, one very interesting question arises:

- Can theorizing the symbiosis between a dictator and suicide attackers make sense?

A hint for answering this question can be found in the book on the psycho-religious mechanism of suicide attacks (61).

Moreover, as the conceptual framework advocates that anyone can be a dictator-to-be and have a chance to be a dictator if they have a certain willingness/intention to control and dominant capacity to do so, one potential question is:

- Can the dictator framework be applied in other contexts, like family, group, and organization? If yes, how?

5.2. Final remarks: reflecting on the book

Having read the entire book, you are more familiar with mindsponge-based thinking, can identify and understand the components and functions within an information process more clearly, and may even be able to expand upon the presented concepts and mechanisms by connecting the theoretical framework with your pool of knowledge. While reading this chapter, you might have pondered what possible models can be constructed to effectively test the proposed psycho-political mechanism of dictatorship.

For example, maybe you can collect data from scientific literature, historical records, or media outlets about various related factors within the process, such as the use of military or police forces, the suppression of independent media, or misinformation and disinformation
campaigns. It is noteworthy that you are able to get a considerable amount of the data you need from open sources on the Internet. Next, you can decide how to conduct the analysis. There are many variables to work with, but you may choose only a handful to create a parsimonious model. This is enough to test what you intend to test effectively. You can always save the rest for other follow-up papers. Bayesian analysis can be a suitable tool to deal with your formulated model. And if you are still new to the Bayesian approach, you may choose the easy-to-use bayesvl package and follow the step-by-step procedures presented in Chapter 10.

Above all, by now, you may have realized that you know how to systematically turn interesting thoughts into conceptual models by applying the mindsponge mechanism. And you know that these models can be quickly turned into impactful articles by employing the BMF. This realization may give you more confidence and control over how you want to walk your career path.
Appendix

Figure A1. The hand-drawn original conceptual framework

Table A1. Most highly-cited documents in each major research line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Research line</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forsythe, Horowitz, Savin and Sefton (32)</td>
<td>Fairness in Simple Bargaining Experiments</td>
<td>1 (red)</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engel (34)</td>
<td>Dictator games: a meta study</td>
<td>1 (red)</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camerer (30)</td>
<td>Behavioral Game Theory: Experiments in Strategic Interaction</td>
<td>1 (red)</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Güth, Schmittberger and Schwarze (62)</td>
<td>An experimental analysis of ultimatum bargaining</td>
<td>1 (red) 243</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (31)</td>
<td>Fairness and the Assumptions of Economics</td>
<td>1 (red) 132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fischbacher (63)</td>
<td>z-Tree: Zurich toolbox for ready-made economic experiments</td>
<td>2 (green) 240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List (44)</td>
<td>On the Interpretation of Giving in Dictator Games</td>
<td>2 (green) 201</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardsley (43)</td>
<td>Dictator game giving: altruism or artefact?</td>
<td>2 (green) 183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana, Weber and Kuang (40)</td>
<td>Exploiting moral wiggle room: experiments demonstrating an illusory preference for fairness</td>
<td>2 (green) 134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levitt and List (45)</td>
<td>What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preferences Reveal About the Real World?</td>
<td>2 (green) 126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fehr and Schmidt (64)</td>
<td>A Theory of Fairness, Competition, and Cooperation</td>
<td>3 (blue) 462</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton and Ockenfels (65)</td>
<td>ERC: A Theory of Equity, Reciprocity, and Competition</td>
<td>3 (blue)</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charness and Rabin (66)</td>
<td>Understanding Social Preferences with Simple Tests</td>
<td>3 (blue)</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabin (67)</td>
<td>Incorporating Fairness into Game Theory and Economics</td>
<td>3 (blue)</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreoni and Miller (36)</td>
<td>Giving According to GARP: An Experimental Test of the Consistency of Preferences for Altruism</td>
<td>3 (blue)</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (68)</td>
<td>Trust, Reciprocity, and Social History</td>
<td>4 (yellow)</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eckel and Grossman (69)</td>
<td>Are Women Less Selfish Than Men?: Evidence From Dictator Experiments</td>
<td>4 (yellow)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreoni and Vesterlund (70)</td>
<td>Which is the Fair Sex? Gender Differences in Altruism</td>
<td>4 (yellow)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croson and Gneezy (71)</td>
<td>Gender Differences in Preferences</td>
<td>4 (yellow)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) and Year</td>
<td>Title and Description</td>
<td>Page Section</td>
<td>Page Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox (72)</td>
<td>How to identify trust and reciprocity</td>
<td>4 (yellow)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoffman, McCabe and Smith (42)</td>
<td>Social Distance and Other-Regarding Behavior in Dictator Games</td>
<td>5 (violet)</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eckel and Grossman (35)</td>
<td>Altruism in Anonymous Dictator Games</td>
<td>5 (violet)</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charness and Gneezy (73)</td>
<td>What’s in a name? Anonymity and social distance in dictator and ultimatum games</td>
<td>5 (violet)</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bohnet and Frey (74)</td>
<td>Social Distance and Other-Regarding Behavior in Dictator Games: Comment</td>
<td>5 (violet)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton, Katok and Zwick (75)</td>
<td>Dictator game giving: Rules of fairness versus acts of kindness</td>
<td>5 (violet)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat and Smith (33)</td>
<td>Preferences, Property Rights, and Anonymity in Bargaining Games</td>
<td>6 (cyan)</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry, Frykblom and Shogren (39)</td>
<td>Hardnose the Dictator</td>
<td>6 (cyan)</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konow (76)</td>
<td>Fair Shares: Accountability and</td>
<td>6 (cyan)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance in Allocation Decisions</td>
<td>Oxoby and Spraggon (38)</td>
<td>Mine and yours: Property rights in dictator games</td>
<td>6 (cyan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruffle (77)</td>
<td>More Is Better, But Fair Is Fair: Tipping in Dictator and Ultimatum Games</td>
<td>6 (cyan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


