

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

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*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.

## **2. Literature review**

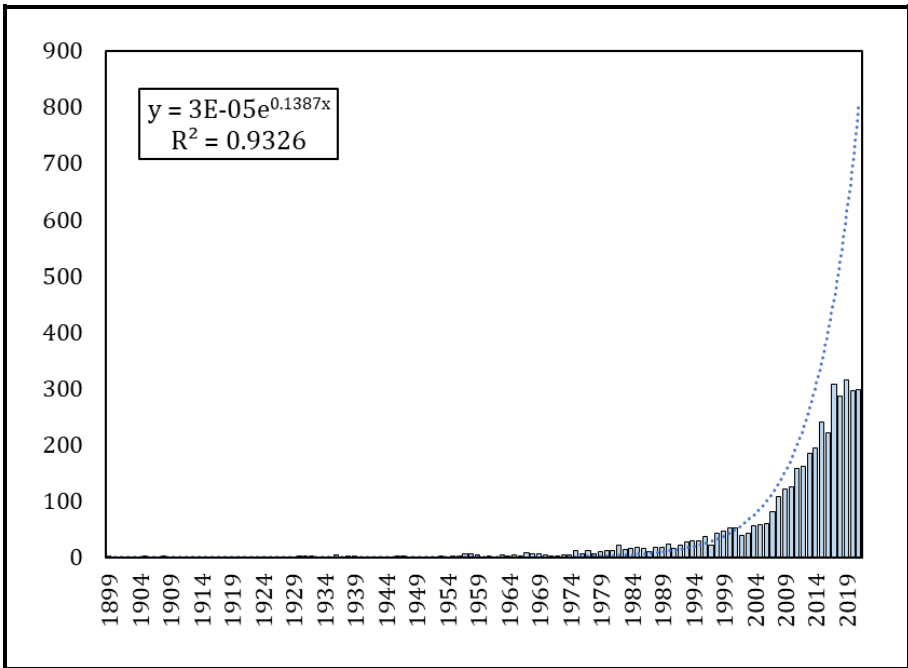
### **2.1. Intellectual and conceptual landscapes**

To scrutinize the literature about dictators, I first conducted bibliometric analyses to visualize the intellectual and conceptual structures of the topic. While the intellectual structure is about major research lines and their intellectual origins, the conceptual structure is about conceptual focuses and their temporal change within the examined topic (6). The co-citation—the frequency of two documents being cited together by other units—analysis was performed using fractional counting to examine major research lines in the literature about dictators (7). The keyword co-occurrences (keywords that appear in the same document) were analyzed to investigate the conceptual structure (8).

The data for bibliometric analyses were from the Web of Science database, one of the two most prominent scientific databases. I searched and retrieved data from the database on April 24, 2022, using the following query without adding any specific filtering criteria (e.g., time, place, document types): TS=(“dictator” OR “tyrant” OR “autocrat”). After retrieving the data, I conducted the co-citation and keyword co-occurrences analyses by employing the VOSviewer software to see the major research lines and important concepts in this topic (9).

The total number of documents retrieved from the database is 4,175. The three most common types of documents are research articles (3193 documents), book reviews (605 documents), and proceedings papers (117 documents). Although the first document was published in 1899, documents about dictators only became more prevalent after World War II. There was a notable trend during the Cold War period (1947-1991). Out of 320 documents in this period, most of the documents were book reviews (168 documents) but not research articles (108

documents). Many books were even reviewed multiple times by various scholars, namely: *Against the Tyrant: The Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide* (10); *The Executive: Autocrat, Bureaucrat, Democrat* (11); *Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator* (12); *Stalin The History of a Dictator* (13); *Waltzing with a Dictator: The Marcoses and the Making of American Policy* (14); etc. The 21<sup>st</sup> century also marked the exponential growth in the number of documents (mostly research articles) about dictators (see Figure 11.1).



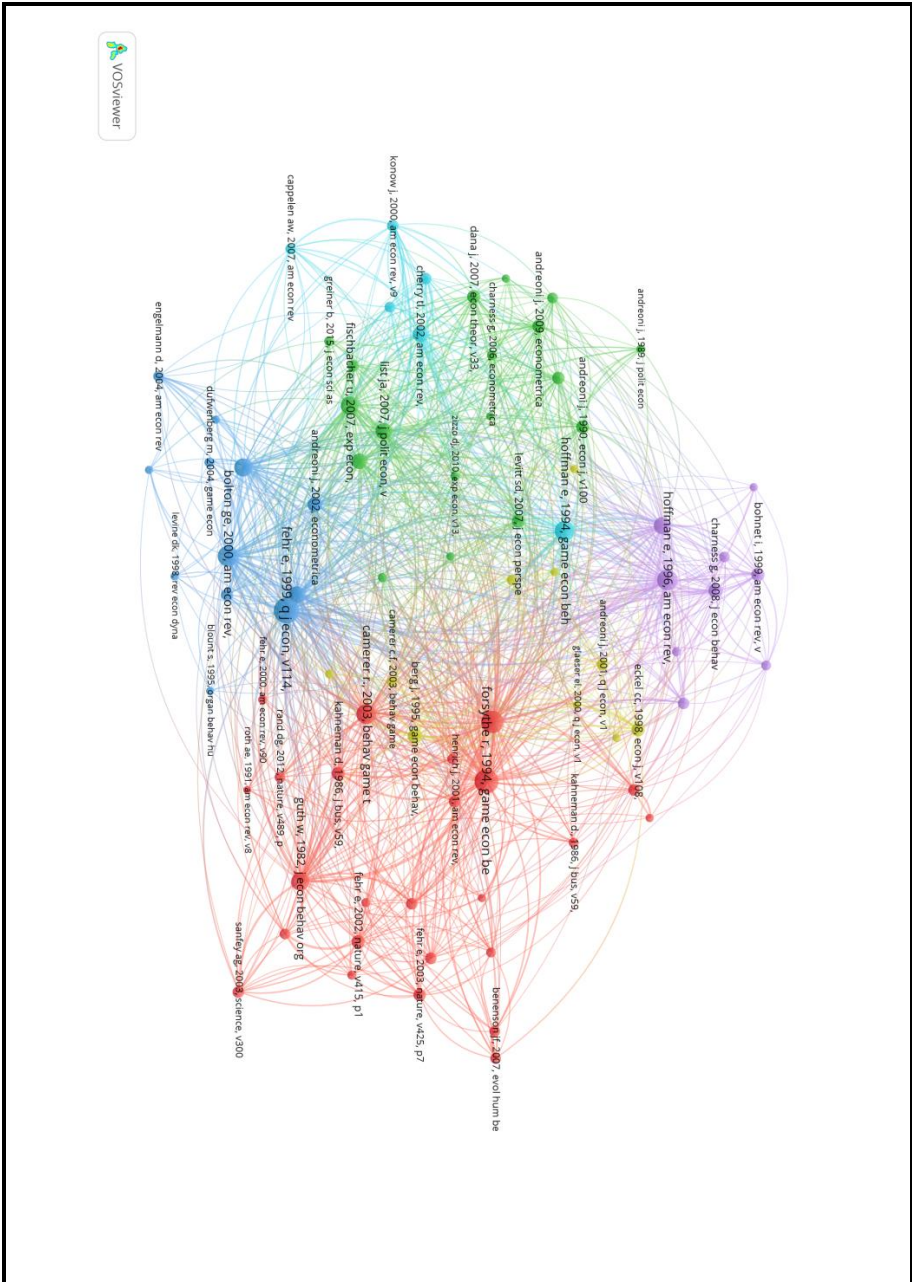
**Figure 11.1:** Annual publications and growth trajectory during 1899 – 2021

I performed a co-citation analysis using 4,175 documents and found six major research lines studying topics related to dictatorship. The co-citation network is shown in Figure 11.2, while the five most highly-cited papers of each major research line are presented in Table A1 in the Appendix. The co-citation network can be interpreted based on three features: the node’s size is proportionate to its average local

citations; the distance between nodes represents how likely these nodes are cited together in a document; the colors of the nodes indicate the research lines that they belong. Because different-colored nodes are proximate to each other in Figure 11.2, it is plausible to say that the cited references visualized in the network share some certain similarities (e.g., related to behavioral game theory), although they are classified in different research lines.

The six major research lines focus on studying problems that are relatively different from the main inquiry of this chapter (the psychological mechanism enabling dictator-to-be to harness power). Specifically, highly-cited documents from six major research lines on dictators are mostly about the economic aspects. The “dictator” concept mentioned in those studies refers to the dictator game—a type of game in behavioral game theory.

The dominance of behavioral game theory in the literature related to dictators can also be observed from the results of keyword co-occurrence analysis. The analysis employing both Author Keywords (keywords specified by authors) and Keywords Plus (keywords specified by WoS) shows that the ten most frequently occurring keywords are: fairness (588 occurrences), dictator game (542), behavior (386), altruism (383), cooperation (367), preferences (248), reciprocity (248), dictator games (246), dictator (200), evolution (190). Such keywords are closely related to dictator games in behavioral game theory. Results of keyword co-occurrence analysis are mapped and shown in Figure 11.3. In the temporal co-occurrence map, three main features need to be considered for interpretation: the size of a node is proportionate to its occurrences; the distance between nodes represents how likely these nodes appear together in a document; the colors of the nodes indicate the average publication year of those nodes.



**Figure 11.2:** Co-citation analysis map of 80 most highly-cited documents (counting method = fractional counting; minimum threshold = reference documents with at least 50 citations)





As shown in Figure 11.3, keywords related to behavioral game theory are mainly distributed on the left-hand side of the map. In contrast, keywords about dictatorship, politics, and democracy are distributed on the right-hand side. Keywords related to behavioral game theory are relatively recent because their nodes' colors range mainly from blue-green (representing the average publication year in around 1980) to yellow (representing the average publication year in around 2020). In contrast, keywords related to democracy, politics, and dictatorship are relatively out-of-date, which is illustrated by the violet color of the nodes (representing the average publication year in around 1950).

In general, the literature about dictators is dominated by experimentalists' studies of dictator games. These studies mainly concentrate on the economic aspects and study how individuals determine to allocate resources to themselves and others when being put into the dictator position (or holding the absolute power of allocating resources). The concepts related to behavioral game theory are also more recent than concepts about dictatorship and politics.

## 2.2. Theories and concepts

The term "dictator" is usually associated with negative meanings in modern times. The Oxford English Dictionary (online version, 2022) defines a dictator as "a ruler with total power over a country, typically one who has obtained control by force". Olson (15) refers to a dictator as a "stationary bandit" – the one who "monopolizes and rationalizes theft in the form of taxes". This common meaning of the word "dictator" is closely related to that of a tyrant—a term coming from Plato's classic works of *The Republic* (16)—as defined by the Oxford dictionary as "a cruel and oppressive ruler" or "a ruler who seized absolute power without legal right". However, the term "dictator" had its original meaning from the ancient Roman Empire as a chief

magistrate appointed during an emergency (1), which did not carry the negative implication compared to today.

The classical view of dictatorship is that dictators are rulers being accountable only to themselves, and their power is maintained through repression, such as the use of surveillance and police to punish disobedience (17). A dictatorship disregards the rights of civilians (including suffrage), and the dictator wields complete control without constitutional limitations. But a dictatorship ruling through only repression and fear may have low public support and thus a higher risk of being overthrown by the general population (18). For single-party dictatorships, where only one party has absolute or virtual absolute political power, the dictator's regime can be stabilized by public support from the motivation of common interests as political exchange (19).

Whether through ideologies or other types of perceived benefits, the dictatorship's existence requires the collective perceptions of its people to be in alignment (20). For this purpose, propaganda has always been a fundamental weapon of dictatorships that helps bring dictators into power, maintains, and expands their influence (21, 22). A popular related concept is "a charismatic authority", developed by Max Weber, which talks about leaders who claim and are believed to possess exceptional virtues and qualities that befit their positions of power (23). Thus, forming a cult of personality – the idealization of the leader – can greatly benefit the dictator's image (24).

Contemporarily, dictators tend to control mass beliefs rather than using brutal and violent measures under their regimes. Guriev and Treisman (5) propose an information theory of dictatorship to demonstrate these changes among modern dictators. According to the theory, making effective propaganda, censoring independent media, co-opting the elites, and equipping police to repress uprisings are the main strategies to control the information channels of the citizens.

Among the four strategies, propaganda can complement the co-optation of the elite and the censorship of the independent media. These four strategies are effective as long as economic shocks are not obvious.

Nonetheless, strategies controlling the information channels have a tradeoff: declined economic growth and deteriorated public services. It is evidenced from 100 countries located in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Near East that the length of being in office of leaders is associated with reduced economic growth, increased inflation rate, and deteriorated quality of institutions. The empirical results can be explained by the dictator effect, a combination of the dictator dilemma (the information asymmetries inherent to dictatorships) and the winner effect (changes in the personality of the dictator) (25). If major economic downturns happen and information-controlling strategies cannot conceal the truth from the public, citizens will recognize the dictator's incompetence and generate protests or even revolutions. In such cases, repression against potential uprisings substitutes all the information-based techniques for maintaining power (5).

Nonetheless, there are still some economic exceptions under dictatorship regimes. Considering the growth of Chile under Augusto Pinochet, South Korea under Park Chung-Hee, and China under Deng Xiaoping, the idea of dictatorship focusing on economic development was also mentioned in a rather positive light (26). Dictatorships may be capable of higher economic growth than democracies due to the concentrated power of allocating wealth, but this, of course, heavily depends on the self-interested decisions of the dictators (27).

While the rationality of dictators' thinking and autocratic regimes has been a topic of academic discussion (28, 29), much is still left unknown about how a dictator is born and rises into power and the roles of violence and lies during such a transformation process.

### 2.3. Dictator games

Since the 1980s, the focus on the state-of-the-art about dictators has been dominated by the behavioral game theory approach. Behavioral game theory is a common approach used to predict or develop strategic thinking, and the dictator game regarding economic interest has been one of the major foci (30). A dictator game is an experiment for studying one's self-interested strategic behavior where a person in the "dictator" position has control over how to share an endowment with other people. The first experiment of a dictator game model in economics was conducted by Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (31), and since then, the model has been developed further (32, 33).

A meta-analysis by Engel (34) on dictator game studies summarizes several factors influencing giving behavior, including factors with positive associations such as old age and multiple recipients, as well as factors with negative associations: social proximity, limited action space, repeated game, and concealment.

Altruism is an important aspect studied in dictator games (35, 36). People may not behave solely based on self-interest, as in the *Homo oeconomicus* concept (37). But while the dictators tend to share a considerable percentage of unearned wealth (money granted by experimenters) with earned wealth, they are much more self-interested, emphasizing the importance of subjectively perceived values in people's cost-benefit judgments (38, 39). Transparency of the action-outcome relationship was found to be associated with higher levels of generosity, mainly due to avoidance of appearing unfair to oneself or others (40), as the outcomes of dictator games may be more influenced by manner (e.g., politeness) than altruism (41). A greater social distance between actors also lessens the influence of social norms and may allow for a higher degree of self-interested reasoning (42). The giving behaviors of the dictator are often measured to assess the degree of benevolence, but Bardsley (43) argues that dictator game

giving is likely an artifact of experimentation rather than a result of unselfish intention. Behaviors under the influence of social norms in the “real world” should be carefully considered when interpreting laboratory results of dictator games (44, 45).

The game theory approach has certain limitations in the pursuit of understanding a real dictator’s mind, whether in political, economic, or other social contexts. Dictator games are useful for researchers to understand the decision-making tendency and behaviors of a person after holding absolute power (over money allocation). Still, they cannot help explain how a person can transform into a dictator due to the natural limitations of dictator games’ design.

Also, there are vast differences between the mind of the experiment participants (e.g., students) and a real dictator-to-be or a dictator in power. The identity gap between one in a position of great power and those “underneath” is significantly influential and cannot be ignored from the subjective cost-benefit judgment. The same can be said for one’s context-specific subjective perception of wealth (e.g., the issue of property rights). The examination of the dictator’s altruism lacks consideration for competitive interest among specific groups, as commonly observed in real-world situations. As Henrich *et al.* (37) found that the people’s self-interested reasoning differs depending on their culture, the collective mindset should be a major focus when studying a dictator’s behaviors as well as responses from involved actors.

Moreover, the dictator’s mind is an extreme case of rationalization (think about the proportion of people actually in the positions of great power). In other words, it is not accurate to predict the thinking and behaviors of an outlier based on the common mindset. Real-world situations are complex and unpredictable, showing a big contrast with the highly controlled environments with clear regulations and limited choices in game theory experiments. Furthermore, real dictatorship is

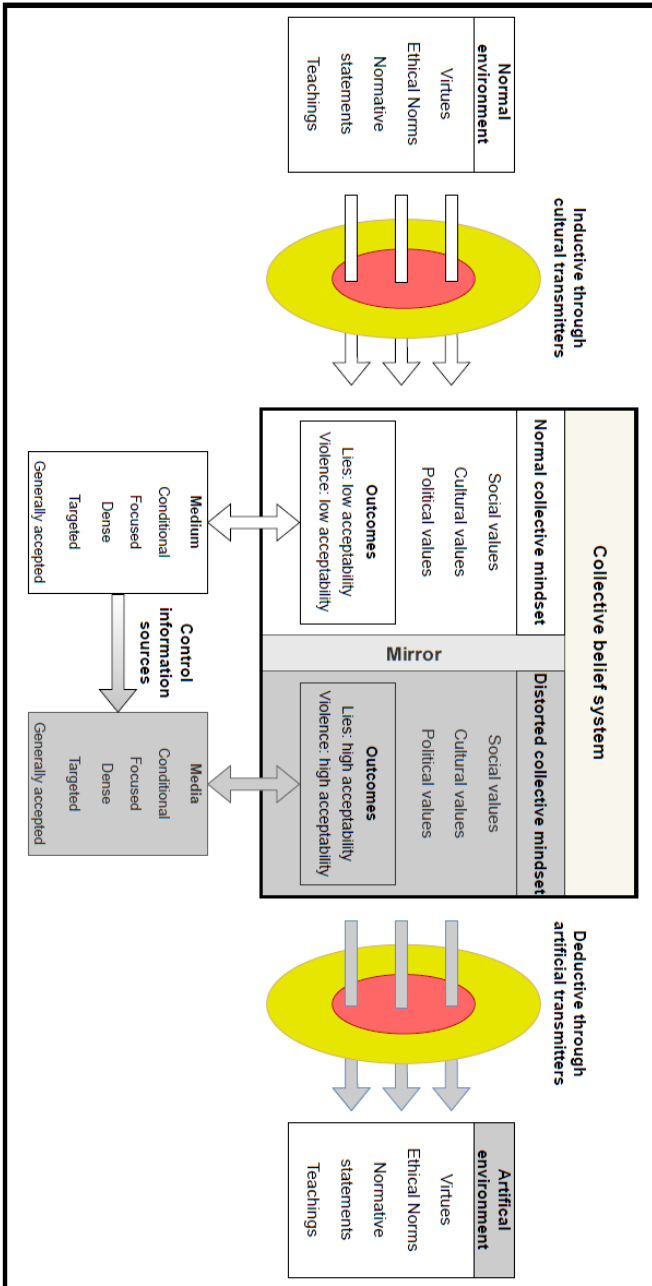
usually a large-scale issue, with many people's lives and livelihoods on the line with each major decision. Such stakes cannot be simulated in experiments.

### **3. Conceptual framework**

The question of the making of a dictator is huge and complicated, so to answer it will have to employ the mindsponge-based analytical framework as well as what I call the SM3D theory (Serendipity-Mindsponge-3D) (46-50).

To begin, I start with the following assumptions:

- One element is always present in the process of harnessing power (usually a long one): propaganda. Propaganda rarely leaves out two other elements: misinformation and disinformation.
- Misinformation and disinformation are hardly used for any other purpose than generating resentment, anger, anxiety, worries, and hysteria.
- The kind of hysteria useful to a dictator-to-be will need to enable the crowd to have illusions and delusions that the person is the ONE that could solve the frustration that the crowd fails to solve!
- The way the ONE solves the problem for ALL will look much like a religion.



**Figure 11.4:** The information processes of creating a collective belief system in natural and controlled environments.

Using the results from Vuong *et al.* (51), I reached fairly plausible reasoning of how a dictator-to-be transforms into a real dictator through violence and lies, provided in Figure 11.4. The prevailing thought conceptualized in this diagram is that there *exists* a partition, i.e., the vertical line drawn from the (circled) mirror. Passing through this, the somewhat *natural* inductive processes for creating, institutionalizing and operating core socio-cultural and psychopolitical values, moving forward, will be reverted. The transmission and filtering of these values follow the mindsponge mechanism on both individual and collective levels.

- *The information process of the collective belief system in a normal society*

Every culture naturally generates and preserves its value sets of virtues, ethical norms, normative statements, and teachings. They exist in every aspect of one's daily life, from the simplest social observation and interaction to the most complex moral contemplation. In a sense, they are the atmosphere in which one lives and the substance that the mind takes in and thinks upon. Think about how you expect people to dress on the street, what should and should not be said to a police officer, why children are told to behave in certain manners, etc. All this information serves as the input for people's filtering processes of "good" and "bad" values. Through countless and constant reinforcement cycles, such values become beliefs and are used as the reference for judging related information.

For example, one may learn from quite an early age that replying "I'm fine" when being asked by strangers in small talk even if things are not going well for oneself is for the sake of not causing unnecessary lengthy nuisances. This type of lying is commonly and implicitly accepted in a normal society. Now think, why do you condemn murder, stealing, and disrespect? When did you start reacting to crime and immorality in such a way? Being part of the belief system in



people's mindsets, such values are rarely subjected to re-evaluation except during critical introspection or specific debates (e.g., scientific studies).

Through cultural transmitters (e.g., the educational system, formal and informal literature), these naturally generated and preserved values in society manifest as core socio-cultural and psycho-political values in an inductive manner. One of the most important outcomes of this process is the establishment of the acceptability of lies and violence. According to the mindsponge information processing mechanism, a value is accepted into one's mindset only when 1) it exists and is accessible, and 2) it is evaluated favorably on the subjective cost-benefit scale. Lies and violence are only regarded as acceptable behaviors when perceived as beneficial. This acceptance, of course, is conditional. Certain acts of lying and violence are perceived positively only in specific situations and involve very specific social roles.

For example, police forces' subjugation of dangerous criminals by violent means is commonly accepted in many societies. Likewise, doctors lying about the remaining time of terminal patients may be widely considered a benevolent act. The properties of the information channels for these cultural values are: focused, dense, targeted, and generally accepted. Think of the distinctly different "lessons" and means of "teaching" for various groups such as primary-school children, juvenile delinquents, blue-collar laborers, academic professors, etc.

In a collective-scale information process, the values are adjusted naturally through loops of information flows and interactions. The way people interpret lies and violence shifts over time in alignment with the current social, cultural, and political contexts. Collective trusted values are based on people's perceptions through normal information filtering processes. In other words, the masses determine what they regard as morally and socially acceptable using the natural

function of their own minds. In a normal system, the information flows keep looping, self-adjusting its value perception and updating the collective mindset naturally. However, with enough power, deliberate influence from a dictator can break this rhythm and drive the information process of collective beliefs into a new system of distorted reality.

- *The information process of the collective belief system distorted by dictatorship*

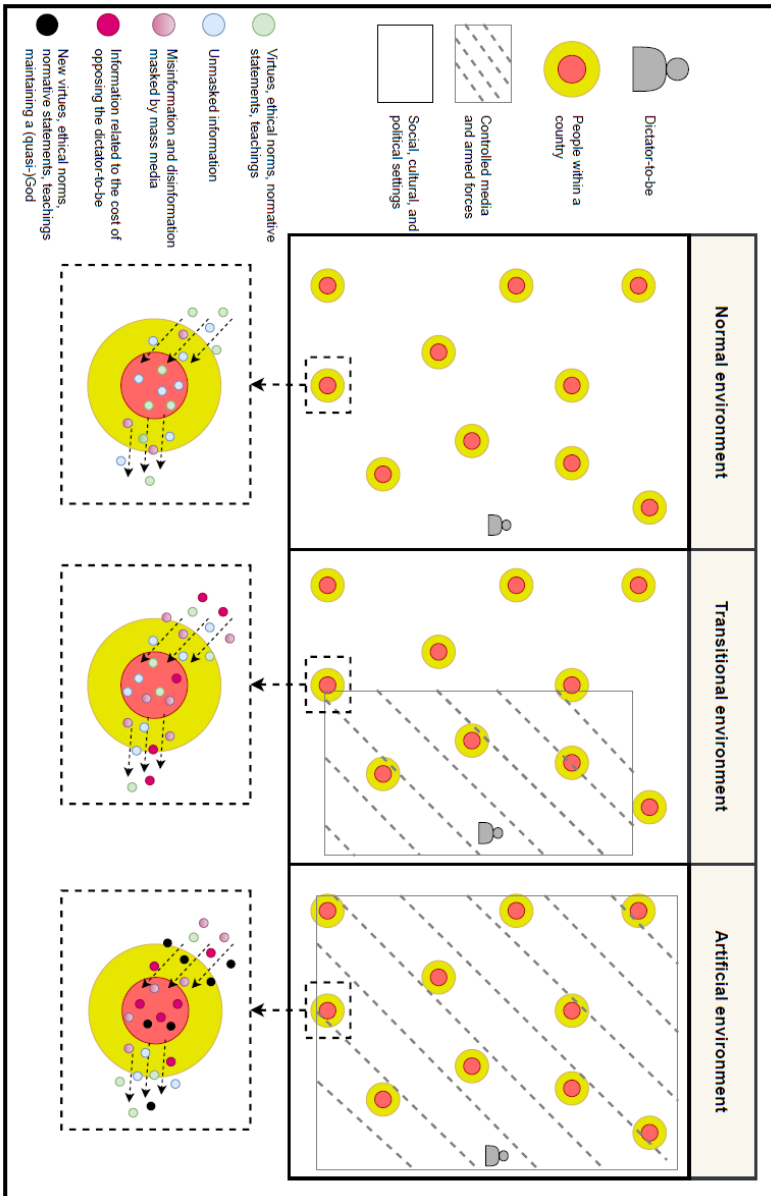
On the other side (right-hand side in the conceptual diagram) of the mirror, the information process of the collective belief system is reversed. The cultural, social, and political values here are those desired by the dictator. For the collective mindset to shift into a state of taking these distorted values for granted, the process also needs to follow the mindsponge mechanism but backward in a deductive manner, producing artificial virtues, ethical norms, normative statements, and teachings. Needless to say, these artificial beliefs are orchestrated to benefit the dictator.

The right-hand side processes are *de facto* the deductive processes in the sense that a dictator-to-be will do whatever it takes to maintain two major weapons: lies and violence, and create the whole system of seemingly logical consequences of these two weapons. These two critically important factors are the cornerstones of the system, and they reinforce each other. In theory, the people will find the use of lies and violence reasonable in the newly established infosphere. The dictator wants to make sure that in whatever situations and for whatever reasons, the people will perceive that the lies and violence being carried out are subjectively beneficial. There are many possible reasons for such judgments to happen in people's minds: blind beliefs (obedience), adjusted beliefs (brainwashing), self-preservation (opportunism or fear of persecution), herd mentality, etc.

There are two main crucial aspects to directionally shifting one's mindset: controlling the information input and how information is interpreted. Both are done by controlling the mass media, for they serve not only as information sources for society but also as a "teacher" of how to digest such information. In other words, media are the machine that force-feeds people specific pieces of information while constantly reminding them about how each piece tastes, whether good or bad. Once the mindset has shifted to adapt to the new infosphere, it will most likely continue to reinforce itself in that direction. Reinforced loops of acceptance deepen the level of trust and solidify trusted values into unquestioned beliefs over time. The inertia helps stabilize the new social order and acts as a psychological inhibitor against internally emerging rebellion intentions.

In essence, the reconstruction on the right-hand side is sort of working backward to create a kind of artificial society that contains seemingly logical elements (but illogical and unnatural to the existence), which allow for properties that explain the existence of the (quasi-)God, i.e., the dictator, perfectly. The system tends to advocate the birth and longevity of that (quasi-)God as a *sine qua non*. Therefore, tenures and terms are no longer required. For this, a constitution can be repeatedly revised until it fits the new *ideals*.

The interesting point is whereas we have "medium" on the left-hand side part of the diagram, this medium refers to the kind of "conduit" that transmits value; on the right-hand side, we have "media". By definition, media is the plural form of medium. But media on the right-hand side has only one meaning: mass media. The whole deductive process serves a unique purpose: creating the system of values, the cultural transmitters, and the reward-punish system that helps reinforce a quasi-religion, with the preset condition: maintaining an almighty quasi-God equipped with two major weapons, lies + violence. Basically, that is one way in which a dictator is *born*.



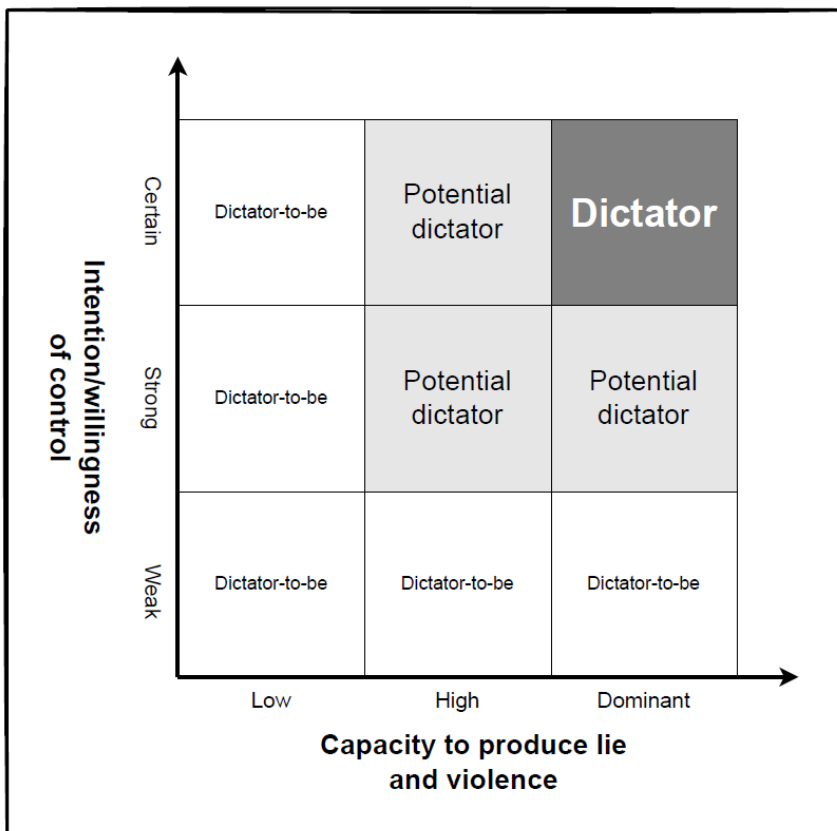
**Figure 11.5:** The psycho-political mechanism enables a dictator-to-be to harness the power generated from disinformation-induced hysteria. Visualized using Bayesian Mindsponge Framework (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Visualizing the conceptual framework using the Bayesian Mindsponge Framework in Figure 11.5 can facilitate the interpretation of the psycho-political mechanism that enables a dictator-to-be to harness the power generated from disinformation-induced hysteria. It shows how different types of information are filtered in people's minds in environments of different levels of influence by the dictator. In a normal environment, natural socio-cultural values are accepted into the mindset. When the dictator starts to control the media, misinformation and disinformation appear in the environment and become absorbed by citizens. This environment is considered transitional and corresponds to the "mirror" in the conceptual framework (see Figure 11.4). During the transitional phase, the citizens are still influenced by opposing voices from the dictator-to-be's political rivals. If the dictator-to-be does not have sufficient control over the media and armed forces, the environment can bounce back to normal.

Nevertheless, if the dictator-to-be acquires complete control of mass media and armed forces, they can rapidly grow into real dictators by manipulating public beliefs and suppressing opponents. The dictator's absolute control of media and armed force helps them build an artificial environment in which natural socio-cultural values are replaced by distorted ones. Such values are the major inputs and are kept within the mindset together with the awareness of the cost of ideological or behavioral opposition. This, in turn, updates the trust evaluators to reject former natural values. People in the artificial infosphere created by the dictator now process information in alignment with, or in favor of, the dictator's ideas and actions.

Additionally, dictators will try to convince people that their motive is purely altruistic (similar to divinity) among three drivers of human action: materialistic benefit, psychic returns, and altruism. People within a dictatorship are also coerced to act altruistically (e.g., sacrifice

yourself for the better good of the collective). However, most can see from the outside that the dictator, the converted followers, and the whole system operate under the two drivers of benefit, far from altruism.



**Figure 11.6:** Two fundamental dimensions of a dictator

For a dictator-to-be to become a *real* dictator requires two main qualities: the intention/willingness to control and the capacity to control. Higher degrees in both aspects mean stronger “dictator qualities”, as shown in Figure 11.6. Without strong intention/willingness to control, a person in power is more likely to allow free speech and accept diversity. Meanwhile, if a person has a

certain intention to control media and armed forces but lacks capacity, they still cannot become a real dictator. In that scenario, the collective belief system is still influenced by opposing voices, so the political and public support for the potential dictator can be degraded if they are truly incompetent. For example, although Donald Trump had dictator-related ideation, he lacked sufficient control over the media, and thus, a dictator has not been successfully born (yet?).

#### **4. Discussion and further implications**

The conceptual framework in this chapter can be applied to examine cases of dictatorship and explain related events. Alternatively, we can use the framework to increase the accuracy of our assessments regarding cases of potential dictators, their failed attempts, and possible risks in the future. Some examples are analyzed as follows. However, these are only exploratory arguments, and thus such ideas would need thorough further studies to confirm.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was certainly one of the most infamous dictators in the modern era (52). Hitler started from the status of a regular civilian before gaining power as a dictator. His early life period as a painter is quite well-known, such as the events of applying for admission to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, producing and selling many paintings, and being interested in architecture and music. There was a massive shift in Hitler's mindset to turn the formerly regular civilian into a dictator. Subsequently, a massive shift in the collective mindset of the German society toward this man to accept him as being in a position of absolute power.

More specifically, on both the individual and collective levels, it is a matter of beliefs about what is supposed to be or what happens. For example, Hitler's beliefs about races and nations are considered wrong and immoral by the majority of humanity but accepted by himself and his followers. Such distorted perceptions of reality allowed for the use

of lies and violence by Hitler to be justified in his established infosphere. Culture is the means to power, an important medium in Hitler's scheme to reshape the information environment surrounding him and his crimes (53). Through propaganda, Hitler brought about the concept of Utopia, an existential threat to the German people, created a parallel universe based on the projection of his mind of the distorted socio-cultural and political values and marketed his glittering image, which ultimately made the public grant him the "right" to mass genocide (54).

In a sense, the distorted information of reality was processed through the Nazi propaganda machine to become "normative" or "true" values that the German society could accept (55). After all, if people believed Hitler to be a supreme being in their minds' world, then his status and action are "supposed to be right(eous)". It is noteworthy that the justification does not have to be from sharing the same ideology as the dictator (although it may often be the case). As long as the result of the subjective cost-benefit judgment of accepting the status and behavior of the dictator is positive, obedience can be enacted regardless of the causes being willingness, naiveness, fear, pretense, etc.

Donald Trump's rise to power has puzzled many scholars. Regardless of the explanatory analogies being used to examine his case (such as comparison to Nazism), his political behavior has certain concerning qualities similar to a dictator, to some degree (56). The United States is indeed under pressure from how Trump-induced misinformation and conspiracy theories, through educational and cultural values, are shaping the collective mindset with radicalized political ideas, especially dangerous anti-democratic ones (57, 58). Trump also aimed to use the media to transmit his "processed" values to the public in an attempt to reshape the infosphere to his advantage through a backward information process, as presented in the conceptual framework above.



However, he could not gain enough control over major media channels and thus could not amass enough public support. With the limited power on his side (e.g., Fox News against CNN, ABC News, and NBC News, etc.), Trump could not shift the collective mindset to a threshold that makes people generally accept his lies (e.g., COVID-19-related and election-related misinformation, etc.) and violence tendency (e.g., military threats against Iran, etc.). The long-lasting effect of a shifted collective mindset induced by Trump's misinformation and disinformation campaigns trying to distort the infosphere was reflected in the widespread divisiveness and violence in the political landscape and society even after he left his position of power (59, 60).

The information mechanism of dictatorship is a neutral process in theory. However, greed and the craze for power may never be eliminated from a human. Thus, a dictator-to-be will most likely exploit the mechanism to build an infosphere that protects and supports self-interested purposes in contrast to any altruistic goal used in deceptive media. Dictators want to rise to godhood so that their words are the truth, and their acts are the law of reality. By desiring absolute power, dictators try to create a singularity of social, cultural, and political values where there is no opposition in ideation and behavior because the reasons for generating opposition have been (consciously or unconsciously) rejected from the collective mindset. And then, there, perhaps, would be no judgments or evaluations anymore, only beliefs. It is the hypothetical scenario of extreme power and extreme irrationality – or, to be precise, forms of reasoning barely exist. Understanding the information process of a dictator and the society in transformation, we can be more aware of the acts of those grasping for power and those who turn to accept such actions as the “new order” in their minds.

## **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 psychopolitical 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

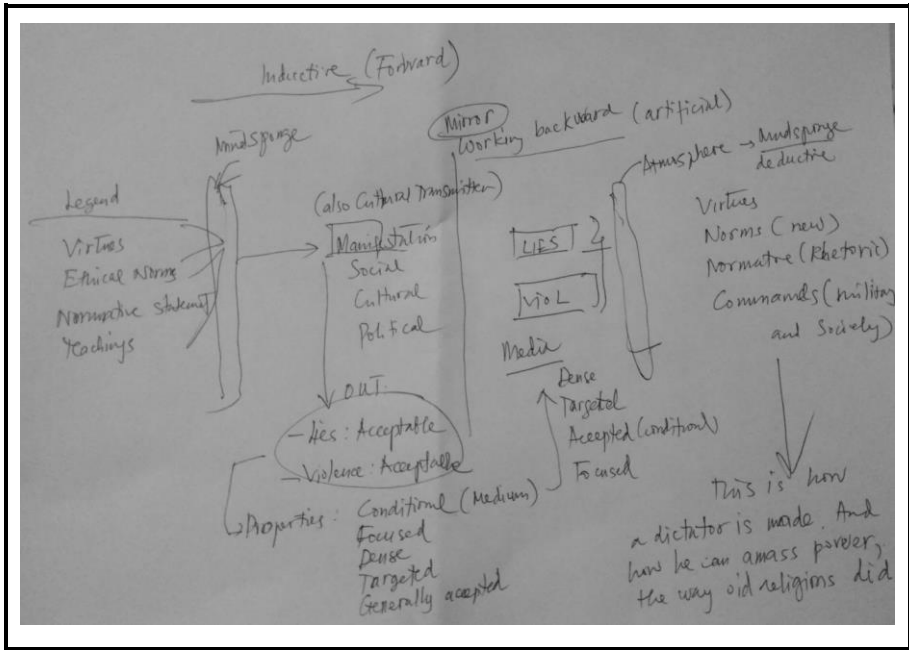


Figure A1. The hand-drawn original conceptual framework

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

Authors	Title	Research line	Citations
Forsythe, Horowitz, Savin and Sefton (32)	Fairness in Simple Bargaining Experiments	1 (red)	400
Engel (34)	Dictator games: a meta study	1 (red)	351
Camerer (30)	Behavioral Game Theory: Experiments in Strategic Interaction	1 (red)	273

Güth, Schmittberger and Schwarze (62)	An experimental analysis of ultimatum bargaining	1 (red)	243
Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (31)	Fairness and the Assumptions of Economics	1 (red)	132
Fischbacher (63)	z-Tree: Zurich toolbox for ready-made economic experiments	2 (green)	240
List (44)	On the Interpretation of Giving in Dictator Games	2 (green)	201
Bardsley (43)	Dictator game giving: altruism or artefact?	2 (green)	183
Dana, Weber and Kuang (40)	Exploiting moral wiggle room: experiments demonstrating an illusory preference for fairness	2 (green)	134
Levitt and List (45)	What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preferences Reveal About the Real World?	2 (green)	126
Fehr and Schmidt (64)	A Theory of Fairness, Competition, and Cooperation	3 (blue)	462

Bolton and Ockenfels (65)	ERC: A Theory of Equity, Reciprocity, and Competition	3 (blue)	302
Charness and Rabin (66)	Understanding Social Preferences with Simple Tests	3 (blue)	230
Rabin (67)	Incorporating Fairness into Game Theory and Economics	3 (blue)	191
Andreoni and Miller (36)	Giving According to GARP: An Experimental Test of the Consistency of Preferences for Altruism	3 (blue)	164
Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (68)	Trust, Reciprocity, and Social History	4 (yellow)	158
Eckel and Grossman (69)	Are Women Less Selfish Than Men?: Evidence From Dictator Experiments	4 (yellow)	122
Andreoni and Vesterlund (70)	Which is the Fair Sex? Gender Differences in Altruism	4 (yellow)	100
Croson and Gneezy (71)	Gender Differences in Preferences	4 (yellow)	79

Cox (72)	How to identify trust and reciprocity	4 (yellow)	71
Hoffman, McCabe and Smith (42)	Social Distance and Other-Regarding Behavior in Dictator Games	5 (violet)	295
Eckel and Grossman (35)	Altruism in Anonymous Dictator Games	5 (violet)	217
Charness and Gneezy (73)	What's in a name? Anonymity and social distance in dictator and ultimatum games	5 (violet)	149
Bohnet and Frey (74)	Social Distance and Other-Regarding Behavior in Dictator Games: Comment	5 (violet)	122
Bolton, Katok and Zwick (75)	Dictator game giving: Rules of fairness versus acts of kindness	5 (violet)	98
Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat and Smith (33)	Preferences, Property Rights, and Anonymity in Bargaining Games	6 (cyan)	276
Cherry, Frykblom and Shogren (39)	Hardnose the Dictator	6 (cyan)	178
Konow (76)	Fair Shares: Accountability and	6 (cyan)	102

	Cognitive Dissonance in Allocation Decisions		
Oxoby and Spraggon (38)	Mine and yours: Property rights in dictator games	6 (cyan)	102
Ruffle (77)	More Is Better, But Fair Is Fair: Tipping in Dictator and Ultimatum Games	6 (cyan)	85



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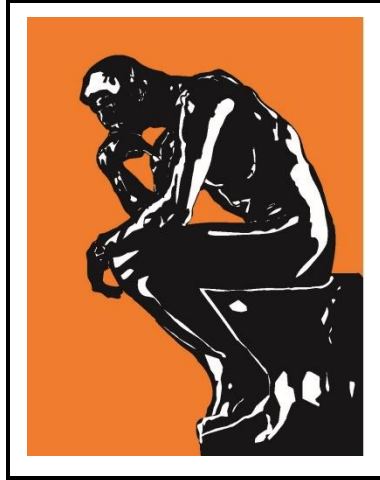
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