

1 *Introduction*

A Contextual Overview

So far ... democracies have not taken seriously the authoritarian challenge.¹

1.1 Introduction

The merger of an array of pro-Kremlin groups into the anti-Maidan represented a lesson drawn directly by the Russian authorities from the Euromaidan in Kyiv in winter 2013–14. The emergence of the anti-Maidan highlights a phenomenon that we seek to address, understanding how, why, what, and when authoritarian regimes learn. Authoritarian learning in the post-Soviet region began with the Colour Revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), which rocked the region and alarmed other authoritarian regimes. While the first successful effort at countering Colour Revolutions was the May 2005 Andijon massacre – which made Uzbek president Islom Karimov ‘a hero’ to other post-Soviet leaders, such as Russian president Vladimir Putin (Zygar, 2016: 107) – a subtler approach was needed for other post-Soviet regimes who did not have the same coercive capacity as the Uzbek regime or could not afford the repercussions if any news of a massacre seeped out (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 45).

One regime had been developing subtler methods for keeping the authoritarian regime in power: Belarus. Since an earlier revolution in 2000 in Serbia, the Belarusian authorities had developed tactics to limit such an event occurring in central Minsk (Hall, 2017b). Former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and incumbent Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka had regularly visited one another until Milošević’s fall from power.² The demise of Milošević worried Lukashenka, especially when protesters in Belgrade shouted, ‘Today

¹ Diamond et al., 2016: 17. ² Personal interview: IR39203.

Milošević, tomorrow Lukashenko.’ Throughout the 2000s, the Belarusian authorities faced protests due to Lukashenka’s fraudulent electoral victories. In response, best practices were developed and adapted throughout the decade, whether that was by infiltrating the opposition, using media to galvanise support for Lukashenka (Wilson, 2021a: 194–6), or using regime-controlled candidates at elections to give the façade of competitive elections (Shraibman, 2018) and keep the regime in power.

At this time, Belarus became something of a testing ground for devising authoritarian practices and stopping Colour Revolutions (Wilson, 2021a: 209). Throughout the decade, the regime continued to learn and devise best counter-revolutionary practices (Hall, 2017b). State structures such as the *Kamitet Dzyarzhaunay Bezopasnosti* (KDB)³ have been at the forefront of this learning, highlighted by the dossier the KDB compiled in 2005 on previous Colour Revolutions and Belarusian protests, allowing the regime to devise anti-protest tactics (Korosteleva, 2012: 45). The document’s focus was on the 2004 Orange Revolution, with information compiled by Belarusian embassy staff in Kyiv.⁴ The Belarusian authorities’ learning has been a constant process, as they adapt to both domestic failures and those of other regimes.

After all, authoritarian regimes must continuously learn, as failure is not an option. However, this process of constant adaption is not always successful. For example, during protests in 2006, the Belarusian authorities allowed protesters to set up a tent city with 10,000 demonstrators congregating in central Minsk (Korosteleva, 2012: 39), forcing the government to use extensive force to clear protesters, resulting in increased sanctions from Western states.⁵ Therefore, during protests in 2010 the regime did not allow protesters to congregate in central Minsk,⁶ with security forces quick to arrest protesters. The speed and force of the crackdown was a direct lesson from the 2006 failure.⁷

The Belarusian example emphasises how authoritarian regimes adapt and learn from previous events, and that learning encompasses success

³ To differentiate the Belarusian security services from its Soviet namesake, we use the Belarusian transliteration.

⁴ Personal interviews: TK02846, HT69204, and KR48280 all argued that staff from most embassies in Kyiv would be at the Maidan ascertaining what was occurring, and that it is certain Belarusian embassy staff were there.

⁵ Personal interview: MU19837. ⁶ Personal interview: MU19837.

⁷ Personal interviews: MU19837 and NJ08269.

and failure. Learning is not just a Belarusian phenomenon. As Gel'man (2015b: 6) argues, during the 2011–2012 protests, the Kremlin copied Belarusian practices from demonstrations in 2010. A similar point is made by Hall (2017b), who contends that the Kremlin learnt from Belarus's preventive counter-revolution. There is evidence that authoritarian elites learn. In this book, we draw out questions like what, how, and why they learn, what constitutes authoritarian learning, and when it takes place. This will be analysed in due course, but first it will be necessary to define a few of the book's key concepts.

1.2 Some Definitions

To better tackle this book's subject, definitions of authoritarianism, learning, and authoritarian learning need to be made. While we will define authoritarianism, the wider literature on authoritarianism will not be analysed in this chapter. Rather, the focus is on authoritarian tendencies, as it is the leaders and personnel, rather than the regimes and institutions, that are of concern here. It is why we analyse patronal politics here to explain why authoritarianism has not consolidated in Moldova and Ukraine but there are periods of attempted consolidation. After defining authoritarianism and authoritarian tendencies, definitions of learning and authoritarian learning follow.

1.2.1 *Defining Authoritarianism*

Although the focus here is on authoritarian learning, which does not necessarily mean that only authoritarian regimes learn, it is necessary to explain what is meant by authoritarianism. We define 'authoritarianism' as the political system of polities that regularly hold elections but violate these to such an extent that they become mere box-ticking exercises, and in which freedom of association, information access, and freedom of expression are highly circumscribed. This definition accounts for the two case studies of Belarus and Russia. However, to understand authoritarian learning fully, it is necessary to analyse authoritarian-minded leaders and not just fully-fledged authoritarian regimes. Not all post-Soviet states can be classified as authoritarian, but there have been attempts by previous and (current) leaders to consolidate power. This is done through learning and copying established authoritarian regimes. Consequently, we need to address the concept

of authoritarian tendencies. This is seen in the example of former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych, who, in the first 100 days of his presidency after 2010, set about weakening parliament, bringing the judiciary closer to him personally, and bringing in his clan – or family⁸ – to positions of power in the state. This allowed Yanukovych to begin to consolidate power, and the regime focused on examples of what Russia had done previously in similar situations, with Yanukovych often saying – when given examples of practices from European states – ‘That’s great, but what about Russia.’⁹ Glasius (2018: 517) defines authoritarian practices as ‘patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation and disabling voice’. However, the definition of authoritarian tendencies used throughout this book is one where leaders try to quickly consolidate power. This explains the situation in Belarus and Russia, as well as periods of attempted authoritarian consolidation by leaders in Moldova and Ukraine.

Patronal politics explains how the four case studies operate and function. Hale (2015: 9–10) explained patronal politics as how ‘individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishment through chains of actual acquaintance’. Power resides with persons who can enforce it, and these people act as patrons to ‘a large and dependent base of *clients*’ (Hale, 2015: 10). Within patronal societies, politics ‘revolves chiefly around personalized relationships joining extended networks of patrons and clients, and political struggle tends to take the form of competition among different patron–client networks’ (Hale, 2015: 21). Analysing state structures through the prism of patronal politics explains the four political systems studied in this book, and patronal politics accounts for why regimes in Belarus and Russia have held power longer than regimes in Moldova and Ukraine. Hale (2015: 64) differentiates between states with single and multiple pyramids of power. If there is a single pyramid of power, then there is one leader who acts as patron and all patron–client ties are hierarchical. This makes authoritarian consolidation relatively easy, and accounts for how politics operates in Belarus and Russia. By contrast, multiple pyramids of

⁸ Not blood relatives – although also true – but people close to him personally.

⁹ Personal interview: ZD49618.

power mean that there is more than one patron able to establish patron–client ties. This makes it much harder for any one person to gain ascendancy and consolidate power, due to competition. Such a system operates in Moldova and Ukraine, and explains why there are periods of attempted authoritarian consolidation but little success.

Authoritarians have found ways to protect themselves (Carothers, 2006; Gershman and Allen, 2006; Krastev, 2006; Schedler, 2002), often acting with confidence and challenging the West (Diamond, 2008; Gat, 2008). One should not just study these regimes but try to understand why they are surviving. Much authoritarian endurance is due to dialogue, emulation, copying, and learning. If democracy is no longer resurgent and authoritarian regimes collaborate to counter democratic norms (Cooley, 2013; 2015; Diamond, Plattner, and Walker, 2016: 4; Koehler, Schmotz, and Tansey 2016) and develop best survival practices, then it is crucial to understand how authoritarian regimes do so – through learning. So, it is essential to better understand authoritarian learning: what it is, how it occurs, why it occurs, and when it occurs.

1.2.2 *Defining Learning*

Learning is a process that weighs the costs and benefits of a particular decision (Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991: 5). Regime learning involves individual and collective learning, making it hard to differentiate what learning is and what it is not (Levy, 1994: 280). A restrictive definition of learning would show little, but a broad definition would show too much (Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991: 17). For Braun and Gilardi (2006: 299), learning combines the effect A has on B and analysis of the actions of others. This sequence of processes allows learning to be gauged. Simmons and Elkins (2004) agree that learning happens because people learn from external actors and historical examples; however, both explanations do not cover personal learning. Levy (1994: 296) defined learning as a ‘change of beliefs, skills, or procedures based on the observation and interpretation of experience’. But this is the result of learning. Learning is the *process* of engagement, leading to the development of beliefs, skills, ideas, and discernment. This definition explains learning without being too broad or narrow. It is individual- and state-focused, accounts for success and failure, explains knowledge from foreign and domestic

experiences, and incorporates new knowledge. Therefore, the definition of learning used here refers to changes of beliefs, skills, or procedures. As shown later, ascertaining a change in beliefs – at least in the case studies – will be hard to investigate. But changes in skills – in how tactics change – and procedures – legislative changes and institution structures – can be shown. This will point to learning and highlight instances of authoritarian learning.

1.2.3 Defining Authoritarian Learning

In the 1990s, much research assumed that democratisation would become the political system of most – if not all – states. But the Afghan and Iraq wars – coupled with the resurgence of international terrorism – contributed to a decrease in the promotion of democracy. With events like the Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet space, which saw the collapse of some authoritarian regimes, other neighbouring autocracies – or as Tolstrup (2014: 2) labels them ‘democracy-inhibiting powers’ – initiated preventive counter-revolution measures to limit the capacity of external democratisation pressures. Learning best survival practices is the best way to limit these stresses. To perform best, autocrats and like-minded leaders must develop appropriate practices for retaining control. Solnick (1998) explained the collapse of the Soviet Union using an analogy of a bank run. As the regime became increasingly weak, state personnel stopped following orders, which precipitated further collapse. In this way, authoritarian-minded leaders must stop all opposition to ensure the bank survives. Ultimately, they must be right all the time, as the opposition only has to be right once. Learning helps this survival by developing methods to stop future bank runs.

Using the definition of authoritarian learning provided by Hall and Ambrosio (2017: 143) – ‘a process in which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies based upon prior successes and failures of other governments’ – as a starting point, we add a new dimension to this definition. Hall and Ambrosio (2017) focus on learning between states, but we see authoritarian learning as incorporating internal learning from examples of success and failure. For instance, Hall (2017a) showed how Yanukovych had learnt from his own failures during the 2004 Orange Revolution when he became president in 2010 – even though he went on to make

other mistakes that precipitated the Euromaidan in 2013. Authoritarian learning is a process of engagement leading to development, and in many circumstances resulting in a change of beliefs, adaptation of skills, and ideas.

1.3 Research Findings

There are several key findings from our analysis of authoritarian learning in the four case studies. Firstly, authoritarian learning had been an under-theorised topic with only a few attempts, principally by Hall and Ambrosio (2017) and Bank and Edel (2015), to conceptualise and explain it. Existing literature stuck with the mantra that because authoritarian states B, C, and D do something like authoritarian state A in a short space of time, there must have been learning. Through an in-depth analysis of authoritarian learning from various perspectives, we have expanded current thinking. We provide a theoretical basis for authoritarian learning that combines experiential and social learning theories and policy transfer, diffusion, linkage and leverage, and lesson-drawing to provide a theoretical basis for authoritarian learning. Authoritarian leaders constantly learn and adapt to stay in power, and they regularly collaborate to develop best practices to remain in power.

Second, authoritarian learning is less hierarchical than widely considered by the existing literature. For example, Hall (2017b) found that Belarus was a testing ground for the Kremlin to learn methods developed in Belarus to counter democratisation pressures, thereby stopping a Colour Revolution in Moscow. However, existing literature has concentrated on the notion that Russia dominates the post-Soviet region and dispenses diktats that other post-Soviet regimes follow. This notion of Russian dominance results in concepts like ‘authoritarian promotion’ and ‘authoritarian gravity centres’. For advocates of authoritarian promotion, the Kremlin promotes authoritarianism in other post-Soviet states. Even if true – which is by no means certain – there appears little account for the Kremlin’s seeming lack of interest in promotion, and little to explain how Russia can promote authoritarianism to established authoritarian regimes that have been around longer than Putin has been in the Kremlin. Similarly, for advocates of the concept of authoritarian gravity centres, some authoritarian regimes are magnets for others to learn from. Yet, we show that the hierarchy is far flatter than widely

considered, and authoritarian learning is a cooperative process in which best practices are shared. In the post-Soviet region, Russia is the regional hegemon. However, it does not dominate learning, and learns itself from best practices developed by others. Of course, once the Russian authorities instigate policy, other post-Soviet regimes follow, with the foreign agents law being a good example of this.¹⁰ However, the notion that other post-Soviet regimes learn solely from Russia does not truly represent the nuances of authoritarian learning.

Third, both external and internal networks of authoritarian learning are extensive, with both network types offering opportunities for dialogue, sharing of best practices, and learning. Existing literature on authoritarian learning has not delved deeply into the regional institutions, state structures, or elite networks to determine which are engaged in learning. Rather, current literature often focuses on the presidential level. But as shown here, much learning occurs in *siloviki* structures, such as the presidential administration, security service, interior ministry, and security council. Although there is a lack of evidence – due to information being simply unavailable – it is likely that regular meetings are held by junior personnel. Consequently, learning occurs at many levels. For now, this is supposition, and future research can address this, but there is information from higher echelons that these are the key learning networks.

Fourth, existing literature investigated the inter-state level, analysing interactions between authoritarian elites. However, this misses a key aspect of authoritarian learning: the intra-state level. By analysing intra-state-level learning in the four case studies, we show that there is significant inter-linkage between factions and clear opportunities for dialogue, sharing of best practices, and learning. Elite inter-linkage in the four case studies means the elites all know each other, learn from each other, and are concerned with protecting their own power and that of their allies. Regarding Moldova and Ukraine, this has been detrimental to the full democratisation of both states, and it is one reason why the Belarusian and Russian regimes are consolidated authoritarian regimes.

¹⁰ The foreign agents law was passed in July 2012 and requires any organisation – and in later renditions of the law individuals – in receipt of ‘support’ or under the ‘influence’ of a foreign government to register as a foreign agent. The term ‘foreign agents’ was used in the 1930s under Stalin to jail and torture people accused of being enemy agents.

Fifth, analysing regional organisations provides a clear understanding of authoritarian learning. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Union State between Belarus and Russia all provide a perfect opportunity for dialogue, information sharing, and learning. The CIS, the CSTO, and the SCO bring members together in training exercises to develop best practices to ascertain which tactics are effective at keeping incumbent leaders in power. In particular, the CIS and the CSTO regularly hold training exercises for members to gauge which methods work best in each scenario. This notion of learning through training is one that is represented by the CIS's anti-terrorist centre, which regularly holds training exercises to develop tactics to deal with protesters. Although evidence is scant, it is likely that the SCO's anti-terrorist centre develops similar methods against protesters too. Consequently, regional organisations provide learning through training. These regional organisations hold regular meetings of different committees, thereby increasing networks that exist between post-Soviet states. There are recurring CIS inter-departmental meetings. These become venues for dialogue, as well as opportunities to share best practices and engage in learning. The Union State is crucial for dialogue and learning, as it allows personnel to regularly meet and harmonise legislation, which helps learning. Membership or having observer status of most of these organisations helps the Belarusian and Russian authorities learn and consolidate power. By contrast, Moldova and Ukraine are not members of many of these organisations, which likely affects an authoritarian leader's capacity to consolidate authoritarianism in both states, as there is less opportunity to learn. It is likely that the role of regional organisations in authoritarian learning is not a post-Soviet phenomenon, but this needs to be investigated in future studies.

Sixth, while diffusion certainly plays a role in authoritarian learning, epitomised by the joke that '90 per cent of what to do can be found on Google',¹¹ there is something stronger than diffusion occurring. On the one hand, there is emulation and diffusion, where authoritarian elites decide what to implement and imitate one another by looking at what each other are doing. On the other hand, there is actual dialogue and the sharing of best practices. Elites in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and

¹¹ Personal interview: HW29578.

Ukraine collude and there are strong pointers towards direct dialogue and cooperation on techniques, a much stronger concept than looking at what is occurring elsewhere and implementing accordingly. Of course, this does not detract from the relevance of diffusion, policy transfer, and emulation, which are integral aspects of authoritarian learning. However, there appears to be a concerted effort by authoritarian elites to talk with one another, share best practices, and learn. This is something far stronger than merely looking at what other authoritarian elites do and copying them.

Seventh, learning from failure has received much analysis in the literature partly because it is easier to see failure. As authoritarian leaders try not to provide many opportunities for the public to replace them non-violently, their demise is often violent, with mass protests and previous elites imprisoned or dead. Naturally, other authoritarian leaders do not want to share that fate, so they ascertain the causes of failure and develop practices to counter such possibilities occurring domestically. Learning from success is harder to measure for researchers, but it is no less relevant to authoritarian learning. Internal sources of learning are the main sources of learning from success. For example, Vladimir Plahotniuc and Petro Poroshenko – in Moldova and Ukraine respectively – learnt from the success of previous domestic regimes to control power. While success is hard to measure, it is as relevant to authoritarian learning as failure.

Eighth, the existing literature has concentrated on the inter-state level. However, to fully understand authoritarian learning, it is necessary to bring in the internal dimension as well. Authoritarian leaders and elites are as likely to learn from internal examples as from external examples. The internal dimension is crucial for understanding authoritarian learning. This is particularly so for Moldova and Ukraine, as current elites in both countries have worked in past regimes and so retain knowledge of past mistakes and successes that can be used for learning in the present.

1.4 What Is Authoritarian Learning?

Having briefly defined authoritarian learning in Section 1.2.3 and explained that it is more than ‘a process in which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies based upon prior successes and failures of other governments’ (Hall and Ambrosio, 2017: 143) including learning from

internal examples, this section analyses the concept in more detail. We will first investigate some of the literature on diffusion, policy transfer, linkage, and lesson-drawing. Then, the different elite networks involved in authoritarian learning will be analysed, which will be shown to be extensive.

Treisman (2020) shows that historically most authoritarian regimes begin a democratic transition not because the elite initiates such a process, but because they make a mistake that they cannot control and consequently lose power. Therefore, learning from external and internal examples is a way for authoritarian leaders, or those similarly minded, to reduce the potential for making a mistake that leads to either democratisation or a more open system. However, there is nothing to stop autocratic-minded leaders from learning the wrong lessons. For example, Viktor Yanukovich learnt some lessons from his failure to become Ukrainian president in 2004, which he implemented when he finally became president in 2010. Leonid Kuchma had not had a party of power or attempted to dominate state institutions. Kuchma had allowed too many competing regime clans. Yanukovich perceived these as mistakes on the part of Kuchma and so strengthened control over state institutions and restricted access to resources for other clans. However, the attempted power grab and ostracising of important factions led to regime disunity and increased support for the opposition. Once the Euromaidan began, elites who were alienated by Yanukovich had their excuse to help depose him (Hall, 2017a). While learning often helps authoritarian-minded elites, it can also result in failure and precipitate collapse. This makes learning a quandary for autocratic-minded elites.

Authoritarian learning occurs by combining policy transfer, diffusion, linkage and leverage, and lesson-drawing. Authoritarian-minded elites regularly collaborate with one another on best practices to remain in power. Authoritarian learning is less hierarchical than widely considered by existing literature. Unlike the literature on authoritarian gravity centres – which perceives learning as coming from authoritarian regimes that act as models to lesser regimes (Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016; Kneuer et al., 2019), we show that authoritarian learning is more horizontal, with the authorities in Minsk and likely Nur-Sultan, Baku, and Tashkent bringing best practices to the table.

Both external and internal networks of authoritarian learning are extensive and offer dialogue opportunities, sharing of best practices,

and learning. Existing literature has not delved deeply into regional institutions or state structures to determine which are engaged in learning. Analysis here shows that presidential administrations, security councils, interior ministries, parliaments, and even ambassadors are involved in learning. In the presidential administrations and interior ministries, there are regular meetings held at senior and junior levels. This provides one venue for learning, and with regular meetings at all government levels, there are many opportunities for learning. Within the four case studies, elites have – mostly – long known one another, learn from each other, and are concerned with protecting their own and allies' power. Such practices in Moldova and Ukraine have been detrimental to democratisation, and this is one reason why the Belarusian and Russian regimes are consolidated authoritarian regimes.

For the case studies, post-Soviet regional organisations are central to understanding authoritarian learning. These institutions provide opportunities for dialogue, sharing information, and learning by bringing member states together in training exercises to ascertain which tactics are most effective to retain power. Regional organisations hold regular meetings, thus increasing the learning networks between post-Soviet states. The Belarusian and Russian regimes are members or observers of most of these regional organisations. These institutions provide learning opportunities and share best practices, thereby helping both regimes with learning and power consolidation. By contrast, Moldova and Ukraine are not members of many post-Soviet regional organisations, which could go some way to explaining why there has been no successful authoritarian regime in either.

Diffusion is crucial to authoritarian learning – epitomised by the joke¹² that '90% of what to do can be found on Google'. There is emulation and diffusion, where authoritarian regimes decide what to do based on what others do, and imitate one another. Then there is actual dialogue and the sharing of best practices. There are strong pointers to direct dialogue and cooperation on strategies and techniques, where regimes go beyond simply imitating what is occurring in another authoritarian state. While learning from success is harder to demonstrate, it is as crucial to understanding authoritarian learning as learning from failure. Similarly, internal examples are as important as external examples for authoritarian-minded elites to learn from.

¹² Personal interview: HW29578.

There is a debate within the literature on authoritarian diffusion as to quite what is happening, with different conceptualisations of diffusion put forward. Silitski (2010) labelled collaboration between the Belarusian and Russian regimes an ‘authoritarian international’. While we will show that there is direct dialogue and far more than just governments looking at what other governments do, the idea of an authoritarian international, where authoritarian leaders and elites try to make the world safe for authoritarianism, is too much of a stretch. There has been a wealth of literature on this idea, centred around authoritarian promotion (Brady, 2016: 190; Burnell, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2013; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova, 2016: 1603; Melnykovska, Plamper, and Schweickert, 2012; Vanderhill, 2013; 2014; Yakouchyk, 2016). This literature contends that at least some authoritarian regimes – such as China, Iran, and Russia – are promoting authoritarianism to other regimes.

While authoritarian promotion is a type of diffusion, with one regime providing lessons for others, it is a very vertical perception of authoritarian learning. As argued here, authoritarian learning is more horizontal than vertical. Similarly, if the notion of authoritarian promotion exists, it is ‘more opportunistic than strategic’ (von Soest, 2015: 624). Yakouchyk (2016) writes about active and passive autocracy promotion, although passive promotion is something of an oxymoron in terms (Tansey, 2016: 147–8). Melnykovska, Plamper, and Schweickert (2012: 750) argue that the Central Asian states are susceptible to Russian and Chinese autocracy promotion, and Vanderhill (2013: 76) contends that Putin helped Lukashenka consolidate power. Examples like these highlight potential failings of authoritarian promotion. Melnykovska and colleagues (2012) fail to explain how the fully consolidated authoritarian regimes of Central Asia required Russian authoritarian promotion. This is also true for Vanderhill’s (2013) analysis of Russia and Belarus. Rather, authoritarian learning is less vertical than authoritarian promotion accounts for.

This is also the case for the literature on authoritarian gravity centres. This concept sees authoritarian regimes coalescing around authoritarian models – such as China, Russia, and possibly Singapore – with these models providing learning opportunities for their satellite states. Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016) and Kneuer and colleagues (2019) are correct to highlight the importance of learning among authoritarian regimes. Similarly, this literature is right to mention that there are some

authoritarian regimes that likely serve as models for other authoritarian leaders. However, too much emphasis is placed on these authoritarian models, making other states mere satellites with limited independence – unable even to leave the sphere of influence – other than to learn from the centre. As shown in this book, authoritarian learning is more horizontal than widely perceived in current literature.

Certainly, there are authoritarian models that other authoritarian leaders copy, but as Hall (2017b) showed, authoritarian gravity centres also learn from so-called satellites. We follow the notion of diffusion laid out by Ambrosio (2010), where diffusion is a mix of learning from applicable models from across the political spectrum rather than copying everything from a single model regardless of local applicability. While diffusion relies on ‘simple demonstration effects’ (Ambrosio and Tolstrup, 2019: 2746), we show that it not just about analysing what others do and implementing accordingly. Rather, there is regular dialogue and authoritarian learning is heavily networked and horizontal. This will be explained later in the chapter and in more detail in later chapters.

As authoritarian-minded elites are concerned with losing power, they will learn from all sources, both internal and external. But they do not just learn from other authoritarian regimes. Rather, it is more nuanced. Concerned with survival at all costs, authoritarians learn from any pertinent examples. Consequently, learning from successes and failures of democracies are also taken into consideration. Political systems and policies developed in democracies have been copied and re-interpreted to help consolidation.¹³ To better ensure survival, authoritarian leaders will copy successful policies from democracies to placate citizens, highlight that the governments are democratic – or at least modernising – and offer increased legitimacy. Therefore, authoritarian learning is not learning between authoritarians but learning from all sources to better ensure survival.

Authoritarian learning occurs through dialogue, emulation, and copying. Regimes learn by analysing internal and external examples of what worked and what failed. Authoritarian learning is continual, as authoritarian regimes must constantly learn to halt anything that could precipitate regime collapse. Therefore, authoritarian learning is about constant

¹³ Personal interview: LD03148, who showed how the Russian authorities have consistently changed the electoral system – originally copied from Germany – to ensure electoral victory. Similarly, the 2012 foreign agents law was copied from the American Foreign Agents Registration Act but made more restrictive.

adaptation, although this adaptation is not always successful. Authoritarian learning is a collaborative process with some regimes acting as testing grounds for others and all authoritarian regimes trying to develop best practices that other authoritarian regimes can use. Consequently, authoritarian learning is highly networked and less hierarchical, with all regimes able to bring ideas and practices to the table for consideration. Regional organisations play a significant role in providing dialogue venues, opportunities to share best practices, and ascertain through training exercises what works directly. Therefore, learning is crucial to increasing understanding on why authoritarian regimes persist.

1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework designed for explaining authoritarian learning is explored here and is tabulated to provide clarity on the terminological mess that is the literature on political learning. When studying this literature, researchers use different idioms to mean the same thing. Within this framework we analyse different learning theories that help explain authoritarian learning, assessing experiential and social learning in Table 1.1. Table 1.2 investigates the literature on political learning and shows how parts of this literature help explain authoritarian learning. After investigating theory and political learning, we turn to analysing diffusion and linkage and leverage, as both are crucial to authoritarian learning.

Experiential and social learning help explain authoritarian learning as they account for both success and failure. Social learning is relevant as it includes habitus and communities of practice, which are relevant to authoritarian learning, as authoritarian elites rely on their past and networks for learning examples. Diffusion – which is a crucial part of authoritarian learning – fits into social learning theory. Before addressing diffusion, we investigate how authoritarian learning fits into the literature on political learning. We define political learning as ‘any change in behaviour due to a change in perception about how to solve a problem’ (Haas, 1991: 63). In this literature there is policy transfer, adaptation, and learning. The differences between them are small and we use policy transfer as an umbrella term as it includes both learning and adaptation. Three other literatures of relevance are diffusion, emulation, and lesson-drawing. Each is briefly explained in Table 1.2.

Table 1.1 *Theoretical framework of authoritarian learning*

Theory	Explanation	Example(s)
Experiential learning	In experiential learning, the learner acquires knowledge by devising questions and investigating those questions to construct meaning (Marin, 2015: 855), combining concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Brookes, 1995: 66). It incorporates examples of failure and success (Marin, 2015: 855).	Governments improving capabilities by learning from external and internal successes and failures.
Social learning (includes habitus and communities of practice)	Social learning is how a person learns from their social environment. People observe others and learn what to do (success) and what not to do (failure) (Bandura, 1963, 1971: 3).	Learning from others' successes and failures and learning from domestic experiences, which shapes how individuals learn.
Habitus	How people use past experiences to adapt to present situations (Bourdieu, 1972, 1992, 2000).	Many elites in the four case studies lived during the Soviet Union, so they internalise Soviet experiences for use now.
Communities of practice	Everyday networks that allow people to share best practices and learn from what worked or	There is evidence that bodies of the CIS, such as the Council of Heads of State, hold informal

Table 1.1 (cont.)

Theory	Explanation	Example(s)
	did not (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29; Wenger, 1998: 7; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002).	meetings, making this council and the CIS networks of sharing best practices and learning.

Diffusion, emulation, lesson-drawing, linkage and leverage, and policy transfer are crucial to understanding authoritarian learning. Each is referred to throughout the book to explain examples used to highlight authoritarian learning in the four case studies. Each is relevant to authoritarian learning, but policy transfer and diffusion are crucial. Authoritarian leaders and elites diffuse information between one another. According to Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019: 2746), diffusion involves ‘any intentionality on the part of the policy innovator and can occur through simple demonstration effects’. However, as will be shown here, authoritarian learning involves direct meetings and sharing of experiences, rather than simply demonstration effects. While the statement ‘90% of what to do can be found on Google’,¹⁴ is true, what will be shown is that there is something more happening than the spread of ideas. Lemon and Antonov (2020) correctly highlighted policy transfer in the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, but we feel that rather than being distinct, policy transfer is a part of authoritarian learning. Emulation is crucial to understanding authoritarian learning, allowing other authoritarian leaders and elites to ascertain what worked elsewhere and act accordingly (Beissinger, 2007: 259). Demonstration effects are important. If it can be demonstrated that something works, it is likely to be copied.

Similarly, we show that authoritarian learning is far more horizontal than the literature considers. Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016) and Kneuer and colleagues (2019) have postulated the concept of authoritarian gravity centres, where some authoritarian regimes – for example China and Russia – are models for other authoritarian regimes. This is indeed the case with economic and political models – especially

¹⁴ Personal interview: HW29578.

Table 1.2 *Learning-related topics and authoritarian learning*

Types of political learning	Explanation	Example(s)
Diffusion	Strang (1991: 325) defined diffusion as 'any process where prior adoption or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for remaining non-adopters'.	• It is likely that the 2012 Russian foreign agents law was diffused, as restrictive NGO legislation occurred later in Azerbaijan (2013), Tajikistan (2014), Kazakhstan (2016), Ukraine (2017), and China (2017). • Many post-Soviet states copied Russian legislation, although there is no direct policy transfer (Bader, M, 2014). This points to diffusion, where elites look at examples rather than learning directly.
Emulation	Effort to match – or even surpass – a policy or practice through imitation.	• During the mid-2000s various post-Soviet authoritarian regimes tried to out-do one another in developing best practices to stop Colour Revolutions, which had led to authoritarian collapse in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005).
Lesson-drawing	Policy-makers draw lessons to achieve best results and learn from others about what to do and what not to do (James and Lodge, 2003: 180; Tosun, 2013: 19).	• Governments draw lessons from other policies to 'apply to their own political system' (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 344).

Linkage and leverage	Linkage refers to political, economic, and cultural ties between states and generally allows richer states to exert leverage over weaker states. The literature mostly addresses how Western democracies use economic links with authoritarian neighbouring states to exert leverage over them and initiate democratisation (Levitsky and Way, 2005: 23, 26, 2006: 379).	• In the post-Soviet space Russia, as the hegemon, uses cultural, economic, and political ties to link with other post-Soviet states (Cameron and Ornstein, 2012; Strzelecki, 2016). • However, as people with authoritarian tendencies are averse to losing power, Russia has been unable – at least to an extent – to exert leverage on other post-Soviet states (Way, 2015) but maintains linkage. Linkage is more important than leverage. Linkages between states help reinforce authoritarianism while precipitating diffusion, copying, and sharing. Brownlee (2017: 1335) contends that the greater linkages authoritarian regimes have, the greater chance ideas will spread, helping authoritarian leaders better consolidate power and deter external democratisation pressures. Authoritarian regimes have increased trade with one another in ‘an intentional move to close ranks internationally’ (Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz, 2017: 1231), thereby improving linkages.
Policy transfer	How policy transmission between states occurs with policy originating in state A being transferred to state B, which	• During the 2013–14 Euromaidan, the Yanukovych regime passed the dictatorship laws, which were copied from previous Belarusian and Russian legislation.

Table 1.2 (*cont.*)

Types of political learning	Explanation	Example(s)
	perceives the policy as successful (Zito and Schout, 2009: 1114).	• Lemon and Antonov (2020) demonstrated that legislation on right to assembly, civil society, and political participation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan has the same wording. While all five regimes could have collaborated directly, it is likely that the CIS's Inter-Parliamentary Assembly – which harmonises member state legislation – was crucial in these legislative carbon copies.

regarding China. Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner (2010: 84) argued that authoritarian regimes have inspired others. However, while these regimes may be models for others, it does not necessarily mean that learning is unidirectional from Beijing and Moscow to other capitals. Rather, we show that authoritarian learning is more networked and horizontal than widely considered. We turn to analysing networks and the actors involved in authoritarian learning.

1.4.2 Networks of Authoritarian Learning

Although networks are investigated in more detail later, it is crucial to explain what a network is, and which regional and state institutions are relevant for authoritarian learning. Using Solnick's (1998) bank run analogy, authoritarian leaders want to restrict any possible regime change. To do so requires that they learn from successful and failed examples to better retain power. As the leader and elites do not want to lose power, they develop best survival practices and have a direct stake in regime preservation and power retention. Consequently, there are extensive networks involved in authoritarian learning. We argue that authoritarian learning is not just learning from external sources, but involves internal examples too. Table 1.3 shows which regional and state institutions, and elite groups are involved in learning in the four case studies at both levels.

These networks are crucial to authoritarian survival. Such networks are extensive – especially external networks – with diverse groups involved in learning. Authoritarian-minded leaders and elites, whether in consolidated or unconsolidated regimes, are concerned with remaining in power and so they learn from external and internal examples of success and failure. Learning is constant although not always successful. It is crucial to understand that authoritarian learning is constant, as elites look to preserve power, although it is not always effective.

As authoritarian leaders and elites are constantly learning to preserve power and reduce chances of regime collapse, learning networks are extensive. Although we list these networks by state institution or regional organisations, they are likely to cross structures and be less centralised than we represent here. Similarly, many networks overlay themselves on formal government structures that do not necessarily represent these actual institutions. This creates a dichotomy, where networks are both centralised and decentralised at the same time.

Table 1.3 *Regional and state institutions and personnel involved in learning*

Institution	Involvement in external learning	Involvement in internal learning
Ambassadors	Heavily involved in providing information on what is happening in their own country to the elites in the country of their ambassadorship and vice versa. Many ambassadors – particularly for Russia – had close ties with the elites in the countries they are ambassadors to. This allowed them to give information on what was happening in their own country. During protests between 2015 and 2016, the Ukrainian ambassador to Moldova met interior ministry personnel to discuss the Euromaidan in Ukraine between 2013 and 2014. Embassies play a role with Belarusian and Russian embassy staff allegedly on Kyiv's streets during the Orange Revolution (2003–4) and Euromaidan (2013–14) taking notes and sending these back to higher-ups in Minsk and Moscow.	As an external network, ambassadors have little role in internal learning.
Foreign ministries	Personnel in these institutions regularly meet one another in regional organisations and inter-foreign ministry commissions, allowing for discussion and learning. There are regular meetings between foreign ministries due to state visits too. Agreements to share information are crucial to learning opportunities provided by this institution.	Limited involvement in internal learning.

Internal affairs ministries	There are regular meetings in regional organisations and there are inter-state commissions too. There are agreements between internal affairs ministries to collaborate and share information.	Plays a significant role in internal learning through regular meetings of personnel. These institutions incorporate many branches that share information and regularly meet. In a country as large as Russia, regional personnel share information to determine whether tactics to disperse protests in Moscow can be used in Saransk. The Kremlin learnt that protest-dispersal practices used in the regions resulted in more protests in Moscow due to the heavy-handedness of regional personnel. Consequently, tactics have changed in how interior ministry personnel deal with protests in Moscow and St Petersburg for fear of creating a spiral.
Parliaments	There are inter-parliamentary commissions, allowing for legislative and best practice sharing. Parliaments also have committees on foreign relations. For example, the upper house of the Russian parliament – the Federation Council – has a committee on the post-Soviet states. Consequently, Russian parliamentarians regularly visit	There are parliamentary committees dealing with domestic affairs, which is one way for learning to happen. Many parliamentarians in the case studies have been in parliament for a long time. This

Table 1.3 (*cont.*)

Institution	Involvement in external learning	Involvement in internal learning
Political parties	other post-Soviet states, allowing for discussions that help both sides learn. Political parties across the post-Soviet space work closely together. For instance, United Russia has a collaboration agreement with the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and with Party of Regions in Ukraine, when the latter was in power under Viktor Yanukovych. This allows elites to share past experiences externally.	makes sharing best practices from the past domestically easier. As with parliaments, many party members have been in politics for a long time. Consequently, these personnel impart information on previous events to help learning in the present.
Prime ministers	There are meetings in regional organisations for prime ministers allowing experience to be shared. They meet regularly in inter-state meetings, thereby providing other learning opportunities.	As many prime ministers have been members of various governments – regarding Moldova and Ukraine – and part of existing regimes in Belarus and Russia, they have experience to share.
Presidential administrations	Regular meetings occur among structures of the presidential administration at the external level. For instance, a week after the head of the Belarusian presidential administration, Viktor Sheiman, visited China and liaised with the Chinese Communist Party, legislation tightened Internet access.	Various presidential administration structures are involved in internal learning. For instance, the Russian presidential administration experiments with different ideas to ensure regime electoral victory.

Regional organisations	Various post-Soviet regional organisations provide opportunities for best practice sharing and learning. There is some information about how these organisations help members counteract protesters under the façade of anti-terrorist operations.	Plays a very limited role – if any – in internal learning.
Security councils	Regular meetings between security councils provide learning opportunities used externally. For example, after the Arab Spring, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, visited Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco to discuss successes and failures from these protests.	As these institutions consist of personnel from across other state structures, there is much that can be learnt.
Security services	Regular contact between post-Soviet security services, with opportunities for learning and sharing of best practices. Personnel from the Belarusian and Russia security services regularly meet and share ideas.	These structures play a key role in internal learning by developing best practices. One example is the training of Russian security forces outside Lyubertsy in the Moscow region against protesters while protests happened in Moscow in 2016. Similarly, state security services are split into various branches – fourteen in the case of Belarus – and so it is likely these branches consult one another, thereby helping with internal learning.

However, due to the lack of information on these networks and the fluidity of personnel in these structures,¹⁵ it remains challenging to really represent these structures. One example is all the models put forward representing relations between Putin and other elites.¹⁶ So, understanding learning networks involves guesswork and we can only offer a limited analysis of the learning network that exist. But by analysing various institutions we have located ten places learning networks exist. These are a mixture of centralised and decentralised entities overlaid on existing institutions. Consequently, these networks are opaque, and it is likely that most learning takes place where no information can be found.¹⁷ Although the limited available evidence points to networks being hierarchical, with top institutional elites involved in learning, it is likely that more junior members also engage in dialogue.¹⁸ As leaders and elites do not want to tarnish their image as aspiring democrats by letting information about these networks seep out and highlight, for example, that there were discussions restricting foreign funding for NGOs, such networks are well hidden. However, these remain integral to explaining authoritarian learning and highlight that learning is constant, includes many personnel, and is more horizontal than widely considered.

Figure 1.1 shows the different networks involved in external learning. These networks engage in extensive learning, although this does not occur solely from one network to another. Most networks engage in diffusion, linkage, lesson-drawing, and policy transfer. As Figure 1.1 shows, the ten networks are engaged intensively in learning from external success and failure. Due to inter-linkage between elites in the four case studies, diffusion, linkage, and lesson-drawing are crucial to external learning. If we perceive that policy transfer includes any course

¹⁵ Personal interview: AM01079, who explained that many Russian elites show little loyalty to one another and coalesce around a resource. However, when interests change, they unite with other elites. It is likely this is so for the other case studies.

¹⁶ Different models have seen these relations as planets (Ledeneva, 2013: 60), a politburo 2.0 (Michenko Consulting, 2017), or a royal court (Haase, 2012).

¹⁷ Personal interview: YR52870, who explained how much discussion occurs in state sanatoria. This is a likely source of learning. For example, former director of the *Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti* (FSB) Nikolai Patrushev regularly conducted meetings while watching Dynamo Moscow's ice hockey team (Soldatov and Borogan, 2010: 88–9).

¹⁸ Personal interviews: YR52870, ND30192.

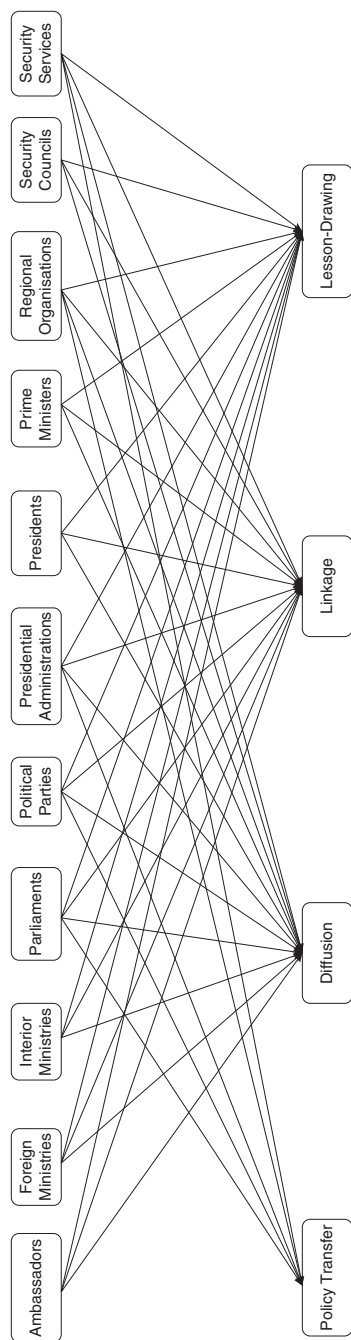


Figure 1.1 Elite networks and external learning

of action, then all structures are involved in this learning type. However, we contend that policy transfer is specific to legislative development and the spread of laws from one state to another. Learning through action is explained by diffusion, lesson-drawing, and linkage. While all nine external learning networks investigated here are involved in these three learning types, only a few are engaged in policy transfer. Having addressed these external learning networks, we turn to internal learning networks.

Figure 1.2 presents how internal networks are involved in authoritarian learning and the learning types used. As diffusion is a learning type occurring at the inter-state level, we do not include it as part of learning happening among internal networks. Similarly, as linkage implies links between states, we do not include it here when analysing internal learning networks. There are fewer networks playing a role in internal learning networks, but they are significant in their operation and in understanding authoritarian learning. Figure 1.2 clearly sets out which networks are involved in which learning type. We argue that with internal learning, authoritarian-minded leaders are more likely to draw lessons from previous examples than use policy transfer. As authoritarian leaders are concerned with survival, they are more likely to draw lessons from past internal failures than successes – although learning from successes is also possible. It is also unlikely that an authoritarian leader will publicly admit to integrating a previous successful policy – and certainly would not use one that failed. Therefore, it is likely that lesson-drawing has more pertinence to internal learning than policy transfer, although the latter remains relevant.

Internal learning is crucial to authoritarian learning, as people use experiences from childhood in the present. Politicians in the four case studies grew up in the Soviet Union and not only survived the 1990s but

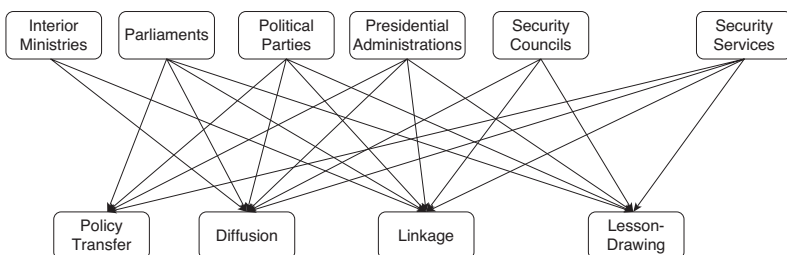


Figure 1.2 Elite networks and internal learning

wrote the rulebook on how to survive it.¹⁹ Therefore, they are likely to resort to authoritarian practices and draw on Soviet experiences and the 1990s. Many elites have been in or around for power years and so to better understand authoritarian learning, one must investigate internal learning. Another aspect of how networks contribute to internal learning in the cases studied is through patronal politics. Moldovan and Ukrainian elites have simply changed position when a new regime takes power, giving these factions opportunities to learn from previous governments. There is likely even learning from the Soviet Union. One example is the failed social parasite law in Belarus, which the Belarusian authorities took from Soviet legislation. The only difference was that the Soviet Union internally exiled the unemployed, whereas the Belarusian regime taxed them (Loushnikova, 2015). Whereas there is some turnover in Belarus and Russia, elites in both states have been in power – overall – longer than personnel in Moldova and Ukraine. This allows Belarusian and Russian elites to learn from past successes or mistakes and draw lessons from the Soviet period. Although both regimes have elite renewal, younger elites learn from those who came before.²⁰ In Moldova and Ukraine, regimes come and go, but elites remain, with changed power remits in existing structures. Therefore, the elites have been members of previous regimes and so use lesson-drawing and policy transfer to effectively learn from internal experiences. Having analysed authoritarian learning and the networks involved we turn to setting out the plan for the rest of the book.

1.5 Organisation of This Book

A comprehensive analysis of authoritarian learning is necessary to better understand how authoritarian regimes and authoritarian-minded elites attempt to survive. Within authoritarian learning, emulation and linkage play a role, but most significant is a strong diffusive practice of direct dialogue, collaboration, sharing of best practices, and cooperation on training exercises to ascertain what works in practice. The rest of the book investigates why authoritarian regimes learn, how they learn, and what they learn. Chapter 2 provides the methodology that will be used throughout the book. This incorporates a comparative research design, using case studies, and a research methodology of

¹⁹ Personal interview: DP24850. ²⁰ Personal interviews: KG84027, ND30192.

interviews and process-tracing. The chapter then goes on to analyse the authoritarian tendency trajectories of the four case studies before investigating the research questions that will lead the rest of the book chapters.

From there, we address learning from external failure in Chapter 3. Defining what we mean by failure allows the chapter to analyse examples of authoritarian-minded elites learning from failure. We investigate a range of examples, with China learning from the failure of the Soviet Union, which saw the creation of a mixture of a state-controlled market economy, political reforms, and the promotion of a nationalist identity. This has helped the Chinese regime gain increased popular legitimacy. We then investigate case learning from the Orange Revolution, Arab Spring, and Euromaidan. In particular, the Belarusian and Russian authorities have particularly focused on these events to learn from these failures.

Having analysed external failure in Chapter 3, we turn to learning from internal failure in Chapter 4. Lessons from the Soviet Union and 1990s taken from Belarus and Russia are addressed in the chapter, before it investigates the lessons Putin took from his initial image failure of the Kursk submarine sinking to become the macho-man depicted in many memes today. A further example of learning from internal failure is the 2009 Moldovan Twitter Revolution and the lessons that Plahotniuc took from Voronin's failure to retain power during these protests. We then assess various Ukrainian governments' learning from the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013–14 Euromaidan, with Yanukovich drawing lessons from Kuchma's failures in 2004 and Poroshenko doing the same with Yanukovich's mistakes during the Euromaidan. A final section of the chapter addresses Russian failure to learn from pension protests in 2005 when implementing a new pension policy in 2018, which led to protests. The other example in the section is the social parasite law in Belarus. This saw the Belarusian authorities' tax the unemployed and led to the first state-wide protests under Lukashenka. Yet the government failed to learn from these events and continued similar policies that in part precipitated protests in 2020.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigated learning from failure. By contrast, Chapter 5 analyses learning from external and internal success. To begin with, the chapter looks at whether China, Singapore, and possibly Kazakhstan are models that the four case studies look to copy.

China is a clear model for the four case studies. Yet, Kazakhstan and Singapore are relevant as well. The chapter then investigates the copying of NGO legislation and how the other case studies have tried to incorporate the 2012 Russian foreign agents law. A final section of the chapter investigates learning from domestic success. One example is how Lukashenka has taken successes from the Soviet Union and implemented these in Belarus. Another example is the successes of previous domestic regimes learnt from by Moldovan and Ukrainian governments.

The next three chapters address different aspects of networks that are crucial for learning by authoritarian-minded elites. Chapter 6 analyses the role that post-Soviet regional organisations play in authoritarian learning. These institutions provide many opportunities for meeting, dialogue, legislative sharing, the sharing of best practices to consolidate power, and engagement in training exercises. Analysis of the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO, and the Union State between Belarus and Russia highlights that these four organisations provide many opportunities for learning. As Moldova and Ukraine are not members of many – or any – of these organisations, this may explain why authoritarian-minded elites in these two case studies have failed to consolidate power.

After this, Chapter 7 investigates the external and internal formal networks that exist in the four case studies. These networks exist in formal state structures and there are ten institutions involved in these learning networks. All these networks engage in external learning and the majority participate in diffusion, linkage, and lesson-drawing. Fewer institutions are involved in policy transfer. We define policy transfer as actions that specifically are focused on legislative development. This explains why fewer institutions are involved in this aspect of learning. Similarly, fewer structures are involved in internal formal networks – with only six institutions engaging in internal networks. Only half of these structures use policy transfer as an aspect of learning.

Chapter 8 investigates external and internal informal networks. Due to the difficulties of locating these types of networks, we concentrate on a couple of examples. As the book is focused on learning and how learning percolates between authoritarian-minded elites, we start the chapter by analysing Russian links to authoritarian-minded elites in Moldova and Ukraine. These are extensive, and while the current governments in Moldova and Ukraine are – for now at least – pro-European, by maintaining ties to other elite factions in both states, the

Russian authorities are playing a waiting game in the hope that public opinion swings to a more pro-Russian attitude. Due to the war in Ukraine, it is unlikely this will occur anytime soon in Ukraine, but it is always best to be prepared. The chapter then investigates the extensive internal informal networks in the case studies, with these structures helping authoritarian-minded elites learn.

In conclusion, Chapter 9 reiterates the book's findings, providing a comprehensive picture of authoritarian learning. It addresses areas for future research, with particular emphasis placed on the need to ascertain if the findings here can be extrapolated to cases in other regions like Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia. The chapter concludes by providing some policy recommendations, providing measures and suggestions to cope with and react to the continued growth of authoritarian regimes worldwide.