Ralph Jessen, Hedwig Richter (eds.)

Voting for Hitler and Stalin

Elections Under 20th Century Dictatorships

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Introduction

Non-Competitive Elections in 20ᵗʰ Century Dictatorships: Some Questions and General Considerations

Ralph Jessen and Hedwig Richter

Elections make the difference between a democracy and a dictatorship. Not the only difference, of course, but nevertheless a decisive one. Any acceptable definition of a democratic order includes the following: universal suffrage, a secret ballot, and competing candidates. These are the essential prerequisites for the legitimization of a political regime. Regardless of all critical considerations concerning limits of representation which could hamper democracy, the elitist isolation of the political class, or the socially, economically or culturally biased structure of the electoral system, elections are considered to be a cornerstone of popular sovereignty.

However, despite this, elections were and are not limited to liberal democracies. In fact most of the 20ᵗʰ century dictatorships put a great deal of effort into arranging general elections and referenda. For example, the Soviet government along with other governments in the Eastern Bloc countries regularly called their populations out to vote in general, equal, direct and secret elections. No effort was spared in enticing the voters to the ballot box. During the 1960s millions of Soviet citizens came together in hundreds of thousands of election meetings to take part in the elections for the Supreme Soviet. In Moscow thousands of shows, dance performances and concerts were put on in order to entertain the voters. In the polling stations play areas and buffets were set up. Around 15 per cent of the total population took part in the Soviet election campaigns as agitators and canvassers (see Tsipursky, Bohn, Smith, Heumos in this volume; Jacobs 1970, 62–68). Of course, with regard to influencing the composition of the parliament, or even the government, all of this remained quite meaningless. Yet, why did dictatorships stage these "elections without choice" (Hermet et al., 1978) if their function as "institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders by some or all of the recognized members of an organization" was not being fulfilled in the slightest (Rokkan 1968, 6; see also Lipset and Rokkan 1967)?

Why did political regimes, which were radically opposed to liberal democracy, imitate one of the crucial features of that antagonistic system? This is the main question which this volume of essays seeks to answer, and it is based on the assumption that fake democratic elections cannot simply be dismissed as trivial propaganda phenomena, but rather are a source of valuable insights into the functioning of dictatorships in the 20th century.

20th Century Dictatorships

Juan Linz distinguishes between democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (Linz 1975, 2000). This typology has been adopted by many political scientists and historians—despite the fact that the different types of *authoritarian* regime make it difficult to bring them all under one common term, and also despite the criticism of different aspects of the theory of totalitarianism. For as much as one might regard the term totalitarianism as problematic given its normative connotations, its fixation on the structures of a regime, and its relative blindness to social and cultural practices, a typological classification of the main different types of dictatorship is essential (Jessen 1995; Bessel and Jessen 1996). This is even more so the case in respect to elections.

Political scientists dealing with this topic have quite rightly highlighted the close relationship between the form and function of the elections, and the type of political regime. In this respect the determining classification criteria are institutionalization and the practice of political competition. Thus, Dieter Nohlen distinguishes between competitive elections in democratic systems, semi-competitive elections in authoritarian systems, and non-competitive elections in totalitarian systems (Nohlen 2009, 26 f). Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way have also arrived at a similar trichotomy in their differentiation between democracy, competitive authoritarian regimes and closed authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010). Others have put forward even more strongly differentiated typologies (Howard and Roessler 2006; Smith 2006).

For political scientists, an interest in elections which take place within non-democratic frameworks has mainly been directed at *authoritarian* regimes. These regimes were the focus of the pioneering 1978 study "Elections Without Choice" by Guy Hermet et al. Furthermore, the develop-

ments following the downfall of Communism in Europe have led to an even greater focus on this area. The "Third Wave of Democratization" (Huntington 1991) after 1989 resulted in stable democracies in only a few Central and Eastern European countries. In most of the post-communist states, different types of authoritarian regimes have established themselves—regimes which attempt to legitimize themselves by means of elections without there being any hope of fair competition (Wilson 2005). This links the neo-authoritarian regimes of the post-communist world with many states in Africa and Asia. Whether the latest upheavals in the North African and Arabian areas will result in a fourth wave of democratization, as some commentators have been quick to hope for, remains to be seen (Olimat 2008; Grand 2011). However, skepticism would seem to be advisable.

Andreas Schedler has drawn the conclusion that the counter-movements to the Third Wave of democratization have not produced different forms of "defective democracies", but rather a new type of regime, namely that of "electoral authoritarianism". Moreover, the relative stability of this new type of regime is not due to the suppression of elections, but rather the effective manipulation of the electoral system (Schedler 2002, 2006 a, b). Although elections in this type of regime feature a minimum level of inclusion, pluralism, competition, and openness, the rules of free and fair elections are breached so systematically that they become instruments wielded by the authoritarian elite to control and direct power (Schedler 2006 b, 2–6).

While political scientists are mainly interested in current phenomena of "electoral authoritarianism", this volume follows a different course. While it does take inspiration from current problems, the essays mainly focus on issues arising from historical research. Furthermore, the volume focuses on the *totalitarian dictatorships*—in particular those in fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany, and the communist states between 1917 and 1991.[1] Despite significant differences, these dictatorships had some common features: they presented themselves radically modern, anti-traditional, and

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1 Due to the lack of a better alternative, here the term *totalitarian dictatorships* will be used in order to distinguish these regimes from the *authoritarian* dictatorships of the inter-war and post-war periods, as well as from the *neo-authoritarian* regimes of the present. The more open and normatively less loaded term "modern dictatorship" (Kocka 1999) is not appropriate here since the *neo-authoritarian* regimes of recent times cannot be labeled as either pre-modern or post-modern, but in fact also belong to *modernity*.

oriented towards a utopian concept of a *new society*. They were based on a strictly anti-liberal and anti-pluralist model of politics and society. This model was connected to an ideal of homogeneity and purity, based on the collective exclusion of *objective enemies*, as Hannah Arendt put it (Arendt 1951). Those included in the *Volksgemeinschaft* or *socialist society* would be integrated into a kind of *dictatorship of consent*. Under these regimes elections corresponded to the category of "zero-competition election" (Smith 2006). While elections in authoritarian and neo-authoritarian regimes served as an instrument of "non-democratic access to power" as Andreas Schedler aptly defines it, in *totalitarian* dictatorships their primary function was as a means for the "non-democratic exercise of power" (Schedler 2006 b, 6). Whether their function extended beyond this, still remains to be considered.

State of Research

Elections in the *totalitarian* dictatorships of the 20th century are not a prominent theme in historical research. Since they so clearly break the rules of fair competition, it seems obvious that they should be discounted as insignificant propaganda events. Secret police, violence, and terror as the instruments used in the safeguarding of power appeared to be much more worthy of attention. Moreover, the fact that elections and plebiscites took place under Fascism and National Socialism only in the 1920s and 1930s, while in the communist European regimes they were of significance up until 1989, has led to an asymmetric division of academic interest. While the elections in the right-wing dictatorships of the first half of the 20th century have been a focus of *historical* research, the elections which took place under Communism usually were the subject of research conducted by *political scientists*. Both disciplines use different approaches, methods and sources. Whereas after 1945 historians were able to analyze the surviving documents from the fascist era, until 1989/91 political scientists and historians had only a few sources at their disposal relating to elections in the communist sphere. The situation only began to improve after the collapse of Communism in Europe—however, still today there are significant differences among the post-communist states.

  With regard to the significance of elections for the Nazi dictatorship in Germany, there are two factors which have been of particular interest for

historical research, but which are not dealt with in this volume. The first is the important question of the origins, motivations, and social structure of the *Nazi voters* in the *Weimar Republic*—it is to these voters that the NSDAP owed its spectacular successes at the ballot box during the chaotic years at the end of the first German Republic (Chrystal 1975; Childers 1983; Falter 1991). The second is the 1935 referendum in which the inhabitants of the Saar region, which had effectively been under French administration since 1920, voted overwhelmingly in favor of annexation to the *German Reich* (zur Mühlen 1979; Paul 1984). In both cases these were not elections under a dictatorship, but free elections which heralded the rise of the NS movement and the initial popularity of the regime.

A special role was also played by the elections to the Councils of Trust which were introduced by the Nazis—in 1934 and 1935 workers were called on to take part in these elections. They have mainly been regarded as a test case for loyalty or political resistance among industrial workers (Zollitsch 1989; Rüther 1991; Frese 1992). By contrast, the referenda of the 1930s, which have been examined in detail by Otmar Jung, were aimed at the whole German population. There were three referenda in which the regime sought to link demonstrations of power in foreign policy with domestic plebiscitary approval. In one instance, during the referendum in 1934, Hitler had his usurpation of the office of the state president sanctioned by the people (Jung 1995; 1998). Up until now, the three Reichstag elections which the NS regime held in November 1933, March 1936, and April 1938 using one-party lists have attracted less attention than the sensational referenda. As well as Jung's work, which, however, does not deal with the elections as a focal point, the regional study conducted by Frank Omland should be mentioned here—his study is also represented by an article in this volume (Jung 1995; 52, 87; Omland 2002, 2008). With respect to Italian Fascism, although there have been some studies on the plebiscites held under Mussolini's dictatorship, in general these have been less frequently studied than those in Germany (Fimiani 1997; Dal Lago 1999).

However, recently there has been increased interest in investigating the extent to which the German population supported the NS regime, as well as how the loyalty of the people can be measured, and which instruments the dictatorship employed in its attempt to consolidate the apparent consensus between the people and the leadership. Examples include the controversial thesis of Götz Aly on the direct or indirect participation of

large sections of the German population in the plundering of the occupied territories during the war, and also the work of Robert Gellately on denunciation. Further studies include David Welch on propaganda, Markus Urban on the rituals of consensus at the Party congresses, and the latest work by Paul Corner on Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes (Aly 2005; Gellately 2001; Welch 1993; Urban 2007; Corner 2009). Up until now, elections have barely been discussed within this context. Therefore, it seems appropriate to link the staging of elections and plebiscites more closely to the general question of the nature of the dictatorship than has previously been the case.

The studies that critically examine the practice and function of elections in the Soviet Union mainly stem from the period before 1991. They were mostly conducted by American or Western European political scientists, and were based on officially available information or on interviews with immigrants. This limited the validity of these studies, as did the political framework of the Cold War. As well as describing the history and structure of the electoral procedures, some of these studies are concerned with ascertaining the functions of "elections without choice", and in particular the contribution these elections made to the legitimization of communist dictatorships (Pravda 1978; Zaslavsky and Brym 1978; White 1985). Furthermore, the local elections in the Soviet Union have attracted the curiosity of western researchers in particular. In contrast to the heavily ritualized nature of the national elections, the suggestion is that in these elections there was a certain leeway for political participation, although the various studies have not reached a definite conclusion on this (Swearer 1961; Jacobs 1970; Friedgut 1979; Hahn 1988). In the search for indicators of non-conformist voting, western observers have focused in particular on non-voters since the end of the 1960s. They started with the plausible assumption that in the light of great pressure to participate in elections, electoral avoidance could be a strong indicator of divergent political opinions (Gilison 1968; Karklins 1986; Roeder 1989). But despite the subtle interpretation of the narrow source base, the insights provided by these observations were limited.

After 1991, political scientists rapidly lost interest in elections which had been conducted under the communist dictatorships. Furthermore, also to historians other topics seemed to be more important than the elections held under Stalin and his successors. However, some studies have already shown the potential insights which can be gained from historical research

which analyzes elections as phenomena of the interaction between the dictatorial state and society, and not only with regard to their political instrumentalization. These studies include J. Arch Getty on the elections of 1937, Wendy Z. Goldman on the parallel *Campaign for Union Democracy* or Jan T. Gross on the elections in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland in 1939 (Getty 1991; Goldman 2007; Gross 1986; Fitzpatrick 1999).

Studies that examine the Soviet-dominated states of Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1991 highlight three main strands of research: firstly, the elections in the period between the end of the war and the establishment of the communist dictatorship. In a still unstable interim situation these polls at first provided certain opportunities for non-communist votes to count—for example, at the local elections and the *Landtag* elections in 1946 in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany (Tuller 1997; Creuzberger 1999). However, only a short time later manipulated elections provided the communist takeover of power with apparent democratic legitimization (Onisoru and Treptow 1998; Zimmermann 2002).

Studies on national variants of non-choice suffrage since the end of the 1940s form the second strand of research. Although the details differed in the various Eastern Bloc countries, nowhere was there the possibility that the Communist Party would be in danger of defeat at the ballot box (Wiatr 1960; Jedruch 1982; Roman 1987, 2007; Löw 1998; Kloth 2000). However, the tightening of the electoral process in Poland after the crisis of 1956, and the great significance which the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia accorded the elections in 1971, which were the first after the suppression of the Prague Spring, both show that elections were not a routine event (Drygalski and Kwasniewski 1990; Jędruch 1982; Dinka and Skidmore 1973).

The third strand of research centers on the issue that even in the context of a dictatorship, elections could become a factor in system change. In Poland and Hungary limited changes in the electoral process in the 1980s promoted the erosion of the Communist Party's monopoly on power (Racz 1987; Lewis 1990), while in the German Democratic Republic, the stubborn adherence of the SED to elections without choice and the blatant manipulation of the local elections in May 1989 stimulated the protest against the regime (Broßmann 1999; Kloth 2000; Herz 2004; Bienert 2008).

Research Perspectives

This volume brings together historians and political scientists with their respective approaches, ideas, and methods. Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the communist regimes in Europe are in the historians' realm now. However, it is of great advantage that political scientists are still interested in elections under modern dictatorships, offering a more systematic perspective, clearly defined categories, and an analytical approach to dominance, collective obedience, political rituals and symbols. On the other hand, it is necessary to historicize and to contextualize our topic. What elections and plebiscites actually meant for the people at the time, and what they meant for the exercise of dictatorial power depended upon specific historical circumstances.

When it comes to dictatorial means of dominance, many historians as well as political scientists tend to concentrate on political institutions and organizations such as the state bureaucracy and the ruling Party, mass organizations, secret police forces, or mass media. With respect to elections, this perspective highlights the staging of the polls, the legal framework, the ideological context, the ways to enforce the notorious 99 per cent turnout, and also the faking of the results. It is in the very nature of dictatorship that power is concentrated in the political center, and society is controlled from above. So a top-down perspective on official narratives, intentions, structures, and practices is self-evident and has been the subject of several studies. However, we also need a bottom-up perspective. Although the political agency of individual citizens—not to mention the agency of collective actors—under dictatorial auspices was extremely restricted, it was not meaningless. In our case, with respect to voting, every single citizen to some degree was actively involved in a political ritual—they had to act or react, to take part, or indeed refuse to do so. What exactly does the overwhelming participation on polling day indicate? Compliance? Resignation? Indifference? How did voters use the remaining scope to act—staying away from the polling station for instance, or using the voting booth or actively taking part in the nomination process? Even under a dictatorship elections were a ritual of interaction between state and society. The perceptions, options, and strategies of voters are of crucial importance if we are to try to estimate the impact of the whole voting process on the stability and legitimacy of the regime. A comprehensive

picture needs a combination of top-down and bottom-up research approaches.

Although the outcome of elections and plebiscites in a non-democratic environment rarely caused any surprise, historical reconstruction has to look below the surface. Analytically it is useful to distinguish between at least three general dimensions: firstly the institutional sphere of dictatorial domination. This dimension obviously not only includes legally defined bodies such as parliament, government, parties or *national fronts*, as well as the state administration, regulations on how to nominate candidates, the electoral law, and the organizations and bodies directly involved in the electoral process. It also includes the extra-legal, informal structures of dominance—the Communist Party for instance, claiming supremacy over all other political actors—politically controlled mass media, and secret police forces all belong to this dimension. This institutional sphere of "polity" usually attracts the greatest amount of attention from researchers when it comes to elections in dictatorships.

Secondly, we have to deal with dictatorial dominance as social practice. When thousands of Party activists went from door to door during a canvassing campaign, talking to virtually every potential voter, trying to persuade him or her, harassing him or her to go to the polls, elections as an instrument of exercising power materialized on the level of face-to-face interaction. The same occurred at pre-election meetings and of course during the act of voting itself. In many cases these were highly ritualized acts of communication, but ritualized interaction is also meaningful. Face-to-face contact with a representative of the ruling Party may foster obedience, but could also be an opportunity to grumble, complain, or even to bargain. Election campaigns and the polls themselves produced thousands and thousands of occasions of direct social interaction and communication—we need to distinguish this process analytically from the institutional structure.

A third dimension is that of the "culture of voting" in a dictatorial environment. In their plea for an "historical ethnography of voting", Romain Bertrand and his co-authors in 2007 put forward the argument that the institutionalization of the secret ballot produced different "cultures of voting" (Bertrand et al., 2007). They did not bother about elections in dictatorships, which typically did not have a secret ballot, but they also made an interesting point for our case. The question of the cultural dimension leads to the issue of the meanings different actors ascribe to the electoral

procedures and to the socio-cultural embeddedness of voting techniques and practices. Also an election without choice—to take an example—idealized the isolated, individual, rational citizen, disengaged from loyalty to the family or local commitments. Irrespective of the manipulative setting, elections were very modern political technologies which stood in sharp contrast to more traditional procedures of collective decision making. Also the meaning and relevance of the *private* and the *public*, of the *secret* and the *visible* were dramatically affected by elections which pretended to be *free* but in reality were strictly under surveillance.

A cultural history perspective on elections in dictatorships also promises to be a rewarding one because the stability and legitimacy of political institutions are created not least by symbolic representation (Stollberg-Rilinger 2005; 2008; Chartier 1988; Vorländer 2005; Biefang 2009). Although historians were inspired by the *cultural turn* of the recent decades, and developed new areas of research within an extended concept of politics as a socially and discursively produced practice, research into elections has remained relatively untouched by this. At the most one will find examples in studies on the 18th and 19th century—for example, in the innovative work of Frank O'Gorman, who investigated the symbolic dimension of elections in England (O'Gorman 1989, 1992, 2000; see also Vernon 1993; Bensel 2004). Also inspiring is the work carried out in Early Modern Studies. In view of the completely different electoral practices in the pre-modern period, research on this period developed a much broader understanding of the issue, and questions relating to materiality and performance were integrated into the analysis much earlier (Stollberg-Rilinger 2001). Although cultural history approaches have been employed in the analysis of elections in the 19th and 20th centuries by authors such as Malcolm Crook or Thomas Mergel, they have not yet been used to analyze the features of elections without choice (Crook and Crook 2007; Bensel 2004; Anderson 2000; Kühne 1994; Mergel 2010; 2005).

The advantages of employing a cultural history approach are threefold: first of all, a "cultural" and "historical-ethnographic" approach can lead to a certain level of "alienation". Thus, rather than simply judging elections held in dictatorships against the western-democratic standard paradigm, and thereby condemning them, we are led to question their system-specific function and the significance ascribed to them by the different participating actors. This draws attention to the question as to whether all elections, including those taking place within a liberal-democratic context, in fact

always contain elements of discipline. Thus, individual, secret ballots can be seen as de-legitimizing alternative forms of collective political expression such as demonstrations, petitions, street protests, or the traditional charivari (Bertrand et al., 2007b, 12). A more detached approach also provokes the question as to why dictators, who believed in a whole new world, fell back on the western-democratic *Australian Ballot*, adopting its procedures such as uniform ballot papers, ballot boxes, voting booths etc., and did not use corporate forms of voting systems or indeed open acclamation.

These considerations lead to the second point in favor of using a cultural history approach, namely that it facilitates the assessing of elections and voting from the viewpoint of performance and materiality. The fact that on election day almost one hundred per cent of the electorate made their way to the polls was a powerful symbol of consensus and demonstrative proof of loyalty, even if many only did so reluctantly and involuntarily. The interpretation of elections as a ritual opens up a view on the way dictatorial systems function because "rituals assert normative standards of belief and behavior and thus the boundaries of what may be deemed socially and politically acceptable" (O'Gorman 2000, 164; see also Edelman 1964; Land 1981; Rytlewski and Kraa 1987; Bizeul 2000; Crewe 2006). Looking at it in terms of materiality, however, it becomes clear to what extent power is exercised, distributed or denied by means of ballot papers and the ballot box. Ballot papers or voting booths may indeed be constructed by people and represent social value systems, but to refer to Latour's terminology, they can also be analyzed as "actants", which develop their own dynamics (Latour 1995, 14; see also Schatzki 2003, 89).

The inclusion of materiality and technology into the approach can be linked to Foucault's concept of power, which then leads to the third point in favor of a cultural history approach. As with Latour, in Foucault's theory material objects are allocated a role in social practices: architecture, machines, bodies, technology or the gaze can create power relations (Foucault 1977). This complex concept of power also includes the observation of interaction from *above* and *below*. Therefore, power is to be interpreted as social interactions among those who rule, as well as between the rulers and the ruled, between discourses, objects and structures. For all the importance that political pressure and coercion played in the elections in dictatorships, they were productions whose impact was due to the fact that all the participants played the roles to which they had been allocated.

Fields of Study

From these initial considerations, three different research areas can be identified which thematize the two-way interaction between the ruling powers and the population, albeit in different ways. In the following, these three areas will be linked to empirical observations and theoretical deliberations. The first relates to the legitimizing effect of the elections, the second to their disciplinary function, and the third to how the electorate reacted to the imposition of elections without choice.

Legitimization and Ambivalent Modernity

Elections should also serve to legitimize authority in dictatorships. They are suitable for this task because first of all, unlike almost any other *political technology* they symbolize modernity. Since the "first wave" of democratization (Huntington), they have become an indispensable prerequisite if a state wishes to present itself as *modern*. Already in the 19th century, and then after the First World War, in the perception of most of the political public, elections and democracy became linked to *modernity*, the *cultural state*, and *civility* (Bryce 1921, 3–14; Kaisenberg 1930, 161 f.; see also Brandt 1998, 68; Lipset and Lakin 2004). Even the anti-liberal, totalitarian systems could not avoid this logic and connected their official master narrative of unity between people, state, and ruling Party to the claim that this unity was manifested in elections and plebiscites.

The orientation towards western symbols of modernity went so far that dictatorships as a rule maintained the complex system of the *Australian Ballot* or even, as was the case with Stalin, introduced it for the first time. When Stalin established the new Soviet constitution with its general, equal, direct and secret voting system, the effect this step had overseas played an important role in his calculations (Getty 1991, 19; see also the article by Merl). In fact Stalin's constitution and its apparently *modern* electoral system was met with euphoria among some western intellectuals (see Smith; Bayerlein 2009). Theoretically the constitution meant universal suffrage— for each worker, peasant and Muslim woman in the huge domain of the Soviet Union, and even for the clergy who had been disenfranchised after the revolution. Andrei Vyshinskii (1883–1954), the infamous chief pro-

secutor in the Moscow show trials of 1936–1938, pointedly described this claim to modernity as follows:

"Never in a single country did the people manifest such activity in elections as did the Soviet people. Never has any capitalist country known, nor can it know, such a high percentage of those participating in voting as did the USSR. The Soviet election system under the Stalin Constitution and the elections of Supreme Soviets have shown the entire world once again that Soviet democracy is the authentic sovereignty of the people of which the best minds of mankind have dreamed" (quoted from Smith in this volume).

Even the Italian Fascists also celebrated themselves as having the most modern form of popular government: the fascist minister and follower of Mussolini, Giuseppe Bottai (1895–1959), asserted that Fascism would be more democratic than all the traditional democracies because it had eliminated the distinction between the elite and the masses. The influential newspaper *Corriere della Sera* declared in 1939 that: "the fascist regime is the most democratic regime that exists because it has *total* consensus" (quoted from Corner in this volume).

Secondly, in addition to their meaning as a *symbol* of modernity, the political *technology* of general and equal elections was able to contribute towards the loosening of traditional connections and individual loyalties, despite all the dictatorial limitations. It was also able to establish the concept of individual citizenship and legitimize central state power. This factor is mainly seen in countries that had no electoral tradition that predated dictatorship, such as the Soviet Union. As we can see in 19th century Western countries and in the case of contemporary China, un-free elections could also have modernizing effects (Lu and Shi 2009; Anderson 2000; Arsenschek 2003; Bensel 2004). Like elections that take place under democratic conditions, non-choice elections are based on the model of an individual, equal citizen, who takes part in public affairs by using his or her right to vote. In societies without a tradition of universal and free suffrage this modern political technology—even in its non-democratic version—could marginalize and de-legitimize traditional patterns of inequality, local mutualism, tribal loyalty and collectivism (Goldman 2007; Gross 1986). The introduction of female suffrage in the Muslim territories of the USSR probably had a modernizing effect, irrespective of its non-democratic character.

The third aspect is that dictatorial regimes were able to confer increased legitimacy upon themselves by maintaining that they were upholding exist-

ing electoral rules and procedures. In Italy and Germany before the Fascists and National Socialists established their regimes there had been a long tradition of elections and suffrage stretching back to the 19th century. Over several decades the population had been able to gain experience of this political technology with the result that elections belonged to the *normal* and *necessary* elements of politics which could only be changed with great difficulty (Bryce 1921, 46; Kühne 1998, 59). Under these circumstances, the abolition of suffrage, or even a fundamental modification of it, would have endangered the claims to legitimacy of the regime. The German National Socialists, who were at great pains to achieve the appearance of legality in the establishment of their dictatorship, may well have destroyed the democratic content and the fundamental rights contained within the *Weimar* constitution, but they retained the *Reichstag* elections and turned them into an instrument for the staging of *Führer* plebiscites (Omland and Urban, this volume). Even in the Soviet Occupation Zone the *Sowjetische Militäradministration* and German Communists at first allowed competitive regional elections in a concerted effort to legitimize the conversion of the political system. Shortly afterwards, however, these elections were transformed into a single-list system with some pseudo-pluralist elements (Bienert 2008; Kloth 2000, 75–95; see Richter in this volume).

A fourth aspect is that the potential legitimizing power of dictatorial elections depended not only on the historical context but also on their tactical deployment by governments. Hitler, for example, staged plebiscites during the 1930s in close connection to successful political coups, and thereby strengthened the general sense of euphoria. Stalin launched the new constitution of 1936 and the new universal suffrage in 1937 during the darkest years of mass terror, and thus focussed attention on the apparent modernization potential of Communism. In post-Yalta Europe after 1945 free elections became a test case for self-determination and immediately a crucial Cold War issue (Wright 1961).

The fifth aspect is the question of whether elections in dictatorships contributed to the legitimization of power, taking the context of the election campaigns into consideration—campaigns that the communist regimes in particular put much effort into staging, and which almost became more important than the act of voting itself (Ó Beacháin, and Bohn in this volume; Dietrich 1966, 816). In countless election meetings a majority of the electorate was addressed. This was, without doubt, a rather asymmetric form of communication in which the ruling Party put much

effort into preaching its ideology. Indeed these meetings sometimes provided the opportunity to express dissatisfaction and put forward complaints, even to the point of becoming informal negotiation processes (see the article by Richter; Nohlen 2009, 36). However, they were primarily part of a huge mobilization process in which many thousands of Party members and functionaries were able to demonstrate their enthusiasm and loyalty, and thus became active participants in the political performance. As is the case with other forms of mass mobilization such as political celebrations, Party conventions, and demonstrations, election campaigns activated the rank and file of the ruling Party and gave them a feeling of importance as well as a sense of being closely connected to the regime.

The sixth question is to what extent the notorious approval rates of almost 100 per cent of the votes were really able to contribute to the legitimization of power. Of course, official propaganda always celebrated such results as the overwhelming affirmation of the regime. However, in the end the results of a non-competitive election say little about whether the citizens actually regard their government as legitimate. Election results with approval rates of 99 or 100 per cent are not only implausible, but they also suffer from a kind of performative self-contradiction since they signal complete consensus even though modern electoral technology is supposed to guarantee *individual* voting that is detached from collective ties. Indeed, one can regard elections as a symbolic representation of the postulated unity of Party, state and people, but they tell us little about the degree to which the population believed in their legitimacy. Rather, they are an indicator of conformism and the extent to which the population was prepared to take part in a ritual demonstration of loyalty. In this respect, this would concord with the thesis of Zaslavsky and Brym who argue with respect to the Soviet Union that: "Elections buttress the regime—not by legitimizing it, but by prompting the population to show that the *illegitimacy* of its 'democratic' practice has been accepted and that no action to undermine it will be forthcoming" (Zaslavsky and Brym, 1978, 371).

Consensus und Discipline

Even under democratic, constitutional conditions in which elections are a credible instrument of political participation, they nevertheless have elements of discipline. This is true, on the one hand, in the sense that the

establishment of elections means that non-institutionalized forms of protest and representation lose their legitimacy (Bertrand et al., 2007b, 12). On the other hand, the technology of the modern electoral process promotes the rationalization of political forms of articulation and demands from the electorate a controlled, disciplined behavior: they have to accept the electoral procedure and follow the strict time frame of the election process. The registration of the electorate and the control of their franchise depend on reliable identification and recording processes. It is no coincidence that modern suffrage has become more widespread at the same time as "the standardizing omnipotence of bureaucracy" (Geisthövel 2008, 25). There is also a close link between literacy and suffrage, and in the past illiterate sections of the population were often either in effect, or sometimes also legally excluded from elections (Bertrand et al. 2007 b, 11). The extent to which elections and suffrage were used to exclude whole groups of people can be seen in the long history of the struggle for universal and equal suffrage. In many countries it was not until well into the 20th century that voting restrictions based on class, wealth, occupation, education, religion, race, and gender were finally abolished and the political rights of citizens were extended to all (Marshall 1964). The right to vote created the disciplined citizen, who in voting demonstrated his or her belief in legitimacy and their membership of the political community. Those in the 19th century who were of a liberal mindset saw suffrage as having an integrating and disciplinary effect. The New York politician Henry Ward Beecher declared, for example, in the 1860s that "to have an ignorant class voting is dangerous […]; but to have an ignorant class and not have them voting, is a great deal more dangerous" (quoted in Wilder 2000, 79).

However, even if the technology of elections has always been connected with elements of behavioral discipline, in 20th century dictatorships this assumed a completely new quality and became one of its main functions. Regimes of both the right and left took advantage of one of the constitutive characteristics of modern electoral technology, namely the public organization of the elections while at the same time systematically annulling the corresponding confidentiality of the individual act of voting. Thus, since participation in an election without choice was public and became conventionalized as the duty of a citizen, elections were easily able to be made into a litmus test of obedience (Zaslavsky and Brym 1978, 368; Hermet 1978 b, 15). As Paul Corner highlights in his article in this volume, the disciplinary effect of the election did not depend on the actual opinion

of the voters, but rather on their public cooperation: "Political conviction took second place to *public* behavior. What was important was that the individual had to *be seen* to be part of the collective effort; inner thoughts were less important." The Fascists merely expected everyone to behave as if they believed in Fascism—even if this was not the case. What was important was "*visible* manifestations of conformity with the common purpose" (Corner). Therefore, the ruling Party and the state authorities put a huge amount of effort into getting the electorate to the ballot box. In the GDR, for example, inquiries were carried out before the elections to ascertain who was likely to refuse to vote or would use the voting booth. In individual and group discussions those citizens who were regarded as suspect, such as the clergy, would be persuaded and pressed into going to vote—sometimes by exerting pressure, but sometimes by using incentives (see Richter in this volume). Jan T. Gross has interpreted the forced participation in the first Soviet elections in occupied East Poland in October 1939 as a public humiliation ritual that was designed to have a long-term damaging effect on the self-respect of the people as well as their belief in others:

"In such a spectacle we are all shown to each other engaged in an act of betrayal of our own beliefs for fear of sanction. What expectations of loyalty can one hold from such tainted prospective associates? And then, in the end, nobody can be sure who was in earnest, or to what degree. After the October elections the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia had lost their innocence. They had made a contribution. They were, as of then, implicated. For the only interpretation which makes sense of the otherwise absurd herding of the people into pre-election meetings and then voting booths, lies in the recognition that Soviet authorities never sought *engagement* from the population in their custody or *electio* or *acclamatio,* only complicity." (Gross 1986, 29).

Despite the moral tone of the language, this is an important observation that can explain why the grotesque approval rates of 99 per cent despite their implausibility had the effect of greatly stabilizing the system. In his study on "Private Truths, Public Lies" Timur Kuran has analyzed this as "preference falsification", and David T. Smith has followed this up with his study on elections in the *post-totalitarian* Soviet Union (Kuran 1995; Smith 2006). A picture of general approval was nevertheless generated because citizens whose private opinion did not concur with the politics of the regime still signalized conformity in the context of the public ritual of the elections in order not to be conspicuous and thus attract sanctions.

This public impression in turn motivated other people to also behave in a conformist manner. "Thus the populace itself perpetuated Communism" (Smith 2006, 19).

Bottom-Up Communication: Loyalty and Dissent

Even if voters had no real opportunity to participate, they usually had some options to act: they could or could not take part in election meetings, go to the polls, enter the voting booth, cast their vote. The voters had more or less three options: active acceptance combined with an inner identification, passive acceptance or open rejection.

Active acceptance and a huge willingness to identify with the regime can be seen in the example of National Socialist Germany when the 1933 November elections reflected the euphoria of large sections of the German population in the wake of the successful seizure of power by the National Socialist movement. The Soviet elections also show indications of an inner willingness to comply on behalf of some parts of the electorate—for example, when conformist citizens used the ballot papers to write down patriotic slogans or hymns to the Soviet Union (Carson 1955, 75; see Merl and Bohn in this volume). Even if it is very difficult to assess how widespread and representative such expressions were, it seems as if in this respect there was a significant difference between *autochthonous* dictatorships of National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union, and regimes that were established by means of Soviet external pressure.

As a rule, the majority of voters completed the state ceremony of the election as designated by the authorities: they voted for the nominated candidates on the single-list, put the ballot paper into the ballot box without changing it and without using the voting booths, which had been set up as a matter of pro forma (Dietrich 1966, 816; Bohn, 10 and 17, this volume; Bienert 2008). It was a similar story with respect to the plebiscites that were held in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. Indeed, the voters in this context did formally have the choice of ticking "yes" or "no", or in Italy they could either put the "yes" slip in the national colors of Italy or the gray "no" paper into the see-through ballot box in full public view (see Fimiani in this volume). The barrage of propaganda, scare tactics, and public pressure that surrounded the whole staging of the elections, as well

as the above-mentioned mechanisms for *preference falsification* all ensured that the vast majority of voters participated and conformed (Ó Beacháin in this volume; Jacobs 1970, 69; Gross 1986, 27; Lewis 1990, 91).

Antipathy or indifference was not so much reflected in dissenting votes or demonstrative abstaining from voting, but rather in complacency and uncertainty with respect to elections without choice. For example, a study showed that in Poland in 1958 only four per cent of the population were familiar with the voting procedure. Even after the 1973 elections twenty per cent of Polish voters did not know which candidates had been elected for which political committees. In addition, the voters had to constantly face the fact that the election results could be manipulated as required. Even if such falsifications were not widely necessary in light of the pressures on the population (Lewis 1990, 91), the knowledge that manipulation could take place was both demotivating and demoralizing (Drygalski and Kwasniewski 1990, 308; Yurchak 2006, 15–17; Jacobs 1991, 186; see in this volume Tsipursky, Merl and Ó Beacháin). Thus dictatorial elections promoted political passivity, indifference and cynicism—a fundamental attitude that certainly made it easier for the post-communist states to establish new forms of electoral authoritarianism (see in this volume Ó Beacháin; on political apathy see Nohlen 2009, 28).

Open rejection of the elections and non-conformist behavior, the third option open to the electorate, always remained the exception. This was not only as a result of pressure from above and the paralyzing perception that all others were publicly participating. The pressure to conform that arises from peers, colleagues, and neighbors should not be underestimated—adaptation, subordination and integration into the *collective* or the *community of the people* were key values while individualism and *Eigensinn* (Alf Lüdtke, see Lindenberger 1999) were frowned upon. Whoever refused to take part in the elections disrupted the regulated course of events. In Socialism a non-voter or voting booth user could, under certain circumstances, provoke the punishment of his shop floor brigade or housing collective in that he or she put the brigade's premium or the renovation of the house at risk (see Tsipursky in this volume). Non-voters demonstratively positioned themselves outside society. Even if someone only wanted to criticize the elections, they would quickly be labeled as anti-social and a suspected oppositionist. Those who disapproved of the voting ritual nevertheless took part in order not to be excluded from society. As a rule, non-voters

were well-known, self-confident outsiders who no longer expected anything from society and who openly rejected it.

Despite these factors, the infamous 99 per cent results were not seen immediately, nor were they universal. On the one hand, there were differences among the regimes. It was the communist dictatorships in the Soviet sphere of power that placed a particularly high value on almost complete approval at the polls. Although it is also the case that elections held in Fascist Italy, National Socialist Germany and more recently those held in China on a local level saw participation and approval rates that would be unthinkable in western liberal democracies. Nevertheless, there were also results that were under the 90 per cent level (Jacobs 1991, 187; see Lu and Shi 1999; Fimiani, Corner, and Omland in this volume). The *totalitarian* 99 per cent did not only depend on the specific political traditions, the electoral politics of the regime and the relative insularity of the Soviet empire. They were also the result of a longer process of acclimatization and the successive implementation of the demand for loyalty from those in power (see Ó Beacháin and Merl in this volume). During the first few years of the Soviet Union, in the countryside only about a quarter of the electorate went to the polls. In contrast to the modern technology of central state-organized elections, in the villages there initially continued to be a "patriarchal oral culture of village politics" (Figes 1988, 26). Before 1920, when a national campaign was started to increase the political activities of women, female participation in elections in the Soviet Union was more the exception than the rule (Radkey 1989; Figes 1988).

Democratic electoral traditions could also have an inhibitory function: in the large industrial cities in Northern Italy, where there was a long history of democracy, under the Fascists up to 18 per cent of the electorate did not vote or voted "no" (Fimiani, 16; Corner, 10). Also, in East Germany after 1945 there were significant levels of "no" votes with respect to single-lists (Bienert 2008). In Czechoslovakia the workforce, which was familiar with democracy, at first did not resign itself to letting its vote be dictated by the Party and maintained a "stubborn localism" (Heumos in this volume).

Lastly, one should not lose sight of the importance of the micro-politics of the elections. They show once again that elections under dictatorships were not only instruments of the top-down exercise of power, but also to a certain extent served as means of communication between the ruling powers and society. In the Soviet Union many voters used the ballot

paper as a type of petition, and wrote down their worries, complaints and wishes (Merl and Bohn). They did not do this, for the most part, in order to articulate their fundamental rejection of the system, but rather in the hope of achieving a concrete improvement in their living standards.

The functionaries of the Communist Party responded to these concerns in their election meetings or in individual conversations. In the later years of the GDR, they hugely concerned themselves with potential non-voters, and had *election discussions* with them in order to encourage them to vote. These discussions often centered on concrete wishes. In a rather crude form of haggling, voters were presented with trade-offs in exchange for their votes if they expressed dissatisfaction about their housing, working conditions or lack of supplies. While such individual discussions were reserved for possible non-voters, the normal citizens could have their say at the public election meetings that were held throughout the country during election campaigns. At these the citizens could present the candidates with *election contracts* in which they demanded new shopping facilities or reminded them that a building needed renovating. The candidates could then accept these requests if they could be fulfilled within the Party's plan (Merl 2007; Richter 2009, 283–295). It was not only pressure and propaganda that ensured a high rate of participation—local negotiations also played a part. Along with petitions, election campaigns belonged to the communication channels used for exchanges between the ruling and the ruled on a local, micro-political level. However, it was by no means close to being political participation on an effective level.