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## Symbiotic Suppression: How Digital Authoritarianism Helps Facilitate Physical Repression in Indian Controlled Kashmir

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SYMBIOTIC SUPPRESSION:  
HOW DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM HELPS FACILITATE PHYSICAL  
REPRESSION IN INDIAN CONTROLLED KASHMIR

by

Patrick Aaron White

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
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## ABSTRACT

Within the scholarship of authoritarianism, there is a growing assumption that as a regime's access to digital means of repression increases, use of violence and other forms of physical state repression will be replaced and decrease. However, since India's revocation of Kashmir's special semi-autonomous status in August 2019, the nature of the ensuing crackdown has suggested that this understanding of modern repression may be incomplete—especially in light of India's extensive use of the digital tactics that purportedly facilitate this transition. Through examining a broad collection of Kashmiri activist, survivor, journalist, and NGO accounts since August 5, 2019, this thesis contends that digital authoritarianism and physical repression can actually thrive symbiotically—offering substantial dividends for the regime at the expense of the civilian dissent. In particular, these findings highlight the need for future research to continue studying the development of “symbiotic” situations like Kashmir, as well as to begin identifying the ways in which international players can leverage change in this evolving realm of repression.

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## INTRODUCTION

*They're marauding our homes and hearths like a victorious army. They are now behaving as if they have a right over our lives, property and honor.<sup>1</sup>*

*- Nazir Ahmed Bhat, Kashmiri resident  
September 2019*

August 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 would become a watershed moment in the history of one of the most dangerous regions in the world. Jammu and Kashmir, a territory caught in the crossfire between two disdainful nuclear powers in India and Pakistan, was seeing the final fragmentary remains of its partial autonomy ripped away suddenly and violently. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution—the long-debated provision which afforded Indian controlled Jammu and Kashmir (referred to hereafter as simply “Kashmir”) this semi-autonomous status—was scrapped by the central government, and the ensuing crackdown on the Kashmiri population was largely unparalleled by any previous democracy. In the immediate wake of the revocation, home invasions by the Indian security apparatus were widespread, gross human rights violations became a tool of intimidation, and thousands were briskly detained as the valley went into a vicious state of effective house arrest.

Such brutal lockdowns may have historical precedence in autocratic regimes, but the fact that this was undertaken by a country internationally viewed as the “world’s largest democracy” was cause for a new level of concern. Moreover, Indian repression in Kashmir was by no means anything new, but this old-school authoritarian crackdown was being implemented with the aid of a newer autocratic tactic: an internet blackout. At this point in time, India already outpaced the rest of the world in its use of this practice, and

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<sup>1</sup> Aijaz Hussain, “Kashmiris allege night terror by Indian troops in crackdown,” *Associated Press*, (September 14, 2019).



Kashmir was victim to more than two-thirds of them.<sup>2</sup> However, the 213-day blackout that would follow became the longest ever imposed by a democracy, and the severing of digital networks meant that the Kashmiri people were now isolated from the rest of the world, the rest of the valley, and in many cases, from their very own families. India was determined to crush a movement of dissent—which would likely have been unmatched in Kashmir’s long history—before it could ever begin, and just as they had over hundreds of years of occupation and oppression, the Kashmiris would pay dearly.

Viewing these blackouts alongside India’s blackouts is puzzling, especially due to an increasing assertion in the research literature on authoritarianism that these types of crackdowns should be subsiding. According to this line of thinking, autocrats are actively transitioning away from more physical means of repression thanks in large part to opportunities now afforded by the development of new internet technologies and information landscapes. In short, why take on the risks of killing one’s own people when the information that stirs discontent can instead be manipulated to prevent popular pushback? Both strategies encompass controlling a population, but the latter can be accomplished much less overtly than the former.

Therefore, an important and distinct dilemma arises: there is evidence that dictators are increasingly turning to digital tools of repression, yet violent repression continues to persist as part of India’s tactical repertoire—despite its purporting to being the world’s largest democracy. If access to the tools and infrastructure of digital authoritarianism truly decrease state use of physical repression, what explains the

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<sup>2</sup> Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, “Kashmir’s Internet Siege: an ongoing assault on digital rights,” n.a. (2020), <https://jkccs.net/report-kashmirs-internet-siege/>

development of the situation in Kashmir—especially since August 2019? Is it possible that the global trend identified by contemporary scholars is not entirely representative of the reality of the ground? If so, what conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between digital and traditional authoritarianism? This thesis explores all of these issues, especially as it relates to Guriev and Treisman’s theory of “informational autocrats,” under the core research question: *how has the availability of digital authoritarianism affected the Indian government’s use of violence in its suppression of the Kashmiri people?*

At this point, there may be one immediate pattern that is cause for confusion: why is India being discussed in the same context of autocrats and authoritarianism? After all, Freedom House still classifies the country as “Free” in its 2020 report of global democracy, and few would argue that the country itself resembles a government close to that of regional autocratic rivals like China and Russia.<sup>3</sup> The answer is relatively straightforward: for all intents and purposes, Indian Kashmir is not free. In the same 2020 report, Freedom House gives the territory a score of 28 out of 100—compared to India’s 71 and last year’s Kashmir’s 49—and affirms its peoples’ current reality with a “not free” classification.<sup>4</sup> While the semantics of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be debated extensively by those focused on Hindu nationalism and the larger politics of the Indian subcontinent, what cannot be disputed is that the Kashmiris are actively being oppressed in an environment of authoritarianism and to act otherwise would be misinformed. Therefore, this thesis accurately

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<sup>3</sup> Freedom House, “India: Freedom in the World 2020,” n.a., (2020), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2020>.

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House, “Indian Kashmir: Freedom in the World 2020,” n.a., (2020), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indian-kashmir/freedom-world/2020>.

contextualizes India, its security apparatus, and its central government within authoritarianist nomenclature like “autocrat” and “regime” regardless of whether this reasonably applies to the rest of India proper, and leaves this latter, separate debate for others to approach.

To start, Chapter 1 provides a theoretical framework which situates the reality in Kashmir within the field of authoritarianism, identifies the core components of digital authoritarianism, and introduces the concept of informational autocracy that becomes so central to the research question at large. This is followed by a literature review in Chapter 2, which dives deeper into Guriev and Treisman’s theory, articulates the five main goals of autocratic regimes, and contextualizes this with reference to other states and regimes. Chapter 3 examines the history of Kashmir and its centuries-long struggle for independence, and Chapter 4 specifically analyses the events that have taken place since the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. From a methodological standpoint, this is largely accomplished by collecting sources in a manner similar to the process known as snowball sampling, albeit using Twitter as a specific medium for this collection. In Chapter 5, some of the larger questions posed by the analysis are approached in greater detail, and ends with the work’s conclusionary thoughts.

As is discussed in the chapters ahead, a variety of factors makes it impossible that this thesis could provide a truly comprehensive account of the situation that has erupted in Kashmir. That said, these challenges do not diminish the importance of beginning to investigate the current reality, as the ensuing results have extraordinary implications for both the future of the Kashmir conflict as well as global democracy at large. Hopefully,

future research will continue to analyze the struggle in Kashmir, and start to provide answers to the questions this work raises.

## CHAPTER I

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*It seems the idea that a 'world is only a click away' doesn't exist for Kashmiris.<sup>5</sup>*

*-Bazila Ehsan, Kashmiri PhD scholar*

*August 2020*

In a field as often highly contested as political science, there is one reality that is as close to a consensus as there will ever be: the dawn of the internet and the modern digital age has had a monumental impact on the political process across the board. While the actual manifestation of these effects has certainly been hypothesized and debated with no end in sight, the development of the most highly complex means of communication in human history has changed the way elections are held, politicians reach their constituents, regimes oppress their populace, and movements spur societal change. Internet technologies have dramatically altered the landscape of opportunities available to individuals, groups, and governments, and any complete, up-to-date understanding of the Kashmir issue must recognize and account for such factors.

When examining the theories of networks at the most fundamental level, it is easy to see how influential the internet has truly become as a means of mass communication and information storage. Mueller argues that networks exist in the social sciences in two separate, distinguishable ways: as a means of “network analysis,” as well as in an

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<sup>5</sup> Safwat Zargar, “A year without high-speed internet ravaged health, education, entrepreneurship in Kashmir,” *Scroll.in*, (August 1, 2020).

“organizational form.”<sup>6</sup> According to Mueller, the latter usage of the term can be broken down in a myriad of complex interdisciplinary fragmentations, though he identifies three that are particularly relevant to the literature of economic organizations and political science: production networks, peer production, and political networks.<sup>7</sup> While the network in its organizational form is closely tied to its other iteration as a tool for network analysis—and certainly has inherent value in its own right—it is the first definition that holds the most relevance in this specific case.

The components of network analysis can be understood as a large web of various, interconnected links and nodes. In simplest terms, a node can be practically any tangible thing within the universe, while a link is the binding which creates the relationship between two nodes. For example, this type of network analysis can help explain the spread of a disease during a pandemic, with individual humans representing nodes while physical proximity acts as the vehicle in which exposure and transmission occur.<sup>8</sup>

As it relates to communication and the spread of information, the power of the internet as a link between nodes is widely understood even if it is not always fully appreciated. To continue within the example of a pandemic, an unobstructed internet connection allows for the nearly instant, seamless transfer of information by a doctor in New York to a peer in New Delhi. While the links that made up this network certainly did exist at prior points in history—in the form of phone calls, telegrams, or even traditional “snail mail,” for example—some of these methods could take hours, weeks, or

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<sup>6</sup> Milton Mueller, *Networks and States: The Global Politics of Internet Governance* (Cambridge: MIT Press: 2010), 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 34-38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

even months in a situation where speed is of the utmost importance. Looking even more broadly, the value of rapid, secure means of linkage is obvious for social movements looking to coordinate in the most efficient way—especially those under the control of autocratic oppression. Where in-person meetings between known dissent leaders may be infeasible due to physical separation by the regime’s coercive apparatus, internet technologies allow for the sharing of data and information that are crucial in building a resistance.

This application of network analysis to the politics of social movements immediately raises important, pertinent questions. For example, exactly what opportunities do these digital tools open up to dissenters in an oppressed society? Likewise, can these same tools also be utilized by authoritarians in order to preserve the regime’s balance of power? The answer to this last question in particular is fundamental in order to appropriately approach the research question.

First, the effects of internet technologies on a dissenting movement itself are perhaps no better exemplified than by the idea of transnational advocacy networks. Transnational advocacy networks, as Keck and Sikkink propose them, are specific to activists as opposed to economic firms or experts in a scientific field, and are formed with the purpose of changing the behavior of states and international organizations.<sup>9</sup> These groups operate on a basis of shared values and goals, and operate both domestically as well as transnationally. Keck and Sikkink identify seven major actors that comprise advocacy networks in some combination: international and domestic nongovernmental

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<sup>9</sup> Margaret Keck, Kathryn, Sikkink. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-2.

research and advocacy organizations (NGOs); local social movements; foundations; the media; churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, and intellectuals; parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations; and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments.<sup>10</sup>

These different actors can be more effectively understood through a process which Keck and Sikkink define as the *boomerang pattern*.<sup>11</sup> Put simply, when the state denies the demands of its populations, a domestic NGO or social movement will seek to share information with external actors within its transnational advocacy network, who in turn will share information with and exert pressure on their own state and relevant intergovernmental organizations. If adequately convinced, these states and intergovernmental organizations will use their own influence to pressure the original country to change their course of action. While this model certainly does not guarantee the successful realization of a movement's goals, it does at the very least create the potential for change that may very well not have existed without such networks.

Clearly, the impact of internet technologies in this process within in authoritarian society can be profound. Of course, these types of transnational advocacy networks could certainly exist in a less digitalized world, as information can spread in a variety of different ways as it has for all of human history. That said, means of communication like text, phone, email, and social media allow information to spread exponentially more quickly than it ever could before, and likewise, the efficiency of today's advocacy networks is simply unmatched. An autocratic state may be able to seal its physical borders, but as long as the internet remains accessible to members of the general

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 13.



population the regime is essentially unable to stop the transfer of information abroad. For a state unable to weather forms of international pressure like economic sanctions, this could be a death sentence for regime stability.

Theories like these demonstrate clearly that internet technologies have absolutely opened up opportunities to dissenters that were simply not available in the past. Taken at face value, such a fact may even suggest that on this basis, the existence of these technologies must therefore be an overall positive factor in the democratization process. However, this claim fails to take into account that the same characteristics that potentially make these technologies so powerful for social movements can also be utilized by the powers being rebelled against. Without a doubt, a fuller understanding of internet technologies from the authoritarian perspective is required in order to achieve a more complete analysis.

Though Guriev and Treisman are the first to coin the specific term “informational autocracy” in the academic realm, there is much related literature that also aids in painting a clearer picture of the dynamics and motivations that drive contemporary autocratic regimes. Gandhi and Lust-Okar, for example, eschew traditionally broader scholarship to explicitly study the purposes of holding elections in a dictatorship.<sup>12</sup> Much of Roberts’ work seeks to illustrate the lessons learned by regimes when implementing censorship, and what the potential consequences of such actions can be.<sup>13</sup> Others such as Egorov and Sonin have even gone as far as to study how the size and composition of an

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<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Gandhi, Ellen Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 12 (2009), 403-422.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Roberts, “Resilience to Online Censorship,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 23 (2020), 401-419.

autocrat's inner support circle can affect the overall regime's stability.<sup>14</sup> Guriev and Treisman's most recent work stands out, though, in its ability to tie such a wide variety of factors under the singular umbrella of informational autocracy theory.

In essence, the central argument Guriev and Treisman make is that autocrats remain in power by proving their competence to the general populace.<sup>15</sup> While such leaders have a vast array of means to convince the public of this fact, the empirical evidence shows that modern dictators have overwhelmingly embraced nonviolent measures of suppression in stark contrast to their historically violent counterparts. These informational autocrats manipulate information rather than kill, and Guriev and Treisman contend that it is this transition that has allowed so many regimes to survive well into the twenty-first century.

They also cite that the core threat to such a regime's stability is the ability to continually manage control over the informed elite, and balance modernization without too greatly enabling its inherent facilitation of democratization.<sup>16</sup> This quandary of modernization at the potential expense of liberalization has been recognized in academia as the "dictator's dilemma," and was brought to the political spotlight in 1985 by United States Secretary of State George Shultz:

Totalitarian societies face a dilemma: either they try to stifle these technologies and thereby fall further behind in the new industrial revolution, or else they permit these technologies and see their totalitarian control inevitably eroded. In fact, they do not have a choice, because they will never be able to entirely block the tide of technological advance.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Georgy Egorov, Konstantin Sonin, "Dictators and Their Viziers: Endogenizing the Loyalty Competence Trade-off," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 9, no. 2 (2011), 903-930.

<sup>15</sup> Sergei Guriev; Daniel Treisman, "Informational Autocrats," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2019), 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>17</sup> George Shultz, "Shaping American Foreign Policy: New Realities and New Ways of Thinking," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1985.

While these words may have been largely directed at the Soviet Union near the turning point of the Cold War, Shultz's sentiment rings true perhaps even more greatly thirty-five years later. It is nearly impossible to maintain a successful twenty-first century economy without the use of the internet in at least some way, and as concepts like the boomerang effect suggest, once this technology truly connects the public to the outside world a regime can quickly suffer attacks on its legitimacy. If legitimacy is severely undermined, in the eyes of Guriev and Treisman, a transition of power is almost inevitable. Hence, there is a real incentive for dictators to adopt and effectively utilize the strategy of informational autocracy.

Generally in political science, the process of oppression using digital information technology has been termed *digital authoritarianism*.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, much of the subject's relevant scholarship has been focused on the exportation of such technologies around the world—particularly by Russia and China.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, the tracking of such developments is of extreme importance as it relates to the promotion of democratic ideals—and likewise, the rejection of authoritarianism—around the world. However, some scholars have begun to push back on the way that the concept is commonly understood and applied. Gunitsky, for one, contends that the specific strategies typically associated with nondemocratic regimes are increasingly finding usage in democratic states as well.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of which terminology one prefers, it is still paramount to both

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<sup>18</sup> Alina Polyakova, Chris Meserole, "Exporting digital authoritarianism," Brookings Institute, 2020. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Valentin Weber, "The Worldwide Web of Chinese and Russian Information Controls," *Centre for Technology and Global Affairs, University of Oxford*, May 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Seva Gunitsky, "Is Digital Authoritarianism Still a Useful Concept?" University of Toronto, 2019, <https://www.individual.utoronto.ca/seva/CNASTalk.pdf>.

define and describe the four main strategies of digital oppression in order to fully recognize the threats they pose.

### Filtering

To start, *filtering* is a complex process where a regime will systematically deny access to some—but not all—internet content. To be clear, filtering is not a technique that follows a uniform set of principles from country to country; instead, the practice can vary widely in each case due to factors such as the existing power’s priorities, degree of social unrest, and the technological capability of the regime.<sup>21</sup> Though this strategy requires a high degree of effort to maintain due to the constant need to surveil and shift access, it can be considered a softer measure than its closely related “blocking” counterpart.

### Blocking

This technique goes by many different names, and is also commonly known as an “internet shutdown” or “blackout.” When a regime chooses to *block* the internet as a whole, it benefits by severing the network-based means of communication across an entire city, region, or even the country as a whole. This can be particularly useful in situations where other forms of non-localized contact may be limited, or when the goal is to isolate a certain group of people—such as a protest. In a macro-sense, this isolation can also help a regime mitigate the effects of developments like the boomerang pattern as access to international allies, media, and NGOs are assumedly inaccessible.

While the impacts of this bolder, more absolute tactic are far reaching—and the actual effectiveness heavily debated—there seems to be a few key indicators of when a

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<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Hellmeier, “The Dictator’s Digital Toolkit: Explaining Variation in Internet Filtering in Authoritarian Regimes,” *Politics & Policy* 44, no. 6 (2016), 1177.

shutdown may occur. Primarily, the existence of conflict seems to be at the top of this list.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, as the amount of foreign aid sent from the United States rises, the likelihood that country will blackout their internet significantly falls. Also, if a state has a past history of shutting down its internet—especially within the last year—it has a much higher chance of taking such action again than countries who have little to no blackout track record.

### Co-opting

Conversely, the process of *co-opting* does not actually seek to limit the spread of information at all. Instead, governments will “proactively subvert [...] social media for their own purposes,” which typically entails the gauging of public sentiment, bolstering of regime legitimacy, and the enhancement of mobilization and support.<sup>23</sup> Gunitsky identifies a myriad of implications stemming from this process, chiefly among them the fact that “citizen participation in social media may not signal regime weakness, but may in fact enhance regime strength and adaptability.”<sup>24</sup>

### Flooding

The final of these four methods is known as *flooding*. Roberts defines this technique as “the promotion of information, which changes the relative costs of access by making competing information cheaper and off-limits information relatively more expensive.”<sup>25</sup> In simplest terms, when faced with a story or event that a government may

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<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Sutterlin, “Flipping the Kill Switch: Why Governments Shut Down the Internet,” Honors Thesis, (William and Mary, 2020), 43-47.

<sup>23</sup> Gunitsky, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Roberts, *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China’s Great Firewall*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 193.

view as damaging or destabilizing, it may choose to oversaturate the information space with its own content to the point where the initial matter becomes exceedingly difficult to access—and if accessed, potentially significantly delegitimized. Gunitsky contends that “the goal of flooding is not to dominate the informational space but to dilute it.”<sup>26</sup> On this note, it should be recognized that the use of such a tactic on a specific population is not necessarily confined to the leaders of the people itself: the nature of an open internet inherently allows for this to be weaponized by groups, organizations, and even external, foreign influences.

This last point carries significance for all four tactics. For sure, use of the first two strategies is much rarer in democratic states than their autocratic counterparts. That said, the number of countries that utilized blocking alone rose from 2018 to 2019, and both India, the United Kingdom, and the United States were democracies that contributed to this trend.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the final two techniques are not only existent in democracies—their current use in countries such as the United States can be seen openly by domestic and foreign actors alike. In an environment where information has the ability to flow freely, the only thing stopping techniques like flooding and co-opting from flourishing is lack of action from interested parties. While this matter presents many pertinent questions itself, the most relevant consideration should be that the means of information manipulation (and depending on the lengths taken, digital oppression) are not just potentialities in a country connected to the web—they are current realities.

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<sup>26</sup> Gunitsky, 2.

<sup>27</sup>Berhan Taye, *Targeted, Cut off, And Left in the Dark: The #KeepItOn report on internet shutdowns in 2019*, Access Now, 2020.

Taken altogether, it is clear that that progression of internet technologies has opened up new channels of opportunity to authoritarian regimes that simply had not existed historically. So, as it relates to the larger research question, does this mean that these new opportunities truly supplant the traditional means of violent state action, as scholars like Guriev and Treisman suggest? Or is something more sinister perhaps at play: the reality that these technologies may actually complement the use of violent repression? In the ensuing literature review, a deeper look into the empirical evidence demonstrates that while the former argument certainly has its merits, it is impossible to ignore the validity of the latter.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*The state is using a mix of harassment, intimidation, surveillance and online information control to silence critical voices and force journalists to resort to self-censorship.*<sup>28</sup>

*-Ravi R Prasad, IPI Director of Advocacy  
March 2020*

Guriev and Treisman's work takes a forward role in the review of the existing literature as this thesis undoubtedly owes an intellectual debt to their theory of informational autocracy. The main scope of this thesis' analysis is centered around Guriev and Treisman's core contention that repression is on the decline throughout the world, and what role internet technologies play in this trend. A particularly constructive way of achieving this is by viewing state action through the lens of autocratic regime goals: namely, surveillance of dissidents, dissemination of misinformation, regime legitimization, creation of fear, and elimination of dissenter's operational capacity. In short, if one can begin to understand the underlying intentions of an autocrat, it can then be reasoned whether advances in modern technologies make the realization of these aims more efficient. If so, not only can the prevalence of state violence and digital authoritarianism be determined, but their interworking role in enabling regime stabilization may be discovered as well.

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<sup>28</sup> Minna Heikura, "Journalism in Kashmir: State of repression," *International Press Institute*, March 17, 2020.



Admittedly, the classification of these goals strictly within the confines of “autocracy” and “authoritarianism” is somewhat problematic. Much of this relates to the argument made by Gunitsky as it pertains to the term “digital authoritarianism.” Simply put, associating the use of internet technologies to achieve the above five aims would improperly exclude many within democratic societies who do the very same.

In the United States, for example, a June 2020 leak revealed that local and federal law enforcement agencies were tracking protestors during the summer’s Black Lives Matter demonstrations: surveilling personal communications as well as monitoring public forums like Facebook event RSVPs to log future protests and specific individuals.<sup>29</sup> This falls neatly within the constraints of the aforementioned “surveillance of dissidents” category. Furthermore, President Donald Trump spent much of the leadup and wake of the 2020 election spreading misinformation about clear and established electoral processes; Trump employed this strategy so much so that the platform actually began to label his tweets as “disputed” or “misleading”—eventually permanently suspending his account after his rhetoric helped incite the January 2021 Capitol attack. By utilizing Twitter as a means to systematically disseminate falsehoods about mail-in voting, vote tabulation, and election results, the President sought to legitimize an ongoing incumbency at a point he perceived himself to be losing control. While this still may have been possible without the use of internet technologies, the capability to instantaneously reach hundreds of millions of Twitter users substantially increased his ability to achieve the second and third categories of the goals list.

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<sup>29</sup> Mara Hvistendahl; Alleen Brown, “Law Enforcement Scoured Protester Communications and Exaggerated Threats to Minneapolis Cops, Leaked Documents Show,” *The Intercept*, June 26, 2020.

In spite of this, these goals are still worthy of consideration under the umbrella of authoritarianism. While Gunitsky makes the strong assertion that terms like “digital authoritarianism” can cause observers to overlook such instances within nonauthoritarian states, his take does not detract from the reality that these cases are in fact incompatible with the core tenets of liberalism regardless of whether they occur within a democratic setting. In short, shying away from appropriately descriptive nomenclature could have the unintended consequence of lessening the perceived nature of the threat these tactics pose.

As a final point prior to the examination of the relevant literature, clarification regarding the usage of several key terms should be established outright. Though “repression” and “violence” may seemingly be used interchangeably throughout this piece, an important distinction should be drawn between the two. While violence can absolutely be a manifestation of repression, repression can also include non-bloody coercive acts such as “arrests, imprisonment...denial of due processes and disappearances.”<sup>30</sup> Simply put, all state violence is repressive, but not all repression is explicitly violent. Recognizing this difference is crucial in determining the precise nature of authoritarian action by the state.

Empirically, the theory of informational autocracy laid out by Guriev and Treisman is strongly convincing. In their 2017 dataset on authoritarian control techniques, the two were able to measure the average amount of state killings conducted by autocrats ruling for at least five years in the period from 1945 to 2015. As finding accurate statistics for topics like such human rights abuses is commonly difficult due to widespread disputes and cover-ups, the dataset draws from over 950 sources across a

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<sup>30</sup> John M Richardson, “Violence and Repression: Neglected factors in development planning,” *Futures* 19, no. 6, (1987), 652.

broad breadth of origins. Two main trends emerge: first, while the number of dictators who were responsible for at least ten killings per year rose by over twenty percent from the 1940s to the 1980s, this category of leader dropped sharply from that point forward—down over thirty percent into the 2010s.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, outside of a brief reversion of the 1940s mean during the 1960s, the amount of dictators responsible for at least one hundred killings has decreased consistently over the past seventy years.<sup>32</sup>

The evidence for this decrease in killings becomes even stronger when accounting for a variety of related factors and patterns. Though political killings have been shown to increase during times of civil war and major insurgency, eliminating leaders who ruled under such circumstances from the dataset actually sharpens the decrease.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, instances of mass killings—defined by the deaths of at least one thousand noncombatants—fell twenty-one percent from 1992 to 2013.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly, political killings are far from the only method of repression—or even violent repression—that regimes have at their disposal. However, the data that Guriev and Treisman have collected suggests that these other tactics are also in meaningful decline. To start, use of torture from regimes has decreased from 96 percent to 74 percent over the course of the last thirty years—a point the two cite as especially surprising due to the fact that modern human rights monitoring should unveil instances of such abuse far more effectively than could be done in the past.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Guriev and Treisman, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

As it relates to nonviolent yet still unmistakably repressive actions, Guriev and Treisman plot political imprisonment much in the same way that they measure state killings. The drops are even more remarkable: the number of autocrats who detained more than one hundred political prisoners in a given year plummeted forty-four percent from the 1970s to the present, and those who detained more than one thousand plunged forty-three percent.<sup>36</sup> Overall, when viewed holistically, it seems that both violent and nonviolent means of repression have fallen significantly and consistently into the twenty-first century.

While this does not necessarily mean that repression cannot be a successful tool in the arsenal of an authoritarian regime, it would be shortsighted to act as if this decline has happened for no reason. One theory Guriev and Treisman posit is that this decrease may stem from the decline of appeal for communist, authoritarian ideologies since the end of the Cold War—a fairly strong potential explanation considering political killings and imprisonments dropped most drastically in the waning and succeeding years of the conflict.<sup>37</sup> As it relates to the larger question of internet technology's role in this decline, this makes it reasonable to surmise it is in fact larger democratization trends—not technological developments—that have been more responsible for such regime changes.

Recent research also strongly suggests that, in one way or another, autocrats around the world have shifted to understand that there are more effective means of maintaining power and controlling a populace than brute force. For many, these lessons

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 102.

were reinforced during the initial stages of the Arab Spring at the beginning of the 2010s—perhaps in no case as greatly as Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak.<sup>38</sup>

At a point where other contemporary autocrats at the international level had clearly begun to shift their tactics—as evidenced by Guriev and Treisman—Mubarak comfortably doubled down on the traditional means of control. For instance, in his penultimate year of rule, when the number of dictators who had imprisoned more than one thousand political prisoners was only at sixteen percent of authoritarian rulers over the course of the decade worldwide, Human Rights Watch reported that between five to ten thousand were detained in Egypt.<sup>39</sup> Under his reign, torture by the security apparatus was a regular occurrence, and freedom of assembly and expression were nonexistent. While Mubarak had fostered discontent for decades, the newly developing political and technological environment he faced in 2011 created the perfect conditions for political upheaval. His lack of responsiveness to these changing factors allows for a case study which illustrates the limitations of repression in the modern age plainly.

Against the backdrop of the uprising in Tunisia that had successfully displaced Ben Ali from power, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians would take to the streets to protest the state of their own regime in January. However, it was not Tunisia nor spontaneity that were the sole drivers of such collective action: international NGOs had been strengthening the capabilities of domestic opposition groups significantly since the 1990s through the documentation of human rights abuses, networking with local groups,

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<sup>38</sup> In China, for instance, the term “Egypt” was blocked by the CCP—an action which strongly implies their recognition that Mubarak’s situation represented a threat not unique to Egypt, North Africa, or the Middle East. See Arnaudo et al., 16.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Egypt: Events of 2009,” n.a., 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/egypt>

and mobilization of public opinion within Egypt. While it would be inappropriate to assign all credit for the 2011 protests to these international organizations—it was the Egyptian people who ultimately rose up—it would be equally problematic to deny the impact that these groups had on the process.

Such actions are entirely consistent with the concept of the boomerang effect as they demonstrate a clear example of a people subverting their nonresponsive government by working with international allies. Selim summarizes the effects on the movement—and Mubarak’s options—succinctly:

...These organizations played an important role in mobilizing Egyptian public opinion against the oppressive nature of the Mubarak regime. As the content of [their] reports became widely covered by local and international media, opposition newspapers and social media forums, opposition and civil society groups were able to attract larger domestic audiences from diverse political and socioeconomic backgrounds in support of their battle against the regime. This, in turn, put the Mubarak regime under increasing pressure as it found it more difficult to proceed with its oppressive measures without being detected and exposed, thereby undermining its legitimacy.<sup>40</sup>

This erosion of legitimacy that Selim describes is the exact development that Guriev and Treisman cite as the principle threat a regime faces in the preservation of its power.

Despite the dangers of doing so, though, Mubarak would again resort to the same, overt repressive tactics that had put him in such a position in the first place: digital authoritarianism would manifest in the form of internet blackouts, and use of force against protestors would result in nearly seven thousand casualties over the course of eighteen days—including eight hundred and forty-six deaths.<sup>41</sup> By the time Mubarak did seek to reconcile with the population through constitutional and legislative reforms, he

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<sup>40</sup> Gamal Selim, “Global Civil Society and the Egyptian 2011 Uprising: Assessing the Boomerang Effect,” *Mediterranean Review* 7, no. 2. (2014), 102.

<sup>41</sup> Jon Leyne, “Egypt: Cairo’s Tahrir Square fills with protestors,” *BBC*, July 8, 2011.

had lost the will of not just his people, but also the security forces which had legitimized his power in the first place. Bellin's research identifies the coercive apparatus as a pivotal force in the determination of regime durability, and Mubarak's strategy of utilizing repression without considering the position and motivations of his own was ultimately central to his demise.<sup>42</sup>

Much scholarly insight has been gained by examining these themes of repression and regime legitimacy through the lens of Mubarak's Egypt. Echoing the points above, Hussein argues that the regime's use of repression—in tandem with its poor political and economic performance—was counterproductive in quelling dissent, and ultimately served to delegitimize its reign rather than secure its longevity.<sup>43</sup> He compounds these findings by adding that the expansion of previously unavailable internet technologies were integral in exposing this lack of legitimacy, and created a window of opportunity for regime change that could not have existed before. Danju et al. are among many who mirror this latter idea, contending that social media was “catalytic” in sparking Arab Spring revolts like Egypt's.<sup>44</sup> That said, a glaring question remains from such literature: does this mean there is a direct correlation between internet diffusion and decreases in state violence, or do these “catalytic” effects only occur when the regime has been delegitimized to the point of no return?

Certainly, some leaders have continued to maintain their traditional modes of repression as a means to quell dissent a decade after the Arab Spring. However, research

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<sup>42</sup> Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring,” *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (January 2012), 143.

<sup>43</sup> Ebtisam Hussein, “Rationalizing Public Repression: Mubarak's Self-Toppling Regime,” *Middle East Policy Council* XXV, no. 1, (Spring 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Ipek Danju, Yasar Maasoglu, Nahide Maasoglu, “From Autocracy to Democracy: The Impact of Social Media on the Transformation Process in North Africa and Middle East,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 81, (2013), 678.

is increasingly backing the viewpoint drawn from Mubarak's case that repression is ineffective in this overall mission. Pan and Siegel, for example, compiled tweets and Google search results originating from Saudi Arabia between 2010 and 2017 in an effort to measure whether the volume of public discourse and level of government criticism was reduced repressive government action. They came to two main conclusions: physical repression does have a direct deterrent effect on targeted dissenters, nevertheless, news of such actions not only fails to suppress movements, but actually generates increased public attention and engagement with existing opposition coalitions.<sup>45</sup> King, Pan, and Roberts cite this very reality as the basis for the Chinese Communist Party's own domestic strategy, and even the impetus for their avoidance of hard censorship beyond evidence of collective action.<sup>46</sup> Surely, the Saudi's failure as one of the world's harshest autocratic regimes to stop the growth of outcry both internationally and within its own borders is proof that the traditional authoritarian playbook is outdated—at least when relied on nearly exclusively.

Global statistics suggest that this message does seem to have resonated with many of the world's autocrats. Beyond China, Chenoweth and Perkoski found that nonviolent protest movements are about three times less likely to be met with the most overt method of repression—mass killings—than their violent counterparts.<sup>47</sup> Some have sought to expand on this idea that nonviolent protest is less likely to draw violent repression; Larsson, for instance, presents evidence that higher levels of gender equality also account

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<sup>45</sup> Jennifer Pan; Alexandra Siegel, "How Saudi Crackdowns Fail to Silence Online Dissent," *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 1 (2020), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Gary King; Jennifer Pan; Margaret Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (May 2013), 326.

<sup>47</sup> Erika Chenoweth, Evan Perkoski, "Nonviolent resistance and prevention of mass killings during popular uprisings," *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict Special Report Series* no. 2, (May 2018), 23.



for a significant decrease in extreme repression.<sup>48</sup> Overall, though, this relationship between nonviolence and use of repression is consistent with trends of decreased state violence that Guriev and Treisman have pointed to over the past half century. That said, Chenoweth and Perkoski also state unequivocally that repression itself has not been abandoned entirely, and in its lesser forms can still be common against peaceful demonstrations.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, cases studies like Saudi Arabia implicitly raise one equally important point: use of such playbooks is not always driving regime change either. Without a doubt, in the post-Cold War years it is not autocracy on the backtrack at the global stage—it is democracy. 2020 marked the fourteenth consecutive year of decline in worldwide freedom according to Freedom House, and while 64 countries were part of this negative trend, only 37 saw marked improvements. This was all despite a boom in new protest movements around the world.<sup>50</sup> Repression may be ineffective at stabilizing regimes on its own, but when combined with more modern practices the pairing is clearly not failing either.

In the previous chapter, it was illustrated that autocrats have a myriad of such individual techniques available to seek self-preservation through weaponizing internet technologies. In general, these tactics can largely be broken into the four main strategic categories of filtering, blocking, co-opting, and flooding. As these technologies have rapidly developed over the course of the 2010s, one clear focus that has emerged within

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<sup>48</sup> Jenny Larsson, “Understanding state repression in the light of gender equality,” *Uppsala University*, (Spring 2018), 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Repucci, “Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy,” *Freedom House*, 2020.

the literature of authoritarianism has been the study of the specific goals these techniques set out to achieve. Effectively, these findings can be broken down into five primary themes: *surveillance of dissidents, dissemination of misinformation, regime legitimization, creation of fear, and elimination of dissenters' operational capacity.*

### Surveillance of dissidents

Prior to the time where populations could be connected by the internet, much of the most valuable information a regime could seek was largely buried from view. At the most fundamental level, democratization stems from discontent, and without adequate knowledge of what specific grievances spur discontent in a respective country a regime is simply unable to respond—whether through actual, perceived, or further repressive changes. Therefore, the existence of social media as a public forum for all thoughts positive and negative results in an informational goldmine for autocrats seeking to address problems before they grow too large. In a larger qualitative discussion about how social media can act as a tool of autocratic stability, Gunitsky states that tapping into the raw, unfiltered dialogue of the overall populace acts as a “continuous feedback loop between the rulers and the ruled,” and both policy and regime response can easily be altered as deemed necessary.<sup>51</sup> The potential of these spaces for authoritarians grows even further when considering that surveillance of such spheres is essentially costless due to their open, public nature.<sup>52</sup>

Social media is far from the only way that a regime can reveal the preferences of the masses. For generations, elections have been utilized to measure public attitudes by

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<sup>51</sup> Seva Gunitsky, “Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability,” *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 1, (2015), 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

showing what percentage of the country backs the opposition over the existing power, and autocrats can simply misrepresent the true results while reaping the benefits of the gathered information.<sup>53</sup> Still, the benefits of a constantly updating digital public forum versus elections are obvious. For starters, elections in authoritarian states may only occur once every several years. This severely hampers the frequency in which an autocrat can track public opinion, which directly correlates to the relevance and accuracy of derived results. Furthermore, while scholarly debate is contentious, some have even argued that elections may actually help facilitate democratization in authoritarian states—a development completely opposite of the objective to stabilize autocratic rule.<sup>54</sup> Research such as these act as striking examples of the power of these social media technologies.

#### Dissemination of misinformation

The proliferation of misinformation in the modern age is staggering, and even in the most anecdotal sense it is nearly impossible to spend any significant time on the internet without encountering falsehoods or propaganda. Part of the reasons for this is simply the nature of the internet: in order for a message to spread—true or false—it does not necessarily require the effort of the originator beyond its initial posting. Indeed, once a Tweet, website, or post is sent, it is their shareability by and to the masses that allows for the spread across states, territories, and oceans. Recent research has further supported this theory: technologies like bots spread true and false information at the identical rate, strongly implying that humans bear primary responsibility for the spread of

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<sup>53</sup> Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, New York: Cambridge University Press (2006).

<sup>54</sup> Ruchan Kaya; Michael Bernhard, “Are Elections Mechanisms of Authoritarian Stability or Democratization? Evidence from Postcommunist Eurasia,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 3, (September 2013), 735.

misinformation.<sup>55</sup> The disparity between misinformation and truth spread cannot be clearer: false news stories are seventy percent more likely to be shared than their true counterparts, and spread approximately six times more quickly.<sup>56</sup>

These digital realities play straight to the advantage of authoritarian regimes, and create an environment primed for the dissemination of disinformation that benefits the long-term stability of the existing power. One method that regimes have traditionally used to propagate their own narratives is the broadcasting of such messages through state-run or controlled media. This distinction is important: as just one example, in the realm of television it is common practice for an authoritarian state to own its own station(s), which in tandem with restrictions on outside programming effectively monopolizes the airwaves. Still, this monopolization is not necessarily predicated on state ownership of television networks: Hern contends that the weaponization of media licensing has emerged as an increasingly attractive alternative for the state. In his research, he investigates the case studies of Singapore, Malaysia, Venezuela, and Russia, and finds that if publishers stray too far from the state's line—which itself is uncommon due to the fact the interests of the two are often firmly aligned—they can be replaced quickly and efficiently.<sup>57</sup> This effectively results in self-censorship that makes direct regime action unnecessary.<sup>58</sup> Overall, in both scenarios of state control, the information being broadcasted is effectively beholden to the regime rather than the truth.

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<sup>55</sup> Soroush Vosoughi; Deb Roy; Sinan Aral, "The spread of true and false news online," *Science* 359, (2018), 1146.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Mikal Hern, "Evading the censors: Critical journalism in authoritarian states," *University of Oxford*, (2014), 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

The natural extension in the digital age has been the presence of state-controlled media on the internet. Examples such as China’s “Great Firewall” demonstrate how easily a robust mix of digital authoritarianism tools allows a regime to control the flow of information within its own borders, but what may be perhaps less obvious is the power that state-controlled media can have internationally as well. When exposed to the state-owned propaganda outlet Russia Today (RT), Americans are up to twenty percent more likely to “support withdrawing from America’s role as a cooperative global leader”—a repeated, stated foreign policy desire of the Russian government.<sup>59</sup> Even more strikingly, these figures were consistent across party lines, and did not change upon disclosure of RT’s financial backing.<sup>60</sup> Misinformation does not always come in the form of blatant lies: often it manifests as an incomplete or intentionally misleading depiction of a larger picture. In this more encompassing light, the effectiveness of pro-regime misinformation campaigns becomes clearer, graver, and greater with the aid of modern internet technologies.

#### Regime legitimization

This goal is largely intertwined with the prior: if regimes use internet technologies with the goal of spreading misinformation, such communications are typically part of the larger mission to legitimize the existing power. However, the use of misinformation is certainly not the only way a state can accomplish this—hence the value of distinguishing between the two.

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<sup>59</sup> Erin Baggott Carter; Brett L Carter, “Questioning More: RT, Outward Facing Propaganda, and the Post-West World Order,” forthcoming in *Security Studies*, (August 21, 2020), 25.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Like before, regime legitimization was a practice that existed long before the advent of the digital age. Similar to the discussion regarding surveillance of dissidents, elections have often been at the forefront of attaining this goal: if a regime can maintain the appearance that its elections are fair, it gives credence to the levers and institutions that put a power in place. In turn, if the autocrat in power is perceived to have been elected freely and fairly, it legitimizes their rule as a leader popular enough to gain the state's highest office. Of course, the challenge for the regime is to successfully portray a fraudulent election as genuine, and the causes and effects of each outcome are covered extensively throughout the literature. However, for the purpose of this work, such basic aforementioned knowledge of the strategy is perfectly adequate.

In discussing the potential of social media to bolster regime legitimacy, Gunitsky expands past the strategy of misinformation dissemination by addressing the technology's capability to countermobilize state allies in the face of opposition movements. It is impossible for a regime to exist without at least some popular support, and this is often most heavily concentrated within the business sector, military, and ideologically aligned citizens.<sup>61</sup> Even if the true base of support is dwarfed in reality by the forces of dissent, social networks allow the regime to connect, recruit, and rally supporters in a way not unlike the processes protestors themselves employ.<sup>62</sup> When aided by the other tactics of digital authoritarianism, this disparity in size can quickly disappear as pro-government voices are elevated and eventually dominate the airspace. Gunitsky points to Russia and China as two particular states where significant domestic regime appeal stems from organic, ideological roots (in other words, propaganda was unnecessary to gain these

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<sup>61</sup> Gunitsky, *Corrupting the Cyber Commons*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

supporters), and highlights MacKinnon's concept of "digital Bonapartism" as the means in which this initial base can help drown out voices of opposition.<sup>63</sup>

### Create fear

As networks such as Facebook and Twitter continue their exponential growth into the new decade, their potential to be used as a means to spread fear is becoming increasingly apparent. Furthermore, examples such as Myanmar prove that the regime does not even have to act as the primary promoter for such developments—it can often just act as the enabler.

In the current scholarship, two key implications of globalism in Myanmar are being raised. Firstly, due to low costs and high demand for connectedness, there has been an explosion of cheap cellphones in the hands of citizens previously barred from even accessing such means of digital communications in the first place.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, due to its preinstallation on most devices and exemption to data quotas on many plans, Facebook has rapidly dominated the populace.<sup>65</sup> In short, Facebook has effectively become the internet in Myanmar, so nationalist, anti-Muslim propaganda that seeks to exploit the nature of social media has the ability to reach even greater proportions of the population than it could in other countries.<sup>66</sup> By using the platform to spread dangerous speech and organize against the Muslim minority, the movement has started a genocide which has

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<sup>63</sup> MacKinnon defines her term as the use of "populist rhetoric, combined with control over private enterprise and the legal system, to marginalize the opposition and manipulate public opinion much more subtly than in the old days." See MacKinnon, xxiv.

<sup>64</sup> Christina Fink, "Dangerous Speech, Anti-Muslim Violence, and Facebook in Myanmar," *Journal of International Affairs* 74, no 1.5 (2018), 44-45.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 44.

wiped out villages, killed thousands, and forced over one million to flee abroad—Asia’s largest human exodus since the Vietnam War.<sup>67</sup>

These human rights atrocities may not be the main doing of the Myanmar government, but their failure to condemn and forcefully end the crisis has been damning. This may stem from the fact that the rhetoric used by the nationalist movement is not dissimilar from past propaganda by the military government aimed at creating “unity.”<sup>68</sup> Regardless, the primary lesson to be drawn from Myanmar is not only the degree to which internet technologies can stoke fear—both for “insiders” of “outsiders” and “outsiders” of “insiders”—but how easily it can be created by nongovernment forces. While the military arm of the government certainly has accumulated more direct blood on its hands than the civilian government, it is the civilian government’s inaction that has been the root of international outcry. It is deeply disturbing to imagine the degree to which this fear—as well as its effects—could be amplified if the government chose to actively aid the process with its own means of digital authoritarianism.

For the purposes of regime survival, a widespread domestic fear of outsiders can work to divert attention away from the existing power. When attention is focused on the regime itself, however, the value of fear for a regime should not be dismissed either. In fairness, the ineffectiveness of repression as a blanket strategy to quell dissent has been examined multiple times thus far—particularly by Chenoweth and Perkoski—so it can be reasonably argued that reliance on fear from this source is not in the best interest of an autocrat attempting to maintain power. On one hand, Aldama et al. do create a formalized

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<sup>67</sup> Todd Pitman, “Myanmar attacks, sea voyage rob young father of everything,” *Associated Press*, (October 27, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> Fink, 45.



model for how an increase in civilian risk aversion can increase the probability of large-scale mobilization.<sup>69</sup> However, their models also show that fear can be successful at increasing dissidents' pessimism for the movement's potential success in the face of perceived regime strength, as well as pessimism for the likelihood of attaining necessary levels of participation from other dissenters—a formula that in some cases can indeed hamper opposition mobilization.<sup>70</sup> With this knowledge in mind, authoritarians may have a real incentive to instill fear not just of outsiders, but of their own rule as well. While traditional means of repression certainly can achieve this, the aforementioned examples of this work clearly show the capability of internet technologies to support this goal as well.

#### Elimination of dissenters' operational capacity

At an abstract level, the elimination of the opposition's ability to continue operating is the end goal of any authoritarian action. In short, if a movement no longer has the means to operate—whether that be through loss of popular support, fear of repercussions, or other negative outcomes—the threat of regime change to the existing power drops to a substantially low level. That said, digital authoritarianism also provides the means for the immediate, literal severing of much of a movement's operations—namely, through internet blackouts.

Mubarak again retains relevance here—though he is certainly far from the only example. By shutting down the internet, Egypt's dictator sought to isolate dissenters from each other, discourage further mobilization through both fear and impracticability of

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<sup>69</sup> Abraham Aldama; Mateo Vásquez-Cortés; Lauren Elyssa Young, "Fear and citizen coordination against dictatorship," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 31, no. 1, (2019), 103.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

distanced organizing, and ultimately end the protests that had begun to take to the streets. Of course, this vision was not what transpired. Hassanpour notes that the communications blackout caused those who were previously absent from the demonstrations to actually join the crowds in an effort to reconnect with family, friends, and other contacts.<sup>71</sup> Apolitical and uninterested citizens were also implicated.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, ground level activists were not only emboldened, but actually became more effective due to their ability to contact individuals directly.<sup>73</sup> The final counterproductive result, according to Hassanpour, was the fact that the movement become much more decentralized without a core communications space (i.e. Facebook or Twitter), which in turn exponentially increased the difficulty of suppression by the Egyptian government<sup>74</sup>.

However, in approaching the question of operational capacity it is not the results of Mubarak's actions that is of chief importance: it is the motivation. For him, it was a final, desperate resort to reclaim control over the situation upon the realization that the power and speed of internet technologies was as extraordinary as the degree to which he was unprepared to confront it.<sup>75</sup> In the post-Mubarak world, the cost remains exceptionally high—both politically and economically—for a full internet blackout, which seemingly suggests that autocrats will only resort to the measure for the most existential of threats.<sup>76</sup> While this may be true for some leaders, it fails to account for the significant and constant rise of blackouts around the world—particularly in India and its

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<sup>71</sup> Navid Hassanpour, "Media Disruption and Revolutionary Unrest: Evidence From Mubarak's Quasi-Experiment," *Political Communication* 31, no. 1, (2014), 10.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Nahed Eltantawy; Julie Wiest, "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory," *International Journal of Communication* 5, (2011), 1216

<sup>76</sup> Sutterlin, 20.

contested territories. If blackouts are truly so likely to end catastrophically for a regime, why would their use continue to rise globally? Perhaps a key gap in the literature is the absence of a conclusive answer to whether states have realized the limits of the technique as a singular means of ending widespread, ongoing dissent, while concurrently discovering the effectiveness of severing operational capacity before such movements can ever reach critical mass.

As a point of emphasis, these five goals that have been outlined are both fluid and interconnected in their nature. To recall the comparison between misinformation dissemination and regime legitimization, the purpose of one goal may ultimately be to realize the fuller attainment of another. Furthermore, this list of goals could assuredly be broken down into numerous more subcategories and priorities, for a complete evaluation of an authoritarian power's objectives could encompass a thesis in of itself. However, even an initial identification of these goals helps more effectively elucidate the current situation in Kashmir.

Since its first iteration in 2015, Guriev and Treisman's theory of informational autocracy has been repeatedly cited in the larger scholarship of authoritarian governance. Typically, the piece has been referenced in three main contexts. Firstly, it is used to establish the counterproductivity of repression in securing public support.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, it is invoked to demonstrate that the manipulation of information has become a favored technique amongst the world's autocrats.<sup>78</sup> Thirdly, it is referred to when identifying the

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<sup>77</sup> Elias Dinas, Ksenia Northmore-Ball, "The Ideological Shadow of Authoritarianism," *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 12. (2020), 8.

<sup>78</sup> Luis Martinez, "How Much Should We Trust the Dictator's GDP Growth Estimates?," University of Chicago, (2019), 3.

importance of managing a regime’s “informed elites,” and the threat that they can pose to the existing power’s overall longevity.<sup>79</sup>

To this point, however, there has yet to be a truly comprehensive analysis of the relationship between repression and informational autocracy as it relates to the transition between the two strategies. One can reasonably surmise that this, at least in part, may be due to the relevant recency of Guriev and Treisman’s work. As of 2020, the piece has been expanded and revised several times—including twice in the past year alone. Moreover, in fairness to Guriev and Treisman, a deeper study of the intersection between these two competing strategies was not the intention of their work at all: the specific purpose of the theory was to illustrate that a shift away from traditional means of repression has occurred in autocratic regimes, and it accomplishes this quite compellingly.

The research on authoritarianism does not assert that the availability of the tools of informational autocracy results in blanket abandonment of violence to facilitate regime preservation—Chenoweth and Perkoski are just two scholars who affirm the prevalence of such methods. Moreover, Guriev and Treisman themselves explicitly acknowledge this as they introduce their theory:

...Today’s softer dictatorships do not forswear repression completely. Informational autocrats may use considerable violence in fighting ethnic insurgencies and civil wars—as, in fact, do some democracies. They may also punish journalists as a mode of censorship (although they seek to camouflage the purpose or to conceal the state’s role in violent acts). Such states can revert to overt dictatorship, as may have happened after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, where the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdogan detained tens of thousands.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Fei Li; Yangbo Song; Mofei Zhao, “Global Manipulation by Local Obfuscation,” accessed at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3471491>, (2019), 21.

<sup>80</sup> Guriev and Treisman, 102.

Especially deserving of attention is their note on democracies. At a population well over one billion, India will comfortably maintain the title of “the world’s largest democracy” for many years to come. At the same time, the country’s actions in the areas it feels least control over—namely, the Kashmir Valley and the Indian northeast—frequently veer away from the fundamental principles of liberalized democracy.

This final point has particular relevance for research that has suggested a positive correlation between the existence of internet technologies and increased democratization within a nondemocratic landscape. Bak et al., for example, propose that “high internet penetration rates have deterring effects on state repression,” and that “extending internet access to citizens will yield protective effects.”<sup>81</sup> Though they stipulate these effects are strongest in competitive democracies, their sentiment that these technologies are inherently liberalizing has been shared by many—including Zang et. al. who argue that “Internet penetration can remarkably increase democratization over a period of time in a country.”<sup>82</sup> Even if Kashmir was unique in its failure to democratize and see reductions in repression through the diffusion of the internet—it is not<sup>83</sup>—the existence of its reality alone necessitates thorough examination. For this repressive informational autocracy to come from a democracy like India accentuates the need even more.

For both the free and unfree world, it is imperative that a greater understanding of the intersection between informational autocracy and traditional state repression is examined. It is not enough to simply identify an inverse proportionality between the two,

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<sup>81</sup> Dachee Bak; Surachanee Sriyai; Stephen A. Meserve, “The internet and state repression: A cross-national analysis of the limits of digital constraint,” *Journal of Human Rights* 17, no. 5, (2018), 1475

<sup>82</sup> Leizhen Zang; Feng Xiong; Yanjan Gao, “Reversing the U: New Evidence on the Internet and Democracy Relationship,” *Social Science Computer Review* 37, no. 3 (2018), 15.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob Groshek, Kate K. Mays, “A Time-Series, Multinational Analysis of Democratic Forecasts and Emerging Media Diffusion, 1994-2014,” *International Journal of Communication* 11, (2017), 429.

as while this trend may be present at the global scale it may also be wholly unrepresentative of the true situation at a domestic level in specific cases. The potential of informational autocracy to abet violence rather than replace it has grave implications for the pursuit of a just global society, and even graver ones for the citizens who must bear the effects.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Now and again there comes a moment in the affairs of men when courage is greater than prudence and a great act of faith uplifting the minds and moving the hearts of men achieves miracles that no act of statesmanship can encompass.<sup>84</sup>*

*-Unknown  
1964*

#### Early Development of Kashmir

The vast, mountainous swath of land that makes up the modern-day region of “Kashmir” has changed hands many times over the course of its civilized history. For sure, the Kashmiris are no strangers to occupation from great, foreign powers, dating back to the Mughal conquest, years of British colonialism, and through today’s current division as it stands between India, Pakistan, and China. Alongside this history, the people have also spent periods of time enjoying the fruits of their own sovereignty. Regardless, the larger point to be made is that the Kashmiris are a proud, distinct people that have closely held onto their own identity from ancient times to the present, and that any analysis of the current conflict that ignores this reality in favor of the external belligerents risks painting an incomplete—or even inaccurate—picture of the real situation.

Today, the term “Kashmir” has become associated with the roughly 85,800 square miles of mountains, valleys, plains, and forests that are bordered by India proper to the south, Pakistan proper to the east, Afghanistan to the northwest, and the Chinese-

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<sup>84</sup> A. G. Noorani, *The Kashmir Question* (Bombay: P. C. Manaktala and Sons Private LTD, 1964), 87.

controlled autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet to its north and northeast.<sup>85</sup> As a significant portion of the territory lies within the Himalayan region, the towering mountains which are the predominant, defining feature of Kashmir's geography split the land into the valleys where its people have generally resided. This harsh landscape is largely responsible for the degree to which the many different peoples of the broader region—including Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Tibetans—were able to be separated throughout history. As late as the mid-twentieth century, Birdwood described the region as “a mountainous country of no roads, whose isolated groups are conscious only of their own existence,” and argued that this fact accounted for much of the reason its people were susceptible to invasion and occupation throughout the centuries.<sup>86</sup>

Kashmir's first experience with imperialism can be traced back to the third century BC, when Ashoka the Great's Maurya Dynasty would go on to stretch across the near entirety of the Indian subcontinent. After Ashoka's death and an ensuing period of reestablished sovereignty, Kushan invaders from northwest China would arrive in the first century AD and bring with them the Buddhist tradition that Ashoka had originally spread throughout Kashmir after his conversion from Hinduism. This time would later take on the legacy as Kashmir's “golden age,” as its people enjoyed cultural and economic fame that stretched far throughout Asia.<sup>87</sup>

Like much of the rest of the continent, Kashmir and India proper would go on to succumb to the seemingly unstoppable tide of Genghis Kahn's Mongol Empire—first

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<sup>85</sup> Britannica, s.v. “Kashmir,” accessed September 12, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kashmir-region-Indian-subcontinent>

<sup>86</sup> Lord Birdwood, *Two Nations and Kashmir* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1956), 20.

<sup>87</sup> Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2003), 2.



coming under attack in 1320. Though the Mongol occupation was relatively brief, its importance to Kashmir's development cannot be understated. To start, the human and material costs suffered by the Kashmiris—who had already been weakened by progressively diminishing resources due to isolationism—were extraordinarily damaging and would be felt long into the future.<sup>88</sup> On a more positive note, the Mongol invasion did bring forth both the Cultural Revolution and further fame and appreciation for the area's picturesque landscape. However, the most impactful consequence by far was the fact that this event would be seen as the final act of dominant Buddhist and Hindu rule in the region; indeed, such traditions were soon eschewed by the ideology that had been knocking on Kashmir's doorstep for quite some time, which has since gone on to find itself at the center of the modern IndoPak identity crisis: Islam.<sup>89</sup>

Though the first formal instance of Muslim rule would occur in 1339, Kashmir's first great Islamic king, Shahab-ud Din, would ascend the throne in 1354.<sup>90</sup> It was during his reign that Kashmir would begin to expand into many of the territories the region is associated with today, and under subsequent rulers the region began to increasingly convert to Islam—though Hinduism certainly did not fade away entirely. Habibullah makes this pointed commentary of the effect of this period of time:

“the history of Islam is inextricable from the history of Kashmir. The faith developed a distinct identity: the Hindi Muslim world was deeply influenced by the ancient heritage of Hinduism. India saw a surge in the spiritual form of Islam in the various schools of Sufi thought, which

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<sup>88</sup> Sameer Ahmad Sofi, “The Mongol Invasion of Kashmir (AD..1320),” *International Journal Advances in Social Science and Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2016), 22.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Schofield, 2.

preceded Turkish invasions from the northwest and went on to become the foundation of the vibrant form that Islam took in India.”<sup>91</sup>

Of particular note here should be the means by which Islam spread throughout Kashmir: not through an autocratic culture war where traditional religious philosophies were squashed, but instead through an inclusive blend that respected the fundamentals of practices that existed before.

By fully appreciating this fact, one can start better contextualize the current situation on the subcontinent. Too often, the Kashmir question has been mischaracterized as a conflict between the forces of Islam, secularism, and Hindu nationalism in which the people and traditions are incompatible, and where victory must be a zero-sum game. However, as the region’s rich history of multiculturalism demonstrates, this could not be further from the case. For sure, this is not to say that religious tensions play no role: this fact becomes increasingly clear in the mid-twentieth century. That said, the more consistent pattern throughout history has been the prevalence of external rule over the Kashmiris—and the population’s clear discontent.

It would be over two hundred years later that this ‘middle age’ of Kashmiri history—and larger era of Kashmir as its own kingdom—would eventually transition into ‘modern history,’ brought forth by the Mughal conquest of 1586. Though this specific rule did bring aspects of liberalism, prosperity, and stability which have generally been seen as positive, it also marked a distinct embrace of the pattern of external administration and taxes that has lasted through the current moment.<sup>92</sup> By the turn of the

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<sup>91</sup> Wajahat Habibullah, *My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects of Enduring Peace*, (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2008), 16

<sup>92</sup> Schofield, 3.

19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindus had begun leaving Kashmir *en masse* for a variety of reasons ranging from persecution to greater economic potential elsewhere, and this exodus would only be exacerbated in ensuing Afghan and Sikh tenures of rule. However, this time under the shadow of the Sikh Empire would be extremely short lived, as by this point both the power and influence of the East India Company were enough to now tip the balance of power in Kashmir.

The amount of scholarship dedicated to the East India Company, the British Raj, and overall Crown Rule is both extensive and deeply complex. It is impossible to ignore the impact that the British have had on the subcontinent, as the implications of their time and actions leading up to the Partition of India are central to how the situation has unfolded today. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, Lamb provides an adequate synthesis of Britain's motivations moving into the twentieth century:

The British had originally established themselves along the Indian shores for purposes of trade. In order to protect that trade they had built up an Empire. Once created, however, the Empire became an objective in its own right and British policy became increasingly directed towards keeping the Empire in being. Some thinkers like Seeley might ask themselves what it was all for; but most English statesmen ceased to question the value of the brightest jewel in the British Crown. Like the other Crown Jewels, it should be guarded. It was in this frame of mind that the British faced the problem of Indian self-government.<sup>93</sup>

This is a view supported by Schofield, who argues that “British imperial policy towards the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was guided primarily by fear of a Russian advance towards India through the Pamir mountains,” in addition to threats from Afghanistan and China.<sup>94</sup> In short, Kashmir represented not only a part of the Empire the

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<sup>93</sup> Alastair Lamb, *The Kashmir Problem: A Historical Survey*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Schofield, 10.

British were prideful of, but in the bigger picture served as both the gateway and geostrategic buffer zone for the rest of the subcontinent. Even at that point in history, the rugged terrain of Kashmir was of crucial strategic importance.

By the start of the 1900s, Britain had been in control of Kashmir for a little over a half century following the Sikh's ceding of the territory per the conditions of the Treaty of Peace—and sale of the region to the subordinate Dogras in the Treaty of Amritsar. At this point, there was a very real level of animosity towards the ruling class by the Kashmiris that had dated back through hundreds of years of external occupation. Much of this stemmed from just how reliant they had become on these forces: even as far into the late 1940s, there were only sixteen miles of railroad connecting Kashmir to the outside, and only a single all-weather road which lead directly to the Punjab capital of Lahore—a city which not only had a “stranglehold on Kashmir’s business,” but had also historically been the heart of Punjabi oppression over them.<sup>95</sup>

Schofield describes the state of 1930s Kashmir as “a proverbial powder keg.”<sup>96</sup> Muslims were barred from owning firearms and joining the military, and had even been stripped of their right to own land; in no uncertain terms, the socioeconomic state of Kashmiri Muslims was nothing short of destitute. Under the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh, both Muslims and Hindus protested against his autocratic rule. However, tensions between the two groups were unmistakable: in 1931, Hindu shops were the victims of protests, riots, and looting stemming from a call “to fight against oppression,” and even

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<sup>95</sup> Habibullah, 18-19.

<sup>96</sup> Schofield, 18.

the reform measures brought on by the government to meet the cries for change amounted to little than more symbolic measures.<sup>97</sup>

It is in this context that Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah would go on to found the Muslim Conference in 1931 with the clear purpose of aligning opposition against the autocracy of the maharaja, and ultimately, securing autonomy for Kashmir. In the next decade, however, this movement would split into two main factions: the National Conference and the Muslim Conference. While the two groups certainly had many differences, the two largest were where each drew their support from. The former, the National Conference, enjoyed backing from Muslims within the Kashmir Valley, while the latter organization's support came from Muslims outside of the valley. In addition, the Muslim Conference was tied to the Muslim League—who advocated for the creation of a separate Muslim state. Meanwhile, the Congress Party—a nationalist movement dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—stood firmly in support of independence for each of the Indian states.

By the 1940s, it was clear that a partition was on the horizon for the subcontinent. While the Second World War largely drew Britain's attention away from Calcutta and Kashmir and instead to Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo, it was now impossible to look away from the forces of Muslim discontent, Hindu nationalism, and the general fervor for Indian independence. In 1942, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill tasked Sir Stafford Cripps with traveling to India with a 'draft declaration' regarding post-war independence for India, and as the war neared its end, Field-Marshal Lord Wavell faced

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid

the dual task of finishing the fight against the Japanese and preparing the subcontinent for independence.<sup>98</sup>

### The Partition of India and the First IndoPak War

Britain had much experience with the tactics of ‘divide and rule’ over the lifespan of its Empire—and the success of such measures undoubtedly accounted for much of how the country was able to control such an overwhelming amount of territory. But Britain had fewer answers as to the question of how to best navigate the resulting political landscape when it came time to leave. It also faced the competing philosophies of the ‘one-nation’ vs ‘two-nation’ theories: the first contested that future of the subcontinent should materialize into a secular, unified India, whereas the second argued that two separate countries needed forming for two “separate, incompatible” peoples.<sup>99</sup> Inherent in the ‘one-nation’ theory is the fundamental principle that the eventual Muslim state that emerged—Pakistan—has no justification for existing as a state at all, which alone represents a massive obstacle for meaningful negotiations between the two countries.

The 1947 Partition of India is a substantial subject in its own right, but as it related to Kashmir, a few key issues were particularly at the forefront. To start, the 1941 census found that the population of Jammu and Kashmir was seventy-seven percent Muslim, twenty percent Hindu, and one percent Sikh.<sup>100</sup> For the Islamic state of Pakistan, this alone would represent a clear mandate for irredentism. The fact that the state lay directly next to the Pakistani border only strengthened this argument. However, this

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Lamb, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Habibullah. 20.

school of thought is inconsistent with the rights granted to each of the princely states as outlined by the Cabinet Mission's Memorandum of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1946, which stated "The rights of the States which flow from their relationship with the Crown will no longer exist and that all the rights surrendered by the States to the paramount power will return to the States."<sup>101</sup> In essence, the newly independent states gained full powers of autonomy upon signing of the Partition, and this interpretation is further supported by the statement from Lord Mountbatten to the Princes on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1947 that "the Indian Independence Act releases the States from all their obligations to the Crown. The States have complete freedom—technically and legally they are independent." In no uncertain terms, Pakistan has never had legal entitlement to Kashmir outside the case of a potential accession that directly stemmed from Srinagar. This has never occurred.

Furthermore, the assumption that the Kashmiris and their territory would neatly assimilate into Pakistan is flawed in its own right. The Kashmiris historically had a tremendous amount of distrust and disdain for the Punjabis—who were the dominant force of Pakistan and its leadership—and joining the country would likely result in a fierce hostility to the Kashmiri identity and traditions.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, Kashmir could join a secular India and enjoy both protection of their distinctiveness and the superior socioeconomic opportunities—though this would come at the cost of joining a predominantly Hindu India as a stark Islamic outlier. When these dueling fates were paired with the option of simply maintaining independent Kashmiri sovereignty, it presented Maharaja Hari Singh with a challenging decision.

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<sup>101</sup> Noorani, 21.

<sup>102</sup> Habibullah, 19.

Which leads directly into another significant issue: the idea of who exactly should decide Kashmir's fate. Britain had clearly outlined that this power reside with each newly independent state, but within that framework such power was specifically given to the respective state's ruler. Lamb argues that this was a massive oversight by the British:

Above all, the British had it in their power to do something about the Indian States. They could have at least ensured that the major Princely States acquired workable representative governments. This, alone, might well have avoided the Kashmir problem. A popular Kashmir Government could have made decisions about its future which both India and Pakistan would have respected. An autocratic and unpopular Maharaja...was in no position to make such decisions.<sup>103</sup>

In fairness, Lamb's assertion that Pakistan and India would have both entirely respected the decision of a fully democratic government may be wishful thinking, but it is difficult to defend the legitimacy of a decision made by an autocrat—one belonging to Kashmir's overwhelming Hindu minority, no less—over that made by a popularly elected government of his citizens. While the holding of a plebiscite very clearly became part of future negotiations over Kashmir's future, some sort of similarly democratic process from the start could indeed have had a very different impact than what unfolded in reality.

Both Pakistan's and India's cases and motivations for controlling Kashmir cut deep into the fabric of their identities. For Pakistan, Lamb points to three main grounds, starting with the religious implications which have already been stated. In short, from a strictly demographical standpoint, Kashmir's clear Muslim majority mirrored that of its own religious composition. Secondly, Lamb cites the fact that Kashmir's economy was more closely intertwined with Pakistan: "Its best communication with the outside world

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<sup>103</sup> Lamb, 12.



lay through Pakistan, and this was the route taken by the bulk of its exports.”<sup>104</sup> His third and final contention was that Pakistan’s agricultural sector—which was vitally important to the survival of the state—was heavily reliant on the waters of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, and Kashmir was home to all three.

For India, Korbelt argued that the importance of Kashmir was rooted in the fact that the territory represented a battleground over which light and darkness—Indian secularism and Pakistani Islamic theocracy, respectively—fought for supremacy. A loss in this duel is not simply a cession of territory, but quite literally an affront to the very foundation of Indian liberalism and democracy.<sup>105</sup> This fact cuts deep enough into the Indian identity that it alone—even disregarding the various other political and economic factors at play—serves as more than enough merit for an absolutist orientation.

Under this backdrop, the Maharaja faced an imminent dilemma: in the late summer and fall of 1947, Pakistani trained and armed paramilitary forces joined together with rebellious Kashmiri Muslims and began raiding the northwesternmost front of Kashmir, with Pakistan hoping to strongarm the leader into ultimately acceding to them. With no chance to repel the invaders on his own—by October these tribesmen had captured and massacred their way to within four miles of Srinagar—the Maharaja and his family fled the capital and turned to India for assistance.<sup>106</sup> Without consultation with Kashmir as a whole—a condition that was supposed to be part of the arrangement—the Maharaja signed an instrument of accession to India. Under this agreement, India would

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Korbelt, *Danger in Kashmir*, (United States: Princeton University Press, 19

<sup>106</sup> Mushtaqur Rahman, *Divided Kashmir: Old Problems, New Opportunities for India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiri People*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 2.

send in its own military to repel enemy forces from Kashmir, and upon the end of hostilities would withdraw and allow for a plebiscite by the Kashmiri people.

This central fact has been repeatedly established in multiple official documents and testimonies. India's reply to the Maharaja's accession request read, in part, "The question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the State, it is my Government's wish that as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invader, the question of the State's accession should be settled by a reference to the people."<sup>107</sup> The Government White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir affirmed this sentiment, saying, "in accepting the accession the Government of India made it clear that they would regard it as purely provisional until such time as the will of the people could be ascertained."<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the Government of India's official statement on October 30<sup>th</sup> clearly stated, "It is desirable to draw attention to the conditions on which the Government of India have accepted Kashmir's accession...[the] people of the State should decide the question of accession."

It is abundantly clear from these quotations that Kashmir's accession to India had two main characteristics: it was entirely legal, and it was indisputably temporary. These two points are extremely important, and both Pakistan and India would have done well to acknowledge them moving forward. The same day as India's October 30<sup>th</sup> statement, Pakistan responded that "the accession of Kashmir to the Indian Union is based on fraud and violence, and as such cannot be recognized."<sup>109</sup> The previously outlined evidence clearly points to the contrary. In the years that have followed, however, India has clearly

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<sup>107</sup> Noorani, 32-33.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

violated its own terms as well: Indian forces should have retreated following the formal end of hostilities, and the failure to do so into the modern day—not to even mention the 2019 decision to revoke Article 370 and claim Kashmir as India proper—is an equal violation of objective truth.

Nevertheless, it was under these conditions that Indian troops would be airlifted into Srinagar in late October 1947 to defend against the invading forces. While Pakistan certainly had a hand in aiding the attacking forces—this would take the form of both logistical help as well the sending of disguised, active Pakistani military forces into the front lines—it was denied formal entry into the conflict by British commanding officers until 1948.<sup>110</sup> Over the course of the war, Pakistan would make significant gains into Kashmir's northern, High Himalayas range, but its forces would fail to break into the Kashmir Valley proper. Here, Indian forces would hold the line, and as 1948 progressed its army was able to take back much of the area previously captured by the Pakistani army. As the battle lines had largely frozen by late November, India and Pakistan would eventually agree to a ceasefire on December 31<sup>st</sup> that would be adopted by the United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan on January 5<sup>th</sup>. When the dust had settled, Pakistan had taken control of about one-third of Kashmir—but failed to capture the core cities and regions that made up the very fabric of the state. For this reason, the conflict is largely viewed as either inconclusive or a slight Indian victory due to the defender's ability to maintain control of the war's most hotly contested areas.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Britannica. s.v. "Kashmir."

<sup>111</sup> Pongsak Hoontrakul, *The Global Rise of Asian Transformation: Trends and Developments in Economic Growth Dynamics*, (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37.

The UN resolution that brought an end to the war was initially adopted by the Commission in mid-August 1948. As it would later go on to be adopted in its final form, the proposal can effectively be broken down into three main phases: ceasefire, truce, and plebiscite. For at least the time being, India and Pakistan were able to successfully realize this first goal. However, it was the final two pillars that would prove harder to achieve. In essence, part two stated that as hostilities between the two belligerents had ended—along with the justification for occupying Indian forces to begin with—India would “withdraw the bulk” of its forces from Kashmir, leaving only just enough to adequately maintain law and order in the region.<sup>112</sup> The third phase, the plebiscite, laid out the moral and already mutually agreed reasons for the need of Kashmiri self-determination, and presented a framework for the eventual referendum.

Immediately, the resolution hit several snares. To start, while the original wording of the agreement stated that Pakistani forces would withdraw from the region in the final phase, India argued that the size of Pakistan’s presence had since increased and thus demanded the withdrawal of the Azad fighters prior to their own. Pakistan pushed back on this argument. Furthermore, both countries fervently disagreed on the exact definition of the Commission’s vaguely defined “bulk” of Indian forces subject to removal. Clearly, the issues that had arisen stemmed from a lack of adequate trust on either side towards the other. This trust problem was not just limited between the two states, however: Mukherjee cites the external factors of the concurrent Cold War as playing a significant role as well.<sup>113</sup> In short, Pakistan had already aligned itself with the Western powers,

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<sup>112</sup> Noorani, 41.

<sup>113</sup> Kunal Mukherjee, “The Kashmir conflict in South Asia: voices from Srinagar,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 30, no. 1 (2013): 48.

while India had declined to choose between either the West or the Soviet Union. Contending that the UN represented an extension of American power, he argues that India viewed any plebiscite supervised by the organization as one that would unfairly favor Pakistan over itself.

While these talks stalled throughout 1949, India and Kashmir took two massive steps—the repercussions of which are still central to the conflict today. First, on the Indian government’s basis that “it would have been unfair to the Government and the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to deny them the opportunity of participating in the discussion of” India’s new constitution while technically still under Indian accession, India admitted four Kashmiri representatives to the country’s Constituent Assembly—a move that drew outcry from Karachi.<sup>114</sup> Second—and perhaps the most relevant—was the eventual move to adopt the Indian Constitution: namely, along with the inclusion of a special Article 370.

During debate over the formation of said Constitution, it became clear that Kashmir, though legally part of the Indian Union, required unique consideration due to the universally accepted temporary status of such membership. With this in mind, Article 370 would grant the region semi-autonomous status that the other Indian states would not enjoy. For example, Kashmir would be able to fly its own flag, pass and enforce its own laws, and even adopt its own constitution. As such, India would only maintain control over the state in three particular areas: communications, foreign affairs, and defense. Similarly to India’s previous admittance of Kashmiri representatives to the Constituent Assembly, there were no actual legal barriers to taking such action; nothing about the text

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<sup>114</sup> Noorani, 45.

of this article prevented an eventual plebiscite, and public statements from the government maintained that such a referendum was still the necessary path forward:

At present, the legislature which was known as the Praja Sabha in the State is dead. But neither that legislature nor the Constituent Assembly can be convoked or can function until complete peace comes to prevail in that State. We have, therefore, to deal with the Government of the State which, as represented in its Council of Ministers, reflects the opinion of the largest political party in the State. Till a Constituent Assembly comes into being only an interim arrangement is possible and not an arrangement which could at once be brought into line with the arrangements existing in the case of other States. Now, if you remember the viewpoints that I have mentioned, it is an inevitable conclusion that, at the present moment, we could establish only an interim system. [Article 370] is an attempt to establish such a system.<sup>115</sup>

In the following years, India, Pakistan, and the UN would continue to unsuccessfully negotiate the terms that would bring forth a plebiscite—and the dignity of self-determination—for the Kashmiri people. It also was during this very time that the Kashmiris would begin to see a pattern that would continue well into the future: the gradual erosion of Article 370. For example, in 1964, Indian president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan would issue a proclamation that transferred the power of government and legislation from Kashmir to the central government.<sup>116</sup> Asserting that “the state’s inclusion in the union was complete, final and irrevocable,” the Indian government would continually back up Radhakrishnan’s sentiment, even going as far as to pressure the Kashmir state assembly to pass a bill that effectively eliminated the Kashmiri’s separate constitution in favor of falling under the jurisprudence of India’s in 1965.<sup>117</sup> While Pakistan repeatedly cried foul at the international stage with each emergent step, much of

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Rahman, 106.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

the issue laid within the Kashmir constituent assembly's decision to dissolve in 1957 without specifying whether Article 370 should be amended or abrogated—a reality that would go on to grant India's judicial and political systems the “grey area” and flexibility needed to define the article in more Indian-favorable terms.

### Kashmir in Decline

By 1965, it was clear that the current state of IndoPak relations was untenable. Sheikh Abdullah, who by now had previously served—and been dismissed from—the role of Chief Minister of Kashmir, remained one of the most prominent and influential figures in the Kashmiri Muslim community. In response to a police shooting of protestors in Srinagar, he beseeched his compatriots to “defeat the purpose of those (Indians) who were trying to tighten the chains of slavery on the Muslims of Kashmir.”<sup>118</sup> He would continue, “You cannot achieve freedom by imploring anybody, and in view of India's present attitude, you have to think how to face her effectively.”<sup>119</sup> His subsequent arrest only served to further fan the flames of domestic discontent, and India's increasingly unstable position was only exacerbated by economic downturn and the recent loss to China in the Sino-Indian War just three years earlier.

Acutely aware of both the fruitlessness of further negotiations and their rival's weakened position, Pakistan sent undercover troops across the Line of Control to train Kashmiri locals hoping to eventually incite a rebellion that would help Pakistan finally take Kashmir. When this plan—Operation Gibraltar—was uncovered by India, it, along with multiple explicit Pakistani offensives into Indian-controlled Kashmir, sparked the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

second of the four eventual IndoPak wars. Though Pakistan had been careful to align its actions with what it perceived was a critically weak point in India's young new history, it was quickly and easily defeated in the matter of about one month.

From an IndoPak point of view, the War of 1965 did not change much. While a lack of trust following the unravelling of Operation Gibraltar was inevitable, the existing deficit between the two sides was already substantial. The conflict certainly did nothing to improve relations, yet tempers would not immediately flare to the point of war again for several years. However, expanding the focus of examination here is key: as it pertains to the international stage, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision to cut off arms shipments to both sides was seen as abandonment by India and Pakistan. Britain and the rest of the western powers largely followed America's suit, and Riedel contends that both Pakistan and India still view this situation as proof that the United States and its allies will not come to their respective aid when the moment of need truly comes.<sup>120</sup>

Definitively, he argues that "the legacy of the U.S. 'betrayal' still haunts [U.S.-Pakistan and U.S.-Indian] relations today."<sup>121</sup> In an increasingly globalist international stage, situations like "The Troubles" in the British Isles have demonstrated the potential value of foreign intermediaries in resolving long standing, violent conflicts. This blemish in the relations between IndoPak and the West represents just one more obstacle in the already deeply complex struggle for peace in Kashmir.

The third IndoPak war would occur six years later in 1971. With aid from the Soviet Union—the Soviets had since aligned with the Indians and the Chinese with the

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<sup>120</sup> Bruce Riedel, *Avoiding Armageddon: America, India, and Pakistan to the Brink and Back*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2013), 69-70.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



Pakistanis following the political fallout of the 1965 war—India sought to launch its own version of Operation Gibraltar in East Pakistan (the territory known today as Bangladesh). By this point, it was clear that the circumstances of each country had flipped. Pakistan was now embroiled in its own economic and political upheaval after failing to secure decisive victories in two straight IndoPak wars, and a comparatively strong India now recognized a window of opportunity to topple Pakistan’s eastern threat and narrow the battlefield of any future conflict to just one front: Kashmir. Though Pakistan had previously warned their neighbor that any incursion into East Pakistan would result in war, this did not deter India: officials in India expressed confidence that “India would enjoy the benefits, both within the region and beyond, of what would be an easy and humiliating defeat of Pakistan.”<sup>122</sup>

With this sentiment, Indian forces entered East Pakistan to support local guerrilla fighters in late November, and Pakistan indeed followed through with its response by attacking India from the west. The United States and its allies immediately called for peace upon the rekindling of hostilities for the third time in just 24 years, though their concerns would be short lived: the war would end just two weeks later when Pakistan signed what effectively amounted to a surrender—and with it the agreed secession of East Pakistan. Not only would the Indian hopes of a “humiliating defeat of Pakistan” be largely realized, the country had also captured a staggering ninety-one thousand prisoners of war in the fourteen days of fighting—an enormous embarrassment for Pakistan and a point of pride for the Indian military. Furthermore, the reworking of the original 1949 Line of Control in Kashmir would be redrawn to represent the Line of Actual Control,

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<sup>122</sup> Rahman, 128.

which granted India additional territorial claims on the west bank of the Kishinganga and the north bank of the Indus at the expense of Pakistan.<sup>123</sup> This overall agreement would become known as the Simla Accord, and its terms left no doubt as to which country now enjoyed superiority over the Indian subcontinent.

The aftermath of the third IndoPak war would also have significant implications as it pertained to Article 370 and the prospects of Kashmiri self-determination. Though Part Six of the Simla Accord explicitly stated that “a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir” was one of several issues that would be diplomatically determined at a later date, the rhetoric that would come from New Delhi took an increasingly hardline, pro-India stance. Sheikh Abdullah was a leading Kashmiri voice pushing back against the Simla Accord’s implication that the future of Kashmir rested in the hands of anyone other than the Kashmiris themselves, but Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had seen her public standing and political capital skyrocket in the wake of a definitive Indian victory. She rejected the outcry from Kashmir, arguing vehemently that when it came to restoring Kashmir’s autonomy to levels seen in the early 1950s, “the clock could not be put back in this manner.”<sup>124</sup>

Understanding the reality that a great discrepancy in power existed between India and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah would eventually relent and sign the Indira-Sheikh Accord, which dropped the demand for a Kashmiri plebiscite in return for the retention of Article 370 and its uniquely semi-autonomous characteristics. In addition, Sheikh Abdullah was put back into the position of Chief Minister of Kashmir. Unsurprisingly,

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>124</sup> Nyla Ali Khan, *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*, (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 103.

when the terms of this agreement were made public in July 1975, there was large-scale outrage in both Kashmir and Pakistan. Particularly problematic was the language that Kashmir was now officially “a constituent unit of India,” and that the Indian government would retain significant ability to influence and exert its own lawmaking priorities in the territory.<sup>125</sup> To this day, the move by Sheikh Abdullah has been described disparagingly as a major, damaging “capitulation” of Kashmiri rights to India.<sup>126</sup> Though he would attempt to distance himself from the accord in the coming weeks, Sheikh Abdullah would watch as widespread protests, increasing fundamentalism, and undeniable instability began to unfold.<sup>127</sup>

These trends would only become exacerbated in the years that would follow. The final years of Sheikh Abdullah’s life and tenure of rule over Kashmir were defined by state violence and autocracy, and the administrations that would follow accomplished little in the way of restoring peace and stability. Allegations of fraudulent elections undermined Kashmiri faith in both their own leaders as well as India’s larger promise of democracy, and militancy was gradually becoming a more frequent outlet for the locals’ frustrations. Little would come in the way of positive developments for Kashmir—nor IndoPak relations—throughout the next decade, but the stakes would rise to an entirely new level by 1998.

In mid-May, the Indian government conducted five, unannounced underground tests of nuclear weapons. Though the international community was swift and severe in

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<sup>125</sup> Rahman, 138.

<sup>126</sup> Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88

<sup>127</sup> Rahman, 139.

denouncing India's actions, Pakistan responded by conducting six tests of its own tests by the end of the month. The consequences of nuclear capabilities being introduced to a historically tense relationship that had already resulted in war three times in the last fifty years were plain—particularly as it related to the Kashmir question. In the words of Schofield:

Amidst the renewed belligerency between India and Pakistan, the demands of the Kashmiri activists were rapidly receding from international consciousness. As both countries continued to test their long range missiles, which were capable of carrying nuclear warheads, the fear of a renewed arms race between India and Pakistan appeared to be far more alarming than the undefined and apparently unrealizable demands for self-determination of the Kashmiris.<sup>128</sup>

Such fears hit new heights starting in the spring of the following year, when troops crossed the Line of Control into the Kargil district of Indian-controlled Kashmir, secured defense positions that the Indian military routinely left vacant during the winter months, and battled strongly against the ensuing counteroffensive. While Pakistan maintained firmly that these troops were simply “freedom fighters” with the goal of liberation for Kashmir, the Indian government was adamant that these troops had been trained, outfitted by, and even partially composed of Pakistani military personnel. On the international stage, sympathy for the Pakistani position was limited: the United States’ intelligence community largely corroborated India’s accusations, and even Pakistan’s most traditional allies like China were hesitant to come to its defense. Perhaps most damning, however, was the reality that even the Pakistani people “did not believe their [own] government’s explanation.”<sup>129</sup> The fact that the militants were able to somewhat

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<sup>128</sup> Schofield, 206.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 215.

hold their own against a superior Indian military worried many that this could lead to the conflict spilling across the Pakistani border, and it was widely understood that another conventional IndoPak war could lead to the first use of nuclear weapons since the Second World War.

Fighting would continue until July, when Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif—after deliberations with U.S. President Bill Clinton—made an adamant plea to the militants to withdraw from their positions. Central to this appeal was the fact that the conflict was no longer necessary as the world had once again turned its attention to the explosive potential of the Kashmir problem—the main goal of these fighters. While this announcement was met with anger from domestic Islamic fundamentalists who felt that the cause of annexing Kashmir was being abandoned, the argument that the fighters could technically claim victory did find its place in the political discourse. Meanwhile, across the border India was also able to claim victory due to the withdrawal of enemy forces from the battlefield—though the damage and losses suffered by its military were not to be understated. In October, Pakistani General Pervez Musharraf led a bloodless coup which replaced Nawaz Sharif, and though this move attracted its own wave of international criticism, Musharraf quickly laid out a seven-point plan for the de-escalation of border hostilities and improvement of overall IndoPak relations.<sup>130</sup> In the end, India and Pakistan were able to avoid a full-blown, formally declared conventional war in the summer of 1999, but the answer to the Kashmir question remained no closer to being answered than before.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 224.

Since the turn of the millennium, IndoPak relations have not returned to the same level of tensions seen throughout the twentieth century. Internally, however, Kashmir has continued to resemble a territory gripped by conflict—one that at many points seems to be directed at the civilians themselves by the occupying forces. While this is certainly not a trend that began in the early 2000s, it is one that is becoming increasingly apparent in the modern, digital, globalized age.

State-sponsored violence and oppression against the Kashmiris are issues that stretch back to the earliest days after the accession to India in 1947. From the start, it was clear that opposition to India's vision of the state's future would hardly be tolerated. Sheikh Abdullah—who had initially gained New Delhi's favor due to his early support of an accession to India and rejection of the “two-nations” theory—was dismissed and arrested from his post as elected chief minister once doubts began to arise as to his loyalty to India. Upon his eventual release four years later, he would almost instantly be imprisoned again for an additional six after taking a public stand in favor of a plebiscite—and this time his detention would be paired with a large trial of twenty-five other dissenters on the grounds of conspiracy.<sup>131</sup>

The hardline stance against dissent that the government of Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad took over the next decade would resemble few characteristics of a healthy democracy. Against the backdrop of 1962's illegitimate election that served to preserve the status of the autocratic regime, freedom of the press was stripped away to quell the spread of information critical of those in power. As for the citizens themselves, one of Bakshi's former associates turned political opponent commented that “the government

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 95.

agents forced hot potatoes into the mouths of their opponents, put heavy stones on their chest; and branded them with hot irons.”<sup>132</sup>

The year 1978 was particularly notable define Kashmiri’s present state of civil society. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, the once again Sheikh Abdullah-led government would introduce the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act. Though similar preventative detention acts had existed in the region in the form of the Public Security Act of 1946 and the Preventative Detention Act of 1954, this method of policing soared under Sheikh Abdullah as a tool to detain his political rivals—a strategy that would continue to be embraced by future leaders.<sup>133</sup> Specifically, the language of the law allowed for the imprisonment of a suspect without trial for a maximum of two years for acting against the “security of the state,” and one year for “acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order;” these terms would only be amended to a respective six months and three months by default in 2012.<sup>134</sup> A clearer picture of the law’s power emerged in 2015 when the Indian government released the statistic that 16,329 individuals had been detained in this manner since 1988.<sup>135</sup> Almost all of these arrests occurred in Kashmir.

A few other laws originating from the twentieth century play in important role in modern Kashmir. The first of which, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), was first enacted in 1958 and evolved into a Kashmir-specific piece of legislation in 1990. In essence, the law allows Indian armed forces to declare a “disturbed area” where

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>133</sup> Mohmad Aabid Bhat, *Insight Turkey* 21, no. 4, (2019), 55.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>135</sup> Mudasir Ahmad, "How the Public Safety Act Continues to Haunt Kashmir," *The Wire*, January 28, 2020.

public order is perceived to be lacking. Within these areas, soldiers are permitted to search homes or make arrests without a warrant, and even open fire on those seen as a threat. Of particular note, those involved with killings of civilians associated with the law are granted immunity from future prosecution. This final point in particular has raised the ire of human rights advocates around the world, as they argue it has prevented justice in countless unjust civilian killings over the years.<sup>136</sup>

A related law is the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act: a counterterrorism law from 1967 that was most recently amended in August 2019. While already decried as draconian for its alleged misuse in targeting social activists and religious minorities, the 2019 changes now allow individuals to be designated as “terrorists” and likewise detained without charges nor trial for six months with no opportunity for bail.<sup>137</sup> Described as India’s now foremost anti-terror law, use has escalated dramatically as an alternative to the PSA due to the facts that PSA detentions are much easier to overturn and that the UAPA ultimately allows the security forces to remove individuals for longer. “Now armed with a more draconian law, the government uses it to detain people who are a political threat or dissenting,” according to Khurram Parvez, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies.<sup>138</sup>

Violent crackdowns on protests like the aforementioned 1965 incident have been common throughout Kashmir’s occupied history. In the eyes of the Indian government, militant insurgencies like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front have created a

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<sup>136</sup> Meenakshi Ganguly, “India: Replace AFSPA with a better, rights-respecting law,” *Human Rights Watch*, (August 24, 2014).

<sup>137</sup> Qadri Inzamam; Mohammad Haziq, “Empty Fields: The Use (and Abuse) of UAPA in Kashmir,” *The Diplomat*, (September 25, 2020).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*



justification for the use of deadly force in securing the territory; one stark example of this sentiment came from Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who, after the 2010 discovery that three villagers near the Line of Control had been murdered “in cold blood” by soldiers, argued that “in a difficult situation, innocent people sometimes ‘have to suffer.’”<sup>139</sup> The modern insurgency in Kashmir began to take on its modern form by the end of the 1980s, and in the period from 1990-2010, 70,000 Kashmiri civilians were killed by India’s security apparatus in their own “war on terror.”<sup>140</sup>

While such death tolls may be able to provide some empirical evidence as to the situation in Kashmir—though the credibility of the government’s estimates is another debate in of itself—these figures are simply unable to demonstrate the full extent of what the civilian population has been endured. Human rights abuses in the region by paramilitary outfits have attracted international criticism, and though allegations of rape, torture, murder, and more are common, no clear statistics regarding their prevalence are readily available as legislation like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act grants impunity those even accused of such acts. With over 500,000 Indian troops present in Kashmir even before the events of 2019, life in and around the valley resembled that of a country at war. While India may view its occupation as one premised on the need for peace, order, and stability, those who have lived under its rule for over seventy years have yet to see any of these buzzwords truly realized. And with the advent and development of digital means of oppression like internet blackouts, India has discovered the potential of these technologies to supplement—not replace—their current repressive strategies.

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<sup>139</sup> Parvaisz Bukhari, “Kashmir 2010: The Year of Killing Youth,” *The Nation*, September 22, 2010.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

*Don't beat us, just shoot us.*<sup>141</sup>

*-Anonymous Kashmiri  
2019*

#### Methodology

For the purpose of this analysis, Chapter Four is broken down into two main thematic sections: instances where the Indian government utilized physical repression (violence, torture, imprisonments, etc.), and instances where the Indian government utilized digital authoritarianism. In Chapter Five, discussion will center on how these two styles of oppression have intertwined, what the impact is for the people of Kashmir, and what the implications are for these developments at the international level. Both thematic sections will examine the respective associated techniques within the context of Chapter Two's five aforementioned goals of autocrats; understanding each's strengths and weaknesses will further unveil where the two styles of oppression overlap—as well as how one may help bolster the effectiveness of the other.

To achieve this, information was compiled from a variety of different sources, including but not limited to activists, reporters, the global diaspora, and firsthand accounts from Kashmiris on social media platforms like Twitter. As alluded to in the prior chapter, attaining exact statistics of human rights abuses is essentially impossible due to the closed nature of Kashmir to the outside world by India, so the body and quality

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<sup>141</sup> Sameer Hashmi, “‘Don't beat us, just shoot us’: Kashmiris allege violent army crackdown,” *BBC*, (August 29, 2019).

of available information is frequently fragmentary and only estimable. Figures are often sourced from NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS). Additionally, a limitation of this study is the author's unilinguality: because of this, the available pool of resources is further narrowed to those written in the English language.

The initial aim of this thesis was to focus primarily on the Twitter activity of Kashmiris immediately following the March restoration of internet services in the valley. By scraping the body of Tweets originating from Kashmir over a period of one week and analyzing a sample of about one hundred per day, one could begin to understand the immediate priorities of the Kashmiri people once they were again connected to the outside world. Furthermore, it is within this early timeframe that personal accounts of abuse by Indian security forces would most likely arise due to concerns of another shutdown and the resultant inability to tell one's story in the near future. With this dataset, it could begin to be extrapolated just how prevalent these negative experiences with security forces were during the shutdown, and what impact the shutdown had in achieving the autocratic goals laid out in Chapter two.

However, several significant issues quickly arose with this approach. To start, Twitter has recently removed access to much of the tweet metadata that would be necessary in order to conduct such a review (such as location, even as broadly defined as "Kashmir"). Even if this metadata could still be retrieved, the growing popularity of VPNs in Kashmir would have masked the true extent of the body of Kashmiri tweets.<sup>142</sup> This fact alone would make the prospect of claiming an accurate measurement dubious at

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<sup>142</sup> Irfan Amin Malik, "In Kashmir, VPNs Allow Residents to Slip Past the Region's Firewall," *The Wire*, (February 8, 2020).

best, especially as it would be impossible to gauge just how many tweets were missing in total.

Moreover, to scrape tweets in this nature in the first place, only an original computer code could properly run and execute the task; the author did not have the knowledge to create this, and practical and logistical obstacles stood in the way of hiring a computer scientist. Therefore, the original proposal of using a large swath of Twitter data as the central focus of the thesis shifted into utilizing a smaller, narrower sample for supplementary purposes instead.

Over the course of the project, a collection of relevant Kashmiri journalists, activists, NGOs, and local politicians were identified through a process similar in nature to snowball sampling. After the creation of an initial list of 23 prominent Kashmiri Twitter accounts ranging from the categories above—primarily discovered by mining the popular hashtags #Kashmir and #PrayForKashmir—these accounts were analyzed one-by-one with Twitter’s advanced search feature. The terms searched for included the verbatim queries of “killings,” “torture,” “rape,” “state violence,” “surveillance,” “drones,” “mass imprisonments,” and “internet shutdown”—along with varied synonymous phrasings in order to both increased relevant results as well as ensure the data was not overly skewed towards a sample of individuals only critical of the government. By analyzing the content of the results stemming from these initial accounts (which typically came in the form of links to external sites), a much greater body of information became available for the ensuing research. Among the dozens of new Kashmiri activists, journalists, and media accounts yielded by this search method, NGO

reports, studies, and data were particularly referenced—especially the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society.

As alluded to above, such a method of sampling does create the potential that the information being analyzed could be overly biased against the Indian government. To help account for this, responses from the Indian government towards specific allegations cited in the thesis were sought wherever possible and included alongside the specific accusation. Though the bias and credibility of those making allegations could somewhat reasonably be called into question, many of their accounts have been cited from internationally recognized publications such as *The Washington Post*. These same news organizations were faced with the same questions before running each respective story, especially in the earliest days of the lockdown where information leaving the valley was dramatically reduced. In large part due to the systematic effort of the central government to suppress non-Indian supported narratives, these organizations found that these stories met the criteria necessary for publication; oftentimes, this journalistic justification would preface said story. Overall, this active effort to pair allegations with opposing viewpoints—specifically seeking out accusations that accredited, career journalists found reputable for publication—was to ensure that the analysis produced as fair and easily replicable of a conclusion as possible.

Of course, the combination of all the above factors makes it impossible that this project or its collection of sources could ever provide a complete picture of the true state of Kashmir. Nevertheless, both the ongoing nature of Kashmir's 2019 blackout and the lack of comprehensive academia on the subject (two dynamics which are surely related) demands that some level of analysis be undertaken—even if it may be imperfect. Ideally,

this preliminary investigation into the subject will highlight deeper, more specific questions that future research can address with the benefit of greater time and resources.

### Physical Repression

#### Extrajudicial Killings

When examining physical repression in Kashmir, it makes sense to begin with the technique first analyzed by Guriev and Treisman: politically motivated killings. To be clear, the “mass killings” that the two specify as the deaths of more than one thousand noncombatants are not currently happening, nor have they in any recent history. In 2019, 368 individuals were killed during Indian counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir; among those, only 80 have been classified as civilians.<sup>143</sup> While this by no means makes these deaths any less tragic or reprehensible, it is also not indicative of a reality where the Indian government is targeting Kashmiris at a rate which can justifiably be classified as mass killing. In observing the larger trend over the 21<sup>st</sup> century, civilian deaths had been falling dramatically since 2002. While JKCCS identified 968 cases that year, the annual figure has not exceeded 200 since 2006.<sup>144</sup>

That said, what has not diminished over this period is the effect of these killings on the Kashmiri people. Last year, JKCCS wrote that “while extra-judicial killings of civilians in 2019 saw a downward trend, the pattern has remained the same. Civilians continue to be the direct target of the armed forces as well as, [are] seen at par with

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<sup>143</sup> Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society; Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, “Annual Human Rights Review 2019,” n.a., (2019), <https://www.jkccs.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-Annual-Human-Rights-Review.pdf>

<sup>144</sup> Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, “Peace and Processes of Violence: An observation on situation in Jammu and Kashmir from 2002 to 2009,” n.a., (2010), [https://www.jkccs.net/Human%20Rights%20Review/2010%20-%20Peace%20and-Processes%20of%20Violence%20\(Feb\).pdf](https://www.jkccs.net/Human%20Rights%20Review/2010%20-%20Peace%20and-Processes%20of%20Violence%20(Feb).pdf)

armed militants, as data has shown.”<sup>145</sup> This contention that civilians are being deliberately targeted by India is consistent with findings by HRW as far back as the earlier stages of the insurgency in 1995:

While attempting to reassure the international community that they have taken steps to curb human rights abuses in Kashmir, Indian forces have in effect subcontracted some of their abusive tactics to groups with no official accountability. The extrajudicial killings, abductions and assaults committed by these groups against suspected militants are instead described as resulting from “intergroup rivalries.” But civilians have also been their victims, and the militia groups have singled out journalists, human rights activists and medical workers for attack.<sup>146</sup>

This observation that India is sponsoring third parties to commit violence on the government’s behalf is extremely important. Frankly, it is impossible to absolve India of blame in civilian deaths in Kashmir on the sole basis that official state security forces were not present during an incident if the groups carrying out such actions have been greenlighted by the state in the first place. HRW emphasizes this relationship in the same report:

In some cases, attacks by these paramilitary groups appear to have been carried out on orders from security officers; in other cases, the groups appear to operate on their own, within broadly defined limits to their discretionary powers and the full expectation on the part of the security forces that they will use their discretion to take initiatives within the overall counterinsurgency strategy of fighting terror with terror. Their actions are taken with the knowledge and complicity of official security forces.<sup>147</sup>

At the very least, this may mean India could be considered an accessory for Kashmiri deaths at the hands of any militarized forces. One may even be able to argue that India bears almost complete responsibility for such bloodshed.

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<sup>145</sup> JKCCS et. al, “2019,” 10.

<sup>146</sup> Human Rights Watch, “India’s Secret Army in Kashmir: New Patterns of Abused Emerge in the Conflict,” *India* 8, no. 4, (May 1996), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/India2.htm>, Chapter 1.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

Indian explanations for civilian deaths often run contrary to family and eyewitness accounts. For example, when a twenty-five-year-old was shot and killed in May at a security checkpoint in Srinagar, India's Central Reserve Police Force released a statement that the victim was shot "when the car didn't stop despite warning shots."<sup>148</sup> This was refuted by a witness who, in an interview with *Deutsche Welle*, explained that the car had indeed stopped, and that "a security official told him something to which he replied that he had some emergency. They let him go but as he was getting into his vehicle, they shot him in the back. He was killed deliberately."<sup>149</sup> The victim's father corroborated this: "Had soldiers fired at his vehicle while fleeing any checkpoint, his car would have got bullet marks."<sup>150</sup>

A remarkably similar incident occurred in July, when a sixty-five-year-old was killed in front of his three-year-old grandson. When police initially identified the victim, they explained that the man had been caught in crossfire of a skirmish between militants and state security forces while trying to flee the scene.<sup>151</sup> The man's family disputed this with their own accusation that the security forces had removed the man from his car and shot him on the spot. They also question why the car had not been touched if it had truly been caught in crossfire.<sup>152</sup>

Mass killings are almost impossible to completely cover up: China failed to do so with its massacre at Tiananmen Square, and it is arguably the most successful regime in the world at controlling the flow of information. This reality makes it is unsurprising that

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<sup>148</sup> n.a., "Clashes in Kashmir after Indian soldiers kill civilian," *DW*, (May 13, 2020.)

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Nusrat Sidiq, "Indian forces killed civilian in Kashmir, family says," *Anadolu Agency*, (July 2, 2020).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*



India would decide against such measures within Kashmir. Instead, they have largely opted for mostly nonlethal measures such as tear gas and shotgun pellets when confronted by large crowds, saving lethal encounters for more isolated incidents where eyewitnesses are few and the circumstances allow for the story to be muddled in the eventual aftermath. Just as JKCCS previously stated, the trend of extrajudicial killings as a state strategy of repression has remained consistent throughout the conflict, and it has shown no indication of receding in the near future.

In terms of the five goals of autocrats, these targeted killings may not serve the interests of surveillance, regime legitimization, or spreading misinformation, but they absolutely succeed in creating fear and eliminating operational capacity. On the subject of regime legitimization alone, civilian deaths were outlined in previous chapters as actually delegitimizing a standing regime in the eyes of its people. As it relates to fear, though, it is not hard to draw the line between how a Kashmiri may be fearful of interactions with security forces when a friend, family member, or person in the news has been slain. Uzma Javed—a twenty-year-old from Srinagar—described this very fear to *Al Jazeera* shortly after the abrogation of Article 370: “The sight of armed forces ‘petrifies me,’ she said, adding ‘I don’t even want my brother and father to go out at all but there is no option. They need to go to get bread and other daily necessities.’”<sup>153</sup> The hesitancy to even put oneself in a position of interaction with these forces plays directly into the elimination of dissident operational capacity as well: if there are not enough willing to directly push back at the state, the critical mass needed to force change may be unattainable.

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<sup>153</sup> Adnan Bhat, “Kashmir women are the biggest victims of this inhumane siege,” *Al Jazeera*, (August 21, 2019).

## Torture and Rape

Just as state killings have remained a consistent strategy of repression, other gross human rights violations such as torture and rape have found continued usage over the years by the security apparatus as well. Last year, the *Washington Post* reported one such incident that had allegedly occurred the day after the abrogation of Article 370. After being questioned by Indian soldiers, 25-year-old Yassin Bhat was ordered to remove his clothes in the middle of a road.<sup>154</sup> He was subsequently held down and beaten, and shocked by electrical wires which had been forced on his chest and genitals. He and four other naked men were beaten for about two hours, and soon after being forced to lie on top of each other Bhat fainted. Though he told the *Post* that “I thought it would be my last night,” he was eventually retrieved by neighbors upon the soldiers’ departure.<sup>155</sup> Photographic evidence and hospital records challenge the Indian army’s statement that the cases outlined the *Post*’s story are “baseless.”<sup>156</sup>

Less than one month after the August 2019 crackdown, the BBC managed to circumvent India’s ban on international media in Kashmir and speak to local residents regarding their experiences with the security forces. In a story eerily similar to Bhat’s, one young man recounted being asked to “name the stone-throwers.” After responding that he did not know any, he was stripped of his clothing and beaten with rods and sticks for two hours—electrocuted awake when slipping into unconsciousness.<sup>157</sup> Another man described being beaten by “15-16 soldiers,” with “cables, guns, sticks and probably iron

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<sup>154</sup> Niha Masih; Joanna Slater; Shams Irfan, “The night the soldiers came: Allegations of abuse surface in Kashmir,” *The Washington Post* (September 30, 2019).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Hashmi, “‘Don’t beat us.’”

rods.”<sup>158</sup> While he said that his beard was pulled so hard “it felt like my teeth would fall out,” he was later told by a witness that one soldier attempted to act further by setting the beard on fire—only stopped by another soldier. Still another described being beaten so badly that he was still unable to lie on his back weeks after.<sup>159</sup> In their own interviews, two brothers said they pleaded with their torturers, “don’t beat us, just shoot us.”<sup>160</sup>

While all the interviewees stated that they believed the security forces did this in an attempt to scare villagers from participating in protests—one even alleged his village was specifically threatened with future beatings if protests occurred—the Indian army responded just as they had to the *Post*’s questioning: “No specific allegations of this nature have been brought to our notice,” and that the accusations were “baseless and unsubstantiated.”<sup>161</sup>

Such allegations against India are anything but uncommon in Kashmir. In late 2010, WikiLeaks published private dispatches from the US embassy in Delhi that detailed secret Red Cross briefings on human rights abuses in Kashmir. In 177 visits between 2002 and 2004 where the organization privately interviewed 1,296 detainees, 681 reported anywhere from one to over six different forms of torture—including ceiling suspension, leg crushing and stretching, electrocutions, water-based, and sexual acts.<sup>162</sup> These 681 detainees reported over 1,890 separate personal incidents, and the Red Cross concluded that the victims were all civilians as militants were typically killed instead of captured.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Jason Burke, “WikiLeaks cables: India accused of systematic use of torture in Kashmir,” *The Guardian* (December 16, 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

Though this report focused particularly on detainees, accounts such as Bhat’s demonstrate how torture can happen as spontaneously as finding someone walking in the street. His story also illustrates how torture has clearly not been abandoned since the Red Cross’s investigation in 2004. The United Nations has repeatedly been audience to torture allegations against Indian security forces, and in May published its own findings that the status of human rights in Kashmir was not just poor, but in a “continued [state of] deterioration.”<sup>164</sup> JKCCS’s 2019 report on Kashmir takes this assessment further, arguing that torture is not only “used indiscriminately by the Indian armed forces and J&K Police in J&K to punish or intimidate people,” but that the practice has become so normalized that it is rarely reported in Kashmiri media anymore.<sup>165</sup> While each year brings with it a new set of stories and allegations, this reality JKCCS illuminates strongly suggests that the outside world will never learn the true extent of torture in Kashmir.

Many similarities can also be drawn to the weaponization of rape by Indian security forces. Even when counterinsurgency operations were just in the process of intensifying in the early 1990s, Asia Watch was among many sounding the alarm bell as to the prevalence of this tactic. In their comprehensive 1993 report on the matter, the organization called the usage of rape by security forces as “frequent,” and that it most commonly occurred during cordon-and-search operations where men were temporarily taken from their homes and the women left alone—as well as for a retaliatory measure following nearby militant ambushes.<sup>166</sup> The motivation, according to Asia Watch, is to

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<sup>164</sup> Nils Melzer et al. to India, May 4, 2020, 1.

<sup>165</sup> JKCCS, “2019”, 53.

<sup>166</sup> Asia Watch; Physicians for Human Rights, “Rape in Kashmir: A Crime of War,” *India* 5, no. 9, (1993), 1.

“punish and humiliate the entire community.”<sup>167</sup> Their reporting on this issue illustrates the consistency of this tactic’s use by Indian security forces throughout Kashmir’s recent history; this consistency may suggest that the forces’ leaders perceive that rape still holds value as a means to quell dissent.

While there are already distinct challenges in finding accurate empirical evidence for crimes as underreported as rape, it is especially important to understand the circumstances that amplify this reality in Kashmir. To start, the Indian government’s lack of urgency in addressing the issue—or perhaps more appropriately, the demonstrated pattern of condoning such actions through coverups and lack of accountability—immediately turns off victims from even raising the issue in the first place. Though the Kunan Poshpora mass rape of 1991 remains one of the most infamous human rights violations by Indian security forces throughout the conflict, the Indian government still refuses to acknowledge the incident and has actively impeded investigations and court proceedings to this day.<sup>168</sup>

Looking at the weaponization of rape more broadly, Fatima particularly cites the fetishization and dehumanization of Kashmiri women—a trend she argues has been exacerbated and encouraged by Indian legislative policy like the AFSPA<sup>169</sup>—as the foundation of an environment where these crimes can run rampant.<sup>170</sup> This is especially dangerous when paired with dismissive attitudes towards rape by authority figures, such as former Jammu and Kashmir deputy chief minister Kavinder Gupta’s comments in

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Update of the Situation of Human Rights in Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir from May 2018 to April 2019,” (July 8, 2019), 23.

<sup>169</sup> Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

<sup>170</sup> Hana Fatima, “Women’s bodies as battlegrounds: Social media discourse and the weaponization of rape in Kashmir,” *The American Bazaar*, (February 24, 2020).

response to a 2018 accusation against security forces: “[it was] a minor incident and need not be hyped.”<sup>171</sup> Mushtaq contends that the combination of these factors and more suggests that “the act of sexual violence and murder cannot and must not be seen outside of the Indian state’s nation-building project over a territory that questions the legitimacy of its rule.”<sup>172</sup>

All of this speaks to much of why the Indian security force’s reputation to torture and rape is so effective at stoking fear in Kashmir: under the current environment of impunity, it is unlikely that past, present, or future victims will ever receive true justice for their tribulations. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful progress on the issue since the Red Cross’ 2004 warning proves that the issue is not a strong priority of Western powers that could potentially force change from the outside through tariffs and other means. Without external pressure, there is no real incentive for India to change a largely effective behavior. In the valley, there is an immense cost not just for acting against the government, but sometimes simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time as the case of Bhat shows. As JKCCS stated, torture is expressly used by the security apparatus to intimidate, and the isolated social media and journalistic accounts that do manage to emerge from a suppressed Kashmir prove that the tactic is working.

This creation of a culture of fear also aids in the goal of eliminating the organized dissent’s operational capacity: similarly to the effect of killings, if the security forces can scare potential protestors enough that they will not act against the state, the critical mass needed to facilitate change becomes much more difficult to attain. Beyond these to

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<sup>171</sup> Samreen Mushtaq, “Why the Kathua Case Cannot Be Seen Outside of India’s Nation-building Project,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 53, no. 19, (May 12, 2018), 7.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

achievements, though, such human rights violations are unable to help in the realization of the other four autocratic goals. Torture and rape do not spread misinformation, help surveille the population, or legitimize the regime. This indicates that while torture may be a powerful tool within the niche it does fill, it needs to fit within a larger, holistic strategy to reach its maximum effectiveness.

### Physical Surveillance

One technique that can augment torture and rape in this way is the substantial escalation of physical surveillance since the revocation of Article 370. Prior to last August, drones were a valuable tool for patrolling the Line of Control as well the valley's biggest protests, but ownership and usage was largely exclusive to the Indian military. Since the crackdown, though, police have been rapidly outfitted with the most up-to-date equipment available. In October 2019, an anonymous Indian official told *Outlook* that "The drone MAVIC2 has an excellent speed; 75 km per hour and it can carry 1.2 kg payload. I think it has sensors that can also detect weapons. If you are able to fly it like an expert, it is of great use for the law and order and surveillance."<sup>173</sup> Perhaps ominously for the Kashmiri people, he added that "we are just in the process of learning its benefits."<sup>174</sup>

One year later, the evidence that India has embraced these benefits is clear. In December 2020, one hundred more drones were budgeted out for local police to be dispersed in the coming months.<sup>175</sup> Another anonymous Indian source stated that "The procurement of 100 drones is just a beginning and in the months ahead, each police

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<sup>173</sup> Naseer Ganai, "Police Use Drones To Shadow And Identify Protestors In Kashmir," *Outlook*, (October 2, 2019).

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Press Desk, "With MHA's nod, J&K police to procure 100 drones in phases," *The Kashmir Press*, (December 10, 2020).

station will be covered...The UAVs or drone system will be of category three which is considered the latest and equipped with the technology required by the police especially in Kashmir given its terrain and mountainous region.”<sup>176</sup>

At the start of the crackdown, these drones were mostly utilized in southern Kashmir where protests were most fervent. In Anchar, for instance, security forces used them to fly above roadblocks that made the village inaccessible from the outside and scout the identity of protestors along with their most likely routes.<sup>177</sup> Kashmiris would soon learn the fruitlessness of attempting to reach high-flying drones or covering their faces when outside, though. Last year in Srinagar, a woman named Aliya was arrested and interrogated after being identified by the color of her dress.<sup>178</sup> In another part of the city, several men were surrounded on a bridge by security forces and attempted to flee by jumping into the river—resulting in the drowning of one.<sup>179</sup> The effectiveness of the police’s drone usage will only increase in the future as in-depth training from experts is expected to be part of the new drone rollout in 2021 and beyond, according to other officials speaking off the record.<sup>180</sup>

Drones are far from the only means in which security forces have sought to track the Kashmiri population. As part of a more widespread, static surveillance infrastructure, thousands of CCTV cameras have been installed throughout the valley since last August. In October, Bandipora deputy commissioner Owais Ahmad implemented the following order: “to keep an eye on anti-social elements and their acts thereof, there is a need for

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ganai, “Police Use Drones.”

<sup>178</sup> Suddaf Chaudry, “Masked soldiers, barred mosques and constant surveillance: Inside Kashmir under lockdown,” *Open Democracy*, (September 12, 2019).

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Press Desk, “With MHA’s nod.”



additional surveillance measures which include installation & extensive usage of CCTV cameras in public places, offices with adequate data storage capacity.”<sup>181</sup> Particularly of note is the demand that “the CCTV HDD (storage device) shall be always kept available for the usage of Law Enforcing Agencies as and when requisitioned.”<sup>182</sup> This directive aligns closely with the Kashmir Police’s larger December initiative, which plans for the installation of three thousand cameras in all twenty districts and along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway—an effort aided in large part by the United Kingdom-based consultant company Ernst and Young.<sup>183</sup>

The effectiveness of these combined surveillance measures has not been lost on the Kashmiris. One Anchar resident discussed the progression of Kashmiri attitudes in an anonymous interview. At first, he said that “people were surprised as they saw the drones flying over their heads during protests. They would cover their faces on spotting the drone. Some would try to chase it but it flew too high.”<sup>184</sup> However, as these technologies have expanded, he explained that people no longer even bother to cover their faces. “Drones are here now every day,” according to Nazir Ahmad, another resident. “They are tracking our every movement in this area...On Eid, we had five helicopters in the area for aerial surveillance. We heard Ajit Doval [India’s national security advisor] was in one.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Owais Farooqi, “Eye on ‘anti-social elements,’ DC Bandipora orders installation of CCTV cameras in offices, busy places,” *Greater Kashmir*, (October 13, 2020).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> News Desk, “Police to install 3000 CCTV cameras in all districts of Jammu and Kashmir: Report,” *The Kashmir Walla*, (December 1, 2020).

<sup>184</sup> Ganai, “Police Use Drones.”

<sup>185</sup> Ahmer Khan; Adnan Bhat, “In Kashmir, the Indian Government is always watching,” *This Week In Asia*, (September 8, 2019).

Obviously, the main purpose of these measures is to surveille the Kashmiri population—something neither extrajudicial killings nor torture and rape are particularly helpful in achieving. While the technique fails to accomplish two of the other main autocratic goals—misinformation spread and regime legitimization—its ability to promote the other two are less clear. On the subject of creating fear, it is easy to imagine how the state of constant surveillance would make a potential protestor fearful of demonstrating as security forces would likely be able to later track them down—resulting in a prolonged detention, inescapable torture, or even death. That said, the relative dismissiveness of the everyday Kashmiri in hiding their face from drones suggests that the tactic is no longer as feared by the public—though this would seemingly increase the effectiveness of future surveillance exponentially. As it relates to elimination of dissenters’ operational capacity, cameras are quite clearly unable to achieve this on their own. However, the opportunities opened up by the information they collect make this goal much more easily attained through the use of other techniques: namely, imprisonments and detentions.

#### Mass Imprisonments and Detentions

One of the most immediate action items of the Indian government in Kashmir following the revocation of Article 370 was the swift, targeted, and widespread detention of civilians in every corner of the valley. Though the laws that provided a legal path for these mass imprisonments have been existent for decades—namely, the PSA and UAPA<sup>186</sup>—the extent to which they were utilized was consistent with the government’s traditional strategy of weaponizing them most in times of significant political unrest or

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<sup>186</sup> Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, respectively.

civilian uprisings.<sup>187</sup> For instance, JKCCS reported “hundreds of fresh detentions under PSA” had taken place in 2018; this is an unmistakably large number for any society operating under the pretense of “democracy,” but one dwarfed by more politically turbulent years like 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2016 (the latter of which saw over eight thousand arrests alone).<sup>188</sup>

In an alarmingly rapid blow to Kashmiri civil society, up to four thousand people were immediately arrested and held under the PSA in the first two weeks after Article 370’s revocation—a figure constituting at least half of the total number previously arrested in all of 2016.<sup>189</sup> However, that number fluctuated depending on the source: while one anonymous security official was responsible for leaking that four thousand figure, another told *AFP* off-the-record that “around 6,000 people were medically examined at a couple of places in Srinagar after they were detained.”<sup>190</sup> Still another anonymously estimated “thousands,” jailed, but stressed that this number “did not include other residents whose detentions at police stations had not been recorded.”<sup>191</sup> One of the highest figures has come from an all-woman fact-finding team whose on-the-ground research contended that about thirteen thousand had been taken in the weeks immediately before and after the lockdown—many of who had not been documented.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Jammu Kashmir Coalition for Civil Society; Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, “Annual Human rights Review: 2018,” (December 31, 2018), <https://jkccs.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Annual-Report-2018.pdf>, 15.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> n.a., “About 4,000 people arrested in Kashmir since August 5: govt sources to AFP,” *The Hindu*, (August 18, 2019).

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Annie Raja; Kawaljit, Kaur et al., “Women’s Voice: Fact Finding Report on Kashmir,” (September 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2019), Accessed at <https://www.freekashmir.org/womens-voice-fact-finding-report-on-kashmir/>

Though the targets varied widely in background and occupation—including but not limited to academics, journalists, political leaders, and activists—they all had one trait in common: their freedom was deemed threatening to the attempted submission of Kashmir by the Indian government. While some of these arrested in the first wave had a history of participation in local protests, those who practice nonviolence were not spared from the ones taken into custody under suspicion of violent action. The police official responsible for the six thousand figure disclosed the process in which these detentions are carried out, explaining that after being sent to the central jail in Srinagar detainees are flown thousands of miles away by military aircraft to India proper.<sup>193</sup> In the bigger picture, the broadness of the net the Indian government has casted when designating such threats is especially concerning as almost anyone could be seemingly painted as “dangerous” when free.

An internal government report from September 6 seen by *Reuters* pegged the number of arrested Kashmiris at 3,800, though it was estimated that 2,600 had been released within the month.<sup>194</sup> However, international NGOs continued to plea for justice in 2020, demanding that the “hundreds” still detained in the jails and prisons scattered across India be released. These calls would become greatly amplified after March as the spread of COVID-19 exploded globally, and those confined within the Indian prison system were not spared from exposure.

Traditionally, Indian prisons have gained a reputation for operating well beyond their intended capacity. In 2019, the average occupancy rate of those in India was 114

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Devjyot Ghoshal; Alasdair Pal, “Thousands detained in Indian Kashmir crackdown, official data reveals,” *Reuters*, (September 12, 2019).

percent, and Kashmir's Director General of Prisons stated in July 2020 that "we have the capacity to lodge 3,234 prisoners in our jails but presently our occupancy is above 3,659."<sup>195</sup> Domestic activists have such as Khuram Parvez contended that the reluctance to release Kashmiris awaiting trial was indicative of the government's larger strategy to harm and repress: "the approach of the government has been vindictive towards Kashmiri prisoners. These people are being punished without trials and COVID-19 didn't deter the government from ending its belligerence when it comes to Kashmiris."<sup>196</sup>

Incremental progress was made early in the pandemic after an Indian Supreme Court directive led a committee to order the release of jail inmates not involved in militancy-related cases (236 were released between April 1<sup>st</sup> and April 19<sup>th</sup>), but to this day a large number of Kashmiris remain missing from the valley—a count unlikely to ever accurately surface. Aliya, the previously discussed Srinagar woman who had been identified and arrested from the color of her dress, is still missing her husband—one of presumably thousands of Kashmiris who have no idea as to the whereabouts (not to mention the status of their potentially jeopardized existence) of their loved ones. In an op-ed published by *The Guardian*, one Kashmiri mother pleaded directly to the Indian government at the start of the crackdown: "I want every single mother in Kashmir and other places whose sons have been forcibly disappeared to get answers to the questions that haunt them: where is my child? Where did you take them? Bring the dead body if you killed them—but for God's sake bring them back."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Joe Wallen, "Overcrowded prisons in Kashmir are 'incubators' for Covid-19 as inmates are refused release," *The Telegraph*, (July 17, 2019).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Parveena Ahangar, "My son is one of Kashmir's 'disappeared.' When will India tell the truth about their fate?" *The Guardian*, (September 12, 2019).

In again relating India's tactics to the five goals of autocrats, these mass detentions do not legitimize the regime nor spread misinformation. On the other hand, the risk of disappearance thousands of miles from home with no concrete timetable for return quite easily creates fear among not just open dissenters, but the loved ones who care and rely upon them as well. While one may be able to argue at an abstract, technical level that imprisonments allow the Indian government to easily track their top perceived targets in a jail cell, these measures do little on their own to increase surveillance over the population as a whole. However, mass imprisonments' ability to eliminate the dissent's operational capacity becomes much stronger by contextualizing the detentions within the larger surveillance infrastructure of the Indian security apparatus. In this regard, it seems highly likely that the effectiveness of the mass imprisonment tactic is strengthened exponentially by the information gathered by constant drone and CCTV coverage.

At this point, the effectiveness of the differing means of repression in achieving the five goals of autocrats has become much clearer. However, as valuable as this information may be, it is not the main focus of the thesis; rather, how does the existence of internet technologies and avenues of digital authoritarianism affect these tactics usage? Considering these four tactics underneath the larger umbrella of "physical repression," does digital authoritarianism strengthen this broader strategy? Or does it instead weaken it? Does digital authoritarianism augment physical repression in a way that may incline an autocrat to maintain or increase their use of violence? Or, as scholars like Guriev and Treisman suggest, is the potential effectiveness of digital authoritarianism enough to actually warrant the gradual abandonment of physical repression in favor of technological tactics? To appropriately answer these questions, the strengths and weaknesses of digital

authoritarianism as it relates to the five goals of autocrats must be fully analyzed. It is from that point that these advantages and shortcomings can be compared to those of physical repression, and the overall effects revealed from their intersection.

### Digital authoritarianism

By no means should the focus of this section on internet shutdowns be misconstrued as an implication that blackouts are the only digitally authoritarianist measure worthy of academic consideration within the context of this thesis' research question. In fact, that is one major direction that future research on this subject should take: how does the prevalence of other tactics such as filtering and flooding contribute to the effectiveness and usage of physical repression in other regimes? That said, the outsized attention given to internet shutdowns is largely predicated on the fact that by the very nature of a blackout these tactics cannot truly coexist. Simply put, if a population has no access to internet services, there is no body of information to filter or flood in the first place.

Of course, this is not to say that the Kashmiris have been completely isolated from the internet since the digital curtain fell in August 2019. Throughout the next year, coverage gradually returned in certain areas of the valley, and trips to government-approved computer terminals were at least somewhat common for numerous individuals as months went by in order to complete time sensitive tasks like paying taxes and applying for colleges. In those controlled environments, other forms of digital authoritarianism were absolutely rampant.

Overall, though, the practically unusable internet speeds can effectively be characterized as simply a newer manifestation of the blackout, and it would be inaccurate

to act as if the complete palate of digital authoritarianism has applied—or was ever even truly accessible—to most. New Delhi-based digital rights activist Nikhil Pahwa maintains this very point: “frankly, let’s call it what it is: It’s still an internet shutdown and a blanket censorship of the internet.”<sup>198</sup> Pranesh Prakash of Yale’s Information Society Project echoes this claim, contending that “the internet shutdown in Kashmir is far worse censorship than anywhere in the world. It even surpasses China’s. It is a step toward demolishing democracy in India.”<sup>199</sup>

For these reasons, Kashmir’s historically unprecedented internet blackout is the focus of this thesis’ analysis of digital authoritarianism within this case study.

### Internet shutdowns

The blackout began the day before Article 370’s revocation: alongside a military-imposed curfew and hard restriction of movement, phone and internet services were severed throughout the valley. With one flip of the kill switch, the Indian government had isolated the Kashmiris from not just the outside world, but from each other in an environment where security forces could and were arbitrarily torturing and detaining. Local journalist Majid Maqbool—one who had not been preemptively taken away at the opening of the shutdown—described the effects of losing access to his family in an instant:

It was traumatic, and no date was given for when it might end... My parents, who are in their mid 60s, left for the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca two days before communication was cut. They couldn’t speak to us for more than a month. For the first time in my life, I couldn’t greet them on

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<sup>198</sup> Aijaz Hussain; Sheikh Saaliq; “India keeps lid on Kashmir’s internet 6 months into lockdown,” *Associated Press*, (February 14, 2020).

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*



the day of Eid. Their once-in-a-lifetime experience was filled with added anxieties and worries.<sup>200</sup>

As mentioned earlier, unlike a scenario in which the internet is simply being filtered, there are no workarounds for absolute blocking in this manner. In China, for instance, usage of VPNs is a common way to circumvent the Great Firewall and access content which the Communist Party has deemed unacceptable. However, for Kashmiris, the underlying technology that allows a VPN to mask a user's identity and connect to a foreign server in the first place—the internet itself—was now absent. Short of access to government approved connections under constant monitoring, the citizens of Kashmir were alone.

Indeed, many would ultimately end up scrambling for short sessions of connectivity—oftentimes traveling far distances to do so. In what would become colloquially known as the “Internet Express,” an 8:15am train out of Srinagar would be packed well over intended capacity as hundreds made a day trip out of the valley for the opportunity to apply for a passport or renew a driver's license. Khushboo Yaqoob, a sixteen-year-old attempting to apply for a competitive medical exam, was forced to make two trips in two days with her mother as lines at her home district headquarters were too long: there were a total of four computers for one million people.<sup>201</sup> When she was finally able to get her application through, she cried. “I was not sure I would ever be able to fill it out. Because of the internet ban, I could see my dreams shattering.”<sup>202</sup> Yaqoob had been preparing for the exam for two years.

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<sup>200</sup> Majid Maqbool, “I’m a journalist who lived through Kashmir’s traumatic internet blackout, which started one year ago. Here’s what it’s like to have your freedoms ripped away for 213 days,” *Business Insider*, (August 5, 2020).

<sup>201</sup> Masih et al., “India’s Internet shutdown.”

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

Weeks after the shutdown began, Maqbool was one of hundreds of journalists who was forced to wait several hours for a few minutes of their own access on one of twelve computers. He managed to email his brother and provide a brief update to his family, before his parents could return over forty days later. Even once they had returned, the pain and fear still lingered:

Whenever I went to the media centre...I'd download photos of my nephew that my brother emailed to show my parents back home on my laptop. Seeing him on the screen would moisten their eyes... Every time I left home for work, they would worry about not being able to ring me to check on me. There was no way I could contact them while I was out. Our mobiles were useless, lying in a corner. My mother never forgot to remind me to carry my ID card when I left home—just as she had when I was a teenager.<sup>203</sup>

In a region where killings and disappearances could already happen in the blink of an eye, the blackout introduced a level of increased uncertainty to a prolonged extent yet to be seen in the internet age.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, the internet ban was partially lifted—with a substantial caveat. Those who were now able to connect only able to do so at 2G speeds. In a world already transitioning from a 4G to 5G infrastructure, this was as good as nothing for many. Of course, that is not to say that there were no benefits to the partial restoration: through VPN use—though officially barred by the government under severe consequences under the UAPA—there was now an opportunity to reach the outside world relatively unfiltered. One student told the Associated Press “they made us silent for six months. Now they’ve opened a window. We’ll tell the world what India has done to us.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Maqbool, “I’m a journalist.”

<sup>204</sup> Aijaz Hussain et al., “India keeps lid on Kashmir’s internet.”

That said, businesses, doctors, and students who relied on the transfer of large files and consistent outside communication were largely unable to do their jobs. Within Kashmir, for example, shopping online was nearly impossible due to the inordinate amount of time it would take to load a picture of the product they sought to buy. For those browsing Kashmiri digital retailers outside of the valley, prolonged shipping times and inability to see consistently updated stocks—a process loading times made incredibly burdensome for business owners in Kashmir—sent them away in droves. “When the government imposed an information blackout following the abrogation of K&K’s special status, I abruptly lost my customers from the rest of India,” said the owner of one boutique. “When I could not operate my business, the customers across India switched to other online shopping portals, due to which my business suffered badly... When your business gets hit, it brings frustration and depression, and you start cursing yourself.”<sup>205</sup> Even before the partial access was restored, one report estimated that the shutdown had already cost the Indian economy—Kashmir included—over \$1.3 billion in 2019 alone.<sup>206</sup> As significant as this number was, though, it would be dwarfed by the nearly \$3 billion loss in 2020.<sup>207</sup>

Even prior to the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, the medical field was one of the sectors of Kashmir most impacted by the shutdown. One urologist from Srinagar had been treating a patient in the advanced-stage of pancreatic cancer since July 2019, and relied on consultation with specialists in Mumbai for information. The shutdown instantly

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<sup>205</sup> Irfan Amin Malik, “A Year Without High-Speed Internet Has Been a Nightmare for J&K’s Entrepreneurs,” *The Wire*, (August 2, 2020).

<sup>206</sup> Samuel Woodhams; Simon Migliano, “The Global Cost of Internet Shutdowns in 2019,” *Top 10 VPN*, (January 7, 2020), <https://www.top10vpn.com/cost-of-internet-shutdowns/>

<sup>207</sup> Ananya Bhattacharya, “India’s internet shutdowns cost its economy nearly \$3 billion in 2020,” *Quartz India*, (January 5, 2021).

severed these communications, and the patient died in November. He told *The Washington Post* in December 2019 he was overwhelmed with the knowledge that he was unable to do everything possible to potentially save the patient's life. "What hurts is when [the government] claims things are normal," he added. "This is not normal."<sup>208</sup> An understanding of such consequences was shared by doctors across the valley, who in normal times were constantly connected and contacting each other through a volunteer network of 1,200 on WhatsApp.<sup>209</sup>

When COVID-19 did strike, many of the measures taken around the world were simply impossible due to the limitation of local internet speeds. For contact tracing alone, doctors had no way to track down those for whom they had received a positive test result. Even the Indian government's own official contact-tracing app was unable to be downloaded by residents of Kashmir.<sup>210</sup> Healthcare officials were consistently kept out of the loop of global knowledge on the pandemic by the crippled internet speeds, as online conferences, programs, and medical journals were inaccessible. "It takes hours to download an advisory document released by the World Health Organization," said one doctor.<sup>211</sup> In spite of these limitations, the Indian government stated firmly in September that "the 2G mobile internet speed is not an impediment in COVID control measures including dissemination of information to the general public as well as health workers."<sup>212</sup> As 2020 drew to a close, the government continued to ban high-speed

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<sup>208</sup> Masih et al, "India's Internet Shutdown."

<sup>209</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen; anonymous local correspondent, "'Many lives have been lost:' five-month internet blackout plunges Kashmir into crisis," *The Guardian*, (January 5, 2020).

<sup>210</sup> Athar Parvaiz, "Kashmir internet blackouts hinder health services, contact tracing," *Reuters*, (May 19, 2020).

<sup>211</sup> Aditi Agrawal, "Internet Shutdown In J&K Had No Impact On COVID-19 Measures, Education, Businesses: Home Ministry," *Medianama*, (September 21, 2020).

<sup>212</sup> Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs, "Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1440," (September 20, 2020), <http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/174/AU1440.pdf>

internet for Kashmir at-large until January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021—despite an order from India’s Supreme Court to restore services across the territory back in August.<sup>213</sup>

When framed within the context of the five goals of autocrats, blackouts are plainly unable to increase the opportunities for surveillance on their own. However as alluded to in the prior section and a topic subject for greater discussion in the final chapter, its effects on surveillance may be much greater when combined with other authoritarian tactics. Internet shutdowns also have a more complex answer as it relates to the spread of misinformation. In short, while it is clear that it cannot possibly spread misinformation domestically when there is an inherent absence of communication networks to begin with, it is evident that the tactic can help spread misinformation abroad as there are few internal sources to effectively counter claims made by the government about the affected peoples.

The case of Kashmir particularly demonstrates that internet blackouts do not legitimize a dominant regime. In fact, Kashmir is far from the only case study that has taught this lesson. This was addressed earlier in this analysis, as the theoretical framework identified Mubarak as one who learned how such heavy-handed measures can delegitimize a regime instead. Nevertheless, stories such as Maqbool’s do prove that fear is absolutely another outcome of internet blackouts, and that the tactic can achieve the goal of creating it well.

However, when viewed in a vacuum, the goal most easily achieved through internet blackouts is the elimination of the dissent’s operational capacity. With few local voices able to share the true status of Kashmir internationally, the larger global

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<sup>213</sup> n.a., “High-Speed Internet Ban in Jammu and Kashmir Extended Till January 8; Ganderbal, Udhampur Exempted,” *Gadgets 360*, (December 26, 2020).

community was kept in the proverbial dark. Furthermore, the types of connective action that open up so many new opportunities to modern activists were briskly ripped away by the simple flip of the internet kill switch. In short, elimination of the digital presence and operational capacity of the Kashmiris' movement was total and absolute.

To summarize, the findings of this chapter are presented in the table on the next page:

Table 1. Relative Usage and Effectiveness of Authoritarian Tactics Within Five Goals of Autocrats

	<u>Trend of usage in Kashmir before and after 8/5/19 lockdown</u>	<u>Effectiveness in surveilling population</u>	<u>Effectiveness in spreading misinformation</u>	<u>Effectiveness in legitimizing regime</u>	<u>Effectiveness in creating fear</u>	<u>Eliminate dissent's operational capacity</u>
<u>Killings</u>	Consistent	Weak	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong
<u>Torture &amp; rape</u>	Increased	Weak	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong
<u>Physical surveillance</u>	Increased	Strong	Weak	Weak	Strong	Weak (though bolsters effectiveness of detentions)
<u>Detentions</u>	Increased	Weak	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong (especially when paired with physical surveillance)
<u>Internet blackouts</u>	Increased	Weak	Weak domestically; Strong internationally	Weak	Strong	Strong

Still, this does not tell the complete story. Blackouts may eliminate protestors' digital operational capacity absolutely, but what about their effects on the dissenters' physical operational capacity? In accordance with the pattern that has clearly emerged in this work, the answer lies in the intersection between the tools and tactics of the two main autocratic strategies: digital authoritarianism and physical repression. This relationship is the subject of the final chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

*Till I am alive, I will continue to fight for justice and speak truth to power.*<sup>214</sup>

*-Kashmiri torture survivor  
2019*

#### Discussion

To first address the concluding question of Chapter Five: how has the internet blackout affected the physical operational capacity of Kashmir's dissenters? In bluntest terms, it has had an extraordinarily detrimental impact on the movement's success. This may not be immediately apparent when viewing shutdowns in a vacuum as the tactic's most obvious effects are the digital repercussions, but the situation in Kashmir is operating within anything but a vacuum. The physical state action that has occurred alongside the blackout is part of a larger, calculated, holistic strategy of repression by the Indian government, which necessitates that the two be evaluated together.

In this vein, *one of the most significant takeaways from the past year in Kashmir is that, respectively, both physical repression and digital authoritarianism can be made devastatingly more effective when implemented together.* While the manifestation of this process certainly may vary in different regimes around the world—as it should from the autocrat's perspective due to the unique circumstances of each's situation—India seems to have found a successful approach for its specific context.

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<sup>214</sup> Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society; Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, "Torture: Indian State's Instrument of Control in Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir," (February 2019), <https://jkccs.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TORTURE-Indian-State's-Instrument-of-Control-in-Indian-administered-Jammu-and-Kashmir.pdf>



Prior to revoking Article 370, the Indian government was clear-eyed about how the move would exacerbate tensions in an already unstable Kashmir. Removing the region's special—though admittedly limited—autonomous status and incorporating it as part of India proper would be the conflict's most significant development since the British partition of the subcontinent. If allowed, pushback from the Kashmiris would almost certainly have reached an unprecedented height: failure at this juncture would be existential in nature for the potentially free future Kashmir. Such protest would not quickly nor easily dissipate, so the crackdown needed to stabilize the population would need to be fierce. It is easy to see how this progression of events would be undesirable for India, especially considering the country's perceived status as the “world's biggest democracy” and the inherent sensitivity to international pressure that accompanies the title—not to mention the desire to avoid being seen as a risky or unstable trading partner as it attempts to more fully integrate itself as a dominant player in the international economy.

Therefore, preventing this type of direct action before it could ever begin would be much more proactive and effective for the government—and the unfolding of August 2019's lockdown proved that an internet shutdown was the focal point of this strategy. In short, by eliminating the potential for digital, connective action from the outset by universally disconnecting internet access, the Indian government created an environment where any and all action was forced to occur physically—whether that was as comparatively small as meeting in an individual's home to coordinate or large as mobilizing a large group of protestors for a visible demonstration.

For sure, while an internet shutdown can block the valuable opportunities afforded to protestors by digital networks, it certainly cannot stop physical direct action on its own. However, in an environment without internet, the physical resources and operational capacity of the dissent are directly pitted against the physical resources and operational capacity of the regime—an uphill battle for the former in most optimistic terms. Over the past year, the extent of this challenge has been made apparent by the level of repression employed against the Kashmiri people: thousands immediately imprisoned (particularly the most influential dissenting voices), a sudden and violent freezing of movement across the region, as well as a widespread and growing surveillance apparatus that can immediately identify potential and existent direct action. Protests may have occurred in more isolated cases from the northernmost border approaching Pakistan to the southernmost border near Punjab, but the Indian government has been successfully able to limit their size, shorten their length, and exact repercussions to a devastatingly effective level.

*Without internet, the power of the boomerang effect is severely neutered.*<sup>215</sup> When paired with its ban on international media from entering Kashmir, India's domestic actions significantly limit the amount of information that could reach an international audience and shed a light on human rights abuses occurring every day—and with that the associated external pressure the boomerang effect can facilitate disappears. This is not to mention how the prevalent environment of fear likely did—and still can—suppress the stories of those who would otherwise be willing to speak out. When direct action could be taken, Kashmiris could not reach the ear of a sympathetic international audience—nor

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<sup>215</sup> An explanation of the boomerang effect can be found on page 8.

that of a concerned government. Largely, such action would just invite increased oppression moving forward. In effect, Kashmir could only cry out to itself.

To be clear, the case of Kashmir does not suggest that internet blackouts can be an effective way of eradicating direct action or achieving the regime's overall goals when implemented alone; Mubarak's downfall in Egypt set the precedent for how internet blackouts may actually be detrimental to a regime's survival in this case when without the support of the coercive apparatus. This is not to even mention other states where a lack of infrastructural capacity would make this strategy impossible to truly realize. Rather, Kashmir's situation strongly suggests that the tactic can be extraordinarily effective within its own niche (eliminating opportunities afforded by digital network) and can powerfully augment physically repressive tactics as part of a larger holistic strategy.

Consequently, physical repression will continue to be an integral tool in the authoritarian toolbox as long as physical and digital repression bolster the other's effectiveness when utilized in combination, and the international costs associated with their use do not outweigh the domestic benefits. Frankly, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in the short term where either is not bound to be the case. As more countries like India continue to refine and demonstrate the effectiveness of their repressive strategies, it is seemingly inevitable that the proliferation of the technological infrastructure required to fully implement them will allow more leaders across the world to take similar steps. Moreover, the relative indifference of Western governments towards taking diplomatic action against India's blatant repression—alongside the willingness of Western companies like Ernst and Young to help create autocratic infrastructure—points to the likelihood that a shift in attitudes and priorities and attitudes may only occur in the long-

term—if at all. Without larger forces like COVID forcing India’s hand, for instance, it is probable that that concessions it did make in reducing its number of jailed dissenters would not have happened at all.

This all has significant implications as it relates to the work of Guriev and Treisman. Certainly, the empirical evidence creates a compelling argument that global trends of violence and physical repression on behalf of authoritarian governments are on a downward trend. That said, this top-down view of the issue fails to capture the entire story. Internet shutdowns—which would fall under the category of the digital means they say autocrats now use to control and manipulate information—create an environment where action *must* happen physically, and these circumstances facilitate state physical repression making it not just more common, but considerably more effective as well.

The symbiosis of this relationship between digital authoritarianism and physical repression is even more apparent when viewing the leadup to the events of August 2019: how was the government so quickly able to gather the information necessary to target, round up, and imprison thousands of Kashmiris in the days before and after August 5<sup>th</sup>? Surely the presence of Kashmir’s dedicated internet police played a role in this regard. It is clear that the opportunities afforded by digital authoritarianism—such as co-opting social media to track potentially “dangerous” individuals for an eventual mass imprisonment—greatly boosted the effectiveness of the ensuing physical repression.

In short, Guriev and Treisman’s core contention is that modern autocrats have learned from the actions and failures of their predecessors, and now predominantly choose to *manipulate*, not *intimidate*. However, since August 2019, Kashmir provides strong evidence that this is not always—nor is it even typically—the case. Accounts from

those directly impacted demonstrate that this debate is not simply an argument about the semantics of informational autocracy and repression at large: it is a direct contradiction of their hypothesis as the actions taken by the Indian government are the exact same type of mass, violent, repression that the two claim is being largely abandoned by contemporary regimes. Therefore, Guriev and Treisman's theory may have real merit within a general discussion of authoritarian trends, but applying the concept without attentiveness to the mixture of regime tactics is problematic. Any assertion of traditional autocratic strategies' obsolescence is dubious and fails to capture the realities being experienced by millions of such regimes' victims.

Taken altogether, the factors examined in this thesis illuminate a few other points of concern. To start, as discussed before, *India is a country more responsive to international pressure than most due to its status as the "world's largest democracy" and the desire of its government to maintain this reputable status for reasons of prestige, diplomacy, and economics. This final point is especially noteworthy considering India's rapid economic ascension across the twentieth and twenty-first century, in large part due to its integration within the global markets. If this country is as brazenly open to embracing authoritarian strategies as it is under such circumstances, what is the deterrent for a less globally integrated state resistant to such pressure—like a Turkmenistan, for example—when it gains the capability to implement such strategies?* Is this danger not amplified when considering the rate at which countries like China and Russia seek to export digital authoritarianism?

To take the discussion of democracy a step further, is it not alarming that a state like India can take this type of action and still legitimately call itself a democracy in the

eyes of the rest of the world? India cannot have it both ways: if the conflict in Kashmir is truly an “internal” issue as it claims, then the territory is being controlled through indisputable authoritarian rule. With local elections unable to manifest the will of the people, thousands unduly and lengthily detained without trial, and killings and torture weaponized indiscriminately, Kashmir in no way resembles a healthy, functional democracy. Perhaps this necessitates the need for the global community to reexamine its measures of what democracy, authoritarianism, and repression truly mean, as well as what the free world is willing to deem acceptable when characterizing states in these terms.

### Conclusion

By conceptualizing modern dictators as “informational autocrats,” Guriev and Treisman present a largely compelling argument that violence and physical repression are actively being -forgone in favor of manipulating information to the masses and gaining the support—or at least not losing it—of the state’s elite. However, while that may be generally true from a purely empirical standpoint, the past sixteen months in Kashmir is proof that statistics can often fail to capture the full reality of circumstances on the ground. As much as almost any other country in the world, India has an extensive array of digital tools available at its disposal. Yet, as the Kashmiris have painfully discovered, this access has not supplanted the traditional modes of state repression physically used against them from their earliest days under imperial rule.

Instead, digital authoritarianism has combined with physical repression in a way that is simply unprecedented for a professed democracy. Alone, each of the outlined authoritarian tactics sees varied results in achieving the five main goals of longevity-

minded autocratic regime. Implemented together, digital and physical repression can be devastatingly effective at preventing direct action and preserving the regime in the face of dissent. The symbiotic nature of this relationship shows little sign of diminishing, and the result is a grim outlook for future dissent movements if current developments continue to be left unchecked.

Taken together, the findings of this thesis point to several fascinating and pressing directions for future research on the subject. At the global level, how does the prevalence of other digitally authoritarianist tactics such as filtering and flooding contribute to the use and effectiveness of physical repression by the state against protestors? As mentioned before, Kashmir's internet blackout created an environment where use of additional digital authoritarianism was effectively impossible. As internet speeds in the valley are increased from 2G and the internet becomes more widely accessible, Kashmir itself remains a valuable case for study—though the list of other relevant situations must be extensive as well.

Furthermore, the unfolding of events in Kashmir strongly indicate that without external drivers of change like COVID-19, India would most likely have continued down its initial track with tactics such as indefinite, legally dubious imprisonment. Therefore, for those concerned with the global preservation of human rights, it would be extraordinarily valuable to examine the leverage that the rest of the world has at its disposal to drive change in India—as well as any other country which utilizes digital authoritarianism as a central mean of repression. India's embeddedness within the world economy and its aspirations for a greater global role demand particular attention in this regard, and perhaps one immediate step the United States could take is curbing its recent

calls for an Indian seat on the United Nations Security Council. Activists may benefit from actively lobbying their respective governments to take such hardline stances, and in essence they would be accelerating the process of the widely recognized boomerang effect. In addition, analyzing how Western private actors like Ernst and Young help facilitate digital authoritarianism would be an especially useful contribution due to the relative ease in which liberalized governments could exert pressure on their domestic corporations.

The road ahead for Kashmir will likely continue to be difficult. With American polarization accelerating at unsustainable levels, Europe only just entering its post-Brexit phase, and COVID-19 posing the greatest international crisis in generations, global attention has been thoroughly diverted from the most militarized region of the world—despite the significance of its own developments. That said, the history of the Kashmiris' experience under oppressive rule proves that while the current moment may be new, it is not fundamentally unique in nature. International support is unmistakably needed in order to finally achieve peace in the valley, but the fervor and persistence of the resistance should not be underestimated. Kashmir will continue persevere, and like any cat-and-mouse conflict, dissenters will discover new ways to counter India's repressive tactics. In the meantime, it is the moral obligation of the rest of the world's peacekeepers to contextualize the circumstances that created the current situation, analyze the most efficient short-term solutions, and determine how to prevent this weaponization of digital and physical repression from ever happening again.



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Upon graduation, Patrick plans to accept a job lobbying for bipartisan climate legislation in Washington DC. After that, he hopes to return to Maine: the greatest place in the world to call home.