

Economic Transition in Comparison¹

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One of the foremost concerns in the mind of policy-makers, pundits, and academics in recent years is the prospect for liberal reforms in developing nations after experiencing social revolutions. The rate and extent of reforms implemented by these regimes frames their domestic and international identity. In the former context, the capacity to legislate liberalizing reforms can appease any potential opposition as well as the skeptics of the regime. It also pleases more moderate members of the revolutionary ruling coalition who identify with revolutionary efforts to undo the corruption and illegitimacy of the deposed regime but might not be prepared to concede other more radical positions to fellow coalition members. Reforms can also keep the spirit of the revolution alive among younger generations over time. For those who did not experience the policies and structural effects that gave way to revolutionary process, reforms have a conversion effect. Simply put, the more reforms the regime undertakes, the more the younger generations are likely to support revolutionary policies, mobilization strategies and rhetoric.

Externally, the situation is no much different. It is often the case that the international community judges the success of revolutions in great part by its capacity to reform as well. Reformist revolutionary leaders are perceived as sensible, pragmatic, astute heroes who sacrificed all for their country. Often, international policy accords are formulated to reward revolutionary governments willing to commit to change. Reforms also spur a sense of bilateral trust in what otherwise could be an anarchical society. By contrast, revolutionary antidotes like Pol Pot or Kim Jong Il hardly inspire much confidence

1. The argument presented in this paper benefited from my early collaboration with Erin Ennis and presentations at the Research Circle Colloquium sponsored by the Department of Sociology at William Paterson University of New Jersey I would like to acknowledge the comments and suggestions from Kathleen Korgen, Maboud Ansari, Gabe Wang, Jorge Sanguinety, and, especially, Erin Ennis none of whom bares the blame for my argument.

at all and are usually bemired as international outcasts. Finally, increasingly scholars and policy-makers are subscribing to the notion that reform minded regimes hardly ever fight each other.²

This paper asks some very straight forward questions about the prospects for reforms in single party revolutions throughout the developing world. First, if there are so many domestic and international incentives for revolutionary elites to undertake reforms, why we do not see more liberalization on the part of these regimes? What factors lead to more reformists policies in one post-revolutionary regime but less so in others? Why do not Caesarian revolutionary leaders like the likes of Castro, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, or more recently those who govern Iran concentrate so much effort on stalling reforms rather than promoting them?

To formulate a proposition that would attempt to answer these questions, I propose to compare recent Cuban revolutionary policy initiatives with those of Vietnam and China.³ These three nations share many similar experiences as developing nations that underwent a revolutionary process to rig themselves from illegitimate autocratic governments. Moreover, the three have toyed with their own ideological version of Marxism-Leninism. Notwithstanding different epochs and distinct political cultures, they all incorporated elements of a nationalist vision which oddly enough supported an internationalist foreign policy. Yet each of these revolutionary processes has instituted different paths and degrees of liberalizing reforms. The evidence I examine suggests that it is probably fair to conclude that with respects to economic, social and even political reforms, China is ahead of the pack by a small margin followed by Vietnam and Cuba. Another question that immediately comes to mind is what determines this order and how can one explain it? In short, why are the two Asian autocracies ahead of Cuba?

One motivation for researching these questions is that in many ways it defies logic. Smaller dependent markets like Cuba and Vietnam should reform first to offset the limitations of restricted market demand structures. A

2. For a critical discussion on the idea of democratic peace, see the exchange between Sebastian Rosato, Michael W. Doyle, Michael Kinsella, Branislav L Slantchev, Anna Alexandrova, and Erik Gartzke in the *American Political Science Review*, 99, 3, (August 2005) 467-472.

3. As I write the first draft of this paper in March 2006, the Cuban daily Gramma reports in its online edition that the Department of Economics at the University of Uruguay is hosting a symposium on economic reforms and development in Cuba and Vietnam. The conference was attended by Alfonso Casanova, Vice Minister of Economic and Planning, and Rogelio Martinez, Vice Minister of Finance, on the Cuban side and by Nguyen Ngoc Dien, the Vietnamese Ambassador to Argentina, Le Anh Son, Vice President of the Development Strategy Institute in Hanoi, and Thia Dian Tun Director General of the Department of Commerce and Services in the Ministry of Planning and Investment. The high level delegations on both sides attending this meeting may indicate that there is some interest in Cuba to at least study the Vietnamese model of reforms. See Gramma, March 20, 2006.

country like Cuba, whose political culture was not touched by Confucianism and which underwent a short but nonetheless competitive democratic experience not long before the revolution, should be in the forefront of political openness and yet it is not. Ideologically, the Chinese seem to have been much more successful articulating their own brand of Marxism and yet they are also ahead in terms of embracing capitalism. In short, logical explanations defy the evidence from this paradoxical comparison as well. In fact, when one considers these cases all together, one thing is for certain: they seem to invite further research on the subject.

In this paper I propose a framework to analyze the extent of liberalizing reforms in post-communist developing societies. I argue that perhaps one of the most significant impediments for reforms in these countries is whether or not the leaders who carried the revolutionary insurgency are still in power. For some, this inverse dichotomy can largely be explained by accounting for the personality and psychological aberrations of political leaders. This explanation, however popular, fails to account the origins and steadfast disdain for reforms by these types of leaders and how their persuasion is sustained over time despite changing domestic and international political interests. By comparing Cuba with China and Vietnam, I find that the longer the core revolutionary elite stays in power, the slower the pace of reforms and the more pronounced the tendencies towards dictatorial authoritarianism. Thereafter, as new generations of leaders who did not participated or experienced the revolutionary insurgency first hand takes control, we will witness more political and economic reforms as is the cases in China today and to a lesser extent in Vietnam, but not in Cuba where Castro's revolutionary cadres still effectively control much of the political power in the island. As I will argue later, this obvious but not so divulged assertion explains this quandary better than other perspectives usually proposed to explain the intransigence of revolutionary elites. As Ortega y Gasset keenly observed close to a century earlier:

A generation lasts about thirty years. But its activity divides into two stages and takes two forms: during approximately one half, the new generation carries out the propaganda of its ideas, preferences, and tastes, which finally arrive at power and are dominant in the second half or its course. But the generation educated under its sway is already bringing forward other ideas, preferences and tastes which it begins to diffuse in the general atmosphere. When the ideas, preferences, and tastes of the ruling generation are extremists, and therefore revolutionary, those of the new generation are anti-extremists and anti-revolutionary....." (Ortega y Gasset, 1957: 93)

Shortly put, a comparative case study of Cuba, China and Vietnam reveals several reasons, besides the natural outcome of generational progression assumed in Ortega's work, why the revolutionary generation does not give way to reforms easily. First, revolutionary leaders have a tremendous personal stake on the implementation of revolutionary policies. Second, these leaders usually see reality in terms of a furious battle between them and their opponents. Third, any lingering legitimacy after the institutionalization of the revolutionary process is rooted in an inflated nationalistic rhetoric which is anti-reformist in tone and substance. Finally, revolutionary leaders often adopt a messianic operational code concerning their own role in managing the state. All and all, a study of the pace of reforms in Cuba, China and Vietnam supports the axiom that the longer revolutionary leaders are away from holding power positions, the more dramatic opening the country will experience. This fatalistic conclusion has far reaching implications for US foreign policy, the political economy of national development, and for exiles whose ambition is to steer power away from revolutionary adversaries. My conclusion suggests that the option for a prudent policy of support for domestic reforms rather than containment or destabilization represents a political virtue in these cases.

Before I proceed to elaborate the reasoning behind my conclusion, I shall discuss how the term reform is utilized in the paper and then I will proceed to review some prominent positions associated with the literature on policy formulation and dictatorial politics.

Liberalizing Reforms and Change in Single Party Autocratic Regimes

The fact that autocratic single party regimes like Cuba, Vietnam and China do not embark in liberalizing reforms when revolutionary elites continue to hold the reigns of power does not mean that the character and policy initiatives of these regimes remain unaltered over the years. In fact, if one examines the legislative history of these regimes it is quite copious. In this paper, I refer to these unsustainable and cosmetic legislative swings as policy adjustments.⁴ In the case of China, for instance, one has to simply recall the transformation that gave way to the Cultural Revolution and beyond. In Cuba, the government position regarding reforms has been less than consistent often shifting back and forth between short periods of relative openness only to resort back to hard line rectification campaigns shortly after. The government in Hanoi, on the other hand, did not deviate much from Ho Chi Minh's politi-

4. In the original version of this paper, I named unstructured policy changes cosmetic reforms. I thank Jorge Sanguinety for pointing out to me the advantages for using the term adjustment.

cal doctrine, which served as guiding principles for policies during the aftermath of the revolution, until 1986 when Vietnamese leaders spearheaded a major economic program aimed at decentralizing the economy and gradually instituting market reforms.

It is usually the case that revolutionary leaders shift policies and the appointments of apparatchiks in an effort to portray a public image of reform-minded changes and keep the state bureaucracy in line. At the end, these government adjustments have the intended effect of reasserting political allegiance to the authority of the autocratic dictator rather than creating opportunities for change. This is the case because revolutionary leaders often change course unilaterally after consulting with their closest confidants who usually shared the experience of fighting the insurgency together. Moreover, personal and governmental changes are usually taken in the name of lofty revolutionary ideals which are always executed according to the discretion of the revolutionary leader. This environment of intimidation and political cynicism is not conducive to bold liberalizing reforms. On the contrary, it serves to support the steadfast conviction of the regime to follow a narrow authoritarian policy course of action.

In this paper, the terms liberalizing reforms and revolutionary leaders are used to depict two key features of the political development of revolutionary regimes. Liberalizing reforms, like the Vietnamese *doi moi* or renovation, refer to a comprehensive program or set of sustainable policy initiatives that are designed to modify the Communist roots of these three regimes. Reforms often take place in any realm of public policy and administration but the argument of this paper singles out the political and economic spheres since they are the more controversial and contentious. Revolutionary leaders, on the other hand, are the generation of cadres who shared the experience of fighting an insurgency together and later clique to steer the institutionalization of the revolutionary process. This political circle also experiences other similar generational events and quite often socializes over a period of time to the point that they form a closed web of personal contacts. Although some in this group may be more hard line than others, they all defend publicly the role and policies of the revolutionary leader and never air discords or cleavages which would undermine the ideals for which they fought. In the words of social network perspective, revolutionary leaders and this group form a tightly bounded knit of dense solidarity. (Dixon, et al, 2004)

No where is the intransigence of revolutionary leaders more evident than in today's Iran. Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a member of one of the revolutionary student groups who helped depose the Shah in 1979, is currently spearheading a domestic campaign of repression against dissidents while re-aligning himself ideologically with the most conservative factions of

the Islamic Republic. Abroad, Mr. Ahmadinejad has followed a more confrontational foreign policy than any of his predecessors, insisting on Iran's right to enrich uranium at home. (*International Herald Review*, 2006a) Iran is also building an internationalist foreign policy much like previous revolutionary regimes before it. For instance, in a recent report in the *International Herald Review*, Tehran was said to be collaborating with the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah to fill the power vacuum in Lebanon after the Syrian withdrawal. (*International Herald Review*, 2006b)

Among social scientists, the controversy surrounding the prospects for reform in post-revolutionary regimes has not subsided since the outbreak of the Chinese revolution. One popular argument, especially among exiles from Communist regimes, is the proposition that revolutionary leaders betrayed moderate supporters by radicalizing the revolutionary process after they firmly control the reigns of power. This behaviorist position insinuates that many who support armed insurgencies in developing nations do so because they believe the lofty goals and proclamations articulated by revolutionary leaders with regards to nationalism and development. Over time, proponents of this position argue, revolutionary leaders hide their true radical sentiments to secure wide broad backing and accumulate gains in their stock of political capital. Once in power, these leaders simply uncover policies they privately held all along. Hence, the tendency or disinclination from the part of revolutionary leaders towards substantial policy reforms once in power is a reflection of a hidden ideology and interests, the argument goes.

One of the major shortcomings of this interpretation is that it overemphasizes subjective intentions that are very difficult to support with verifiable evidence. There are certainly plentiful reasons for the revolutionary leaders not to present their more benign side publicly when they are trying to gather widespread support for their cause. Yet, who is to say there are not other possible reasons for these leaders radicalization besides a calculated strategy of deception? For instance, it is certainly possible that often during the insurgency process revolutionary leaders themselves become radicalized as they confront indiscriminate state repression and they count among the fatalities close collaborators and friends. When revolutionary leaders forgo opportunities for reforms, the argument goes, it is because these leaders are responding to deep-seated crises or unexpected conditions. As is often the case, after assuming power revolutionary leaders get to realize the extent of the social deterioration and economic mismanagement that reigns in their country. More importantly, by underlying unsupported arguments about intensions, proponents of the betrayal position often underemphasize how structural opportunities shape state policy and actions.

On the other end of the spectrum, structuralists often assert that the orthodoxy of revolutionary leaders is rooted in the imminent threat they perceive from international state and non-state actors. As this reasoning goes, former allies of the incumbent regime often mobilize neighboring countries and transnational advocacy groups to escalate any discords into potential adversarial crises in an attempt to destabilize or curtail revolutionary legislative initiatives and policies. When this occurs, revolutionaries adopt a more autocratic position to safeguard their own legitimacy at home and quell the expectations of domestic political supporters. This response promotes further international provocations which then spiral downward ultimately ending in confrontation. Following the structuralist reasoning, orthodoxy is a natural response to menacing foreign policies designed to corner revolutionary leaders.

Almost anything said regarding the behavioralist argument can be said to contradict the structuralists' position. If the former was too voluntaristic, the latter is too deterministic. Structuralists undermine any assertion that attempts to demonstrate the inter-subjective capacity of decision-makers to resolve differences and find common interests. In addition, they put too much weight on the actions of disenfranchised groups and their ability to mobilize international public opinion against revolutionary leaders. Finally, it seems that the possibility of any discord between revolutionaries and their external adversaries is conditioned by the structural configuration of the world politics—an argument many structuralists underestimate. As many international relations scholars have pointed out, during periods of tensions in a bipolar world, radical changes caused more of a stir among allies and former allies than under any other structural conditions. (Waltz, 2000) Hence to make the general assertion that revolutionary leaders are “pushed” by others besides themselves to adopt authoritarian convictions could be a mistake unless one takes into account the effects of the specific structural configurations in the international environment.

Even international structural conditions alone should be considered with caution in any attempt to explain the domestic policy swings. In many cases, the structuralist argument forecasts overly optimistic predictions about the level of commitment and durability of new policy predicaments. In fact, as the case of Vietnam and China clearly indicate, the end of the Cold War was not perceived by the leader of either nation as an immediate opportunity for reforms. Political cultural arguments, on the other hand, fail to capture the dynamic density that determines the pace of liberalizing reforms in the three nations I compared in this paper.

Social scientists have been more persuasive when they interpret the regime hard line or propensity to reform by reverting to the nexus between

internal regime dynamics and structural conditions. For example, in a meticulous study of how intellectuals depict Chinese and Vietnamese reforms, Alexander Woodside illustrates how despite sharing a mandarin vision, intellectuals in these two nations remarkably do not study each other's reforms giving path to different pace of development. (Woodside, 1998) In the case of Cuba, reference to Fidel and his inner circle's inclination for gamesmanship has also been noted as another consideration why this group turned to Marxism-Leninism to legitimize their control over the state and the direction of the revolutionary process. Proponents in the middle range position often site such factors as the style and substance of political leadership, the size of the market, the recurrent deepening economic crises, the structure of the state, or the clouds periling over social ills in developing nations to explain the hard line often subscribed to by revolutionary leaders.

Policy Reforms and Adjustments in Cuba, China and Vietnam

In this section, I discuss some key development indicators to document the extent of reforms in Cuba, China and Vietnam with emphasis on the first. My purpose is to illustrate the recent political and economic reform unfolding in these three countries and to compare their recent development performance. This discussion is relevant because as I argue at the conclusion of the section, development performance indicators help us explain, at least partially, how a country like Cuba which has only undertaken tentative policy adjustments at best has been able to endure without submerging to the recent wave of market and political liberalization.

TABLE 10-1. The Extent of Political Reforms

| Issues | Cuba | China | Vietnam |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Economic Policies* | Rolled back limited reforms from the 1990s | More market reforms with private ownership | Reforms since 1968. Liberalization and export led since 2001 |
| Annual Growth Rate 1990-2003** | 3.5% | 8.5% | 5.9% |
| 2006 Index of Economic Freedom*** | 4.10 (150) | 3.89 (142) | 3.34 (111) |
| 2006 Political Freedom Ranking**** | 7% | 6.5% | 6.5% |
| Elections* | President elected by unanimous vote. No rotation of top leaders. | CPV control. No opposing representation | Top leaders elected with some opposition and abstention |

TABLE 10-1. The Extent of Political Reforms

| Issues | Cuba | China | Vietnam |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Political Participation* | Control by PCC. No opposing representation | CCP in control with 8 small parties registered | CPV control. No opposing representation |

*Indicators for Economic Policies, Political Elections and Political Participation derived from *The World Fact Book*, 2006 Edition.

**Annual Growth Rate from the 2005 *Human Development Report*

***Index of Economic Freedom was compiled by The Heritage Foundation. (4-5=repressed economy)

****The Political Freedom Ranking is a composite score of Political Rights and Civil Liberties (1=Most Free and 7=Least Free). 2006 *Freedom in the World*, published by Freedom House.

The data in table 1 supports the assertion I put forth earlier in the paper stating that revolutionary single party states tend to embark on political and economic reforms when considerable time has passed after the demise of the revolutionary leadership. China and Vietnam are far along the path of liberalization than Cuba and these two nations are also the ones where the revolutionary leadership is more removed from the reigns of power. Later in the paper I will offer some tentative conclusions to back this apparent anomaly. For now, I will limit my discussion to comparing the extent of reforms in these nations.

The table also shows that China and Vietnam continue to incrementally affirm their own interpretations of a socialist oriented market political economy. As China became the world's third largest trading nation in 2005, the country completed another leadership transition, trimmed its average tariff rates by half, and changed its FDI (foreign direct investment) regime to open the retail and distribution sector to foreign-owned companies while other direct investments are still subjected to state control. The Chinese government recently loosened restrictions to permit foreign insurers and banks to operate throughout the country.

Vietnam followed the Chinese path but with more modest economic decentralization reforms. Since 2001, Vietnamese leaders also lowered trading barriers by roughly 4 percent and simultaneously signed bilateral trading pacts with the United States, China, Australia, Japan and South Korea. In the area of FDI, the country is well behind China with multiple restrictions and state controls still in effect as is the case in the area of employment. In the last Party Congress that ended in April, the party proposed an export-led development strategy as the centerpiece to promote growth. In April, the International Herald Tribune quoted Adam Sitikoff, the Executive Director of the American Chamber of Commerce, saying that Vietnam is seeking to move into a second wave of investment by exporting a higher level of manufactured goods, including electronics, rather than to remain "the world's best

maker of socks and towels.” (Mydans, 2006) In the same article, Jonathan Pinkus, the country representative for the UN Development Program said “you’ll find tremendous enthusiasm among the foreign community for Vietnam as the next rising star.” (Mydans, 2006)

By all accounts, Cuba, on the other hand, seems to be moving in the opposite direction. While the first two nominally Communist nations experiment with their own brand of market socialism, Havana is centralizing and regulating its economy, in effect rolling back the meager adjustments it implemented to generate employment during the *Periodo Especial* in the 1990s. This trend was recently authenticated by Carmelo Mesa-Lago in his latest annual overview of the Cuban economy where he concluded that “Castro launched a process of recentralization of decision making in 2004-2005 that has reversed most advances made by the modest market oriented reforms implemented in 1993-1996.” (Mesa Lago, 2005: 13) Some of the noteworthy policy measures Mesa Lago identifies as being more centralized since 2005 involve: (1) banning state enterprise from conducting transactions and from providing some services in hard currency; (2) tighter controls on currency deposits and transactions by foreign owned businesses and joint ventures; (3) imposing tight controls on all tourist personnel; (4) a value added tax on currency imports; (5) a ban on the dollar transaction and new exchange fees on currency conversions; and, (6) halting permits for about 40 self-employment activities. (Mesa Lago, 2005: 13)

Politically, Cuba also lags behind its counterparts. Perhaps one of the most significant electoral changes in recent years was the decision by the Fourth Party Congress to pick municipal delegates through direct elections by their constituents. However, electoral campaigns and debates are still banned. There were also some changes in the statutes of the Party (PCC) to make it more inclusive nationwide. Yet, the legislative bodies continue to lack real power and there is still no direct election or rotation among top leaders.⁵ In the area of individual liberties, Cuba continues to systematically repress any voices of dissent as was most recently demonstrated with the incarceration and sentencing to long prison terms of 75 prominent opposition leaders and activists.⁶ Finally, the island does not afford any public space to any organized political opposition. When the Varela Project presented the government a plebiscite, with the required number of signatures, demanding a referendum as is guaranteed constitutionally, officials simply responded

5. For a recent overview of electoral politics in Cuba, see William M. LeoGrande, *The Cuban Communist Party and Electoral Politics: Adaptation, Succession, and Transition*, Cuba Transition Project, Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami, 2002.

6. In May 2006, four youngsters were arrested and, later intimidated, by security forces simply because they were thought to be responsible for displaying an anti-governmental sign in a public park in the city of Bayamo. Cubannet, on line, May 15, 2006.

with a plebiscite of their own in support of the regime. The difference with regards to freedom of expression between Cuba, China, and Vietnam may be one of degrees but nonetheless it is important because this fluctuation add more evidence to support the assertion that countries still ruled by revolutionary leaders are less willing to entertain any notion of reforms.⁷

This quick overview of some recent political and economic developments in these nations provide evidence to support my contention that in China and Vietnam, despite disputable policy depth, reforms are further along than in Cuba. This is not to say that the former are free or an ideal state to emulate. In fact, both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue to list China and Vietnam among the world most repressive regimes—Cuba also appears prominently in the list.⁸ The point is that the distance between newly elected leaders and the revolutionary leadership in the two Asian nations seems to give way to more a comprehensive process of reforms, however meager, than in Cuba. And this trend is very likely to continue that at least into the near future since the revolutionary leadership in the Havana is not likely to reverse the ongoing recentralization process given the regional support they now enjoy from newly elected left-of-center governments in Latin American, especially in the case of Venezuela which is willing to subsidize the Cuban economy with very favorable energy trade arrangements.

When one compares the data from tables 1 and 2, a logical question is how does Cuba fair so much better in terms of social safety net indicators than both China and Vietnam? Considering this question is relevant to this paper I will argue that the answer lies in the fact that Cuba defends its social gains publicly to legitimize its lack of desire for structural reforms. The Cuban regime often frames these health and educational gains in terms of unparalleled achievements of the revolution, as achievements no other nation can emulate, or as benefits the Cuban people could easily lose if the course of the revolution is derailed, overturned, or halted. For example, in a May 11, 2006, front-page article on the online version of the *Gramma International*,

7. In another evidence of the degree of freedom between these countries, the *New York Times* reported about China's order to remove some avant-garde paintings from galleries during the Dashanzi International Art Festival, but stated that collectors and gallery owners expressed surprise about the government actions and said they did not expect a broader crackdown. See, "China Orders Galleries to Remove Art," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2006, B16.

8. In the case of Cuba, the 2006 Human Rights Watch country report summarizes the current state for freedom in the island in the following terms: "Cuba remains a Latin American anomaly: an undemocratic government that represses nearly all forms of political dissent. President Fidel Castro, now in his forty-seventh year in power, shows no willingness to consider even minor reforms. Instead, his government continues to enforce political conformity using criminal prosecutions, long- and short-term detentions, mob harassment, police warnings, surveillance, house arrests, travel restrictions, and politically-motivated dismissals from employment. The end result is that Cubans are systematically denied basic rights to free expression, association, assembly, privacy, movement, and due process of law." Human Rights Watch, online edition, 2004.

the official organ of the Party announced that Cuba has the largest number of children receiving electronic hearing implants in the world and reminds its readers that this is an unprecedented revolutionary achievement. (*Granma International*, 2006) The same newspaper, in its April 7 edition, flatly declared that before the revolution “poliomyelitis was the cause of quite a few deaths, and paralyzed an average of 300 children per year. Cuba was the first country in the Americas to eradicate polio in 1962.” (*Granma Interna-*

TABLE 10-2. Basic Human Development Indicators

| Issues | Cuba | China | Vietnam |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| HDI Ranking | 52 | 85 | 108 |
| Life Expectancy | 77.3 | 71.6 | 70.5 |
| Literacy Rate | 96.9 | 90.9 | 90.3 |
| Education Index | 0.87 | 0.78 | 0.82 |
| GDP Index | 0.67 | 0.65 | 0.54 |
| GDP Per Capita (2005 est.) | US\$3,300 | US\$6,300 | US\$3,000 |

Note: All indicators are from 2003 as reported by the UN *Human Development Report* with the exception of GDP per capita which comes from the *World Fact Book*

tional, 2006)

Authoritarian Intransigence. Why?

Thus far, I have argued that the social distance between the new generation of leaders and the experience of the revolutionary insurgency seems to explain, at least partially, the predisposition for reform among leaders in China and Vietnam as opposed to Cuba. In this final section of the paper, I present some plausible reasons in support of this assertion. I shall discuss five such reasons.

First, evidence gathered from quite a few case-studies reveals a striking conclusion. Revolutionary leaders can not resist the impulse to publicly carve a personal affinity between their role as leaders and the revolutionary process. The social origins of these aberrations are very complex. On the one hand, the mysticism surrounding the identity of these leaders as saviors who rescued the nation from the excesses of previous regimes is often a necessary condition to rally support to consolidate the revolutionary process. Revolutions are highly contested political processes and it is often the case that the charismatic authority of revolutionary leaders serves as a rallying point to mobilize popular support for radical measures.

Since many of these leaders have a lot of personal capital invested in the revolutionary process and since tensions between political factions in the rev-

olutionary coalition are likely to erupt over time, revolutionary leaders develop a sense of indispensability and personal affinity with the goals of the revolutionary process which leads them to believe that they are the personal reincarnation of the nation and the polity. This personal stake is reinforced by subordinates who are either expected to demonstrate alliance or are coerced to adulate the personality of these leaders. In these autocratic situations, more often than not, it is the case that attempts to implement reforms by any other than the leader's inner circle or the leaders themselves is perceived as a threat to the leader. The revolution, the nation, and the leader become in the eyes of the beholder one and the same. The omnipotent view of authority is not new, in fact it has been well thought through by observers of several European upheavals since the French Revolution. Bonald's theory of authority, for instance, draws attention to how socializing effects on political authority led leaders to exclude intermediate association after the French Revolution. (Nisbet, 1978)

Second, one of the most frequent communication tactics crafted by revolutionary leaders to mobilize and control is to frame policy along confrontational views—"us against them." This perspective has multiple functions to consolidate autocratic authority. It reduces the complex reality of political alternatives to an unambiguous choice between supporters and detractors, hence imposing limited political options on the population and cutting down alternative oppositional discourses. In addition, since the common enemy is usually depicted as an outsider, the implicit connotation is that only the actions of the revolution are legitimate. (Becker, 1963) Furthermore, revolutionary leaders veil their confrontational view in nationalistic rhetoric and tactics. The language supporting political activities, including policy discourses, is full of militaristic overtones and insinuations in revolutionary regimes. This strategy of articulation has the effect of reminding citizens of a state of belligerence where the revolution is almost always victimized. In addition, it attempts to forge an organic collective identity where citizens and leaders are united for the public good and against a common enemy. Various illustrations of this rhetorical strategy can be seen in Ho Chi Min's declaration of Vietnam's right to independence in 1945, in many of Castro's revolutionary proclamations, or in Mao's Great Leap Forward, among others. Authority is an essential capital to execute political discretion in the policy realm. As Carl J. Friedrich argued persuasively some time ago, "discretion without authority will appear arbitrary and generate resistance; this is likely to be destructive of organizations and create chaos..." (Friedrich, 1972: 74)

Notwithstanding the effects of political rhetoric, another basis for the autocracy of revolutionary leaders is the idiosyncrasies of their own operational code. Social psychologists point that the code comprises the vision,

values and norms that sustain political action. (George, 1969) In the case of revolutionary leaders like Mao and Castro, they view the modernization of the nation as a constant struggle to perfect socialism. They assume that the revolution can manage to modernize society and has the capacity to perform this function more just and effectively than any other capitalist development path. For this reason, Castro justifies his recurrent “rectification campaigns” in the name of combating corruption and other ills he perceives embedded in liberal reforms and follows a Rousseauian reasoning favoring the purity of the revolution against the threat of extraneous forces. Mao also justified his cultural revolution in much the same terms. The findings from a very original research conducted by Erin Ennis empirically supports Ortega y Gasset’s assertion that the operational code of authoritarian leaders moderates as the social distance between the cliques of revolutionaries and new generations of authoritarian leaders who succeed them widen (Ennis, 2002); hence, the tendency to attempt to foster modernity with liberal market reforms by current Chinese and Vietnamese leaders but less so by Cubans.

Finally, the process of institutionalization of revolutionary regimes in developing societies tends to devise powerless political institutions which mainly present a facade of pluralistic democracy. Meaningless institutional arrangements leave autocratic leaders unchallenged. These leaders arbitrarily retain control over high level political appointments and have a tendency to conceal real political power among trusted old cadres resulting in masking real political leverage in the informal networks of friendship and comrades they cultivate and far away from the public figures they appoint. Since these associates have no real incentives for change, they often discourage or block any attempts to implement sustainable reforms that depart from their own intrinsic interests. (Diamond, et al., 1999)⁹

Conclusions

If the findings derived from my observations of Cuban, Chinese, and Vietnamese post-revolutionary developments are correct, it seems that the best hope for political and market reforms after revolutions among developing nations comes after a leadership change precipitates the demise of the revolutionary leadership. When a new generation of leaders who did not experience the tragic contention leading to revolutions comes onto the political scene, new opportunities for reforms arise. This is the case, because an anti-extremist generation has less vested in the personal experiences and social meanings associated with any struggle for change. With social distance

9. As Diamond, Hartlyn and Linz assert: “the style of political leaders is quite crucial. A flexible, accommodative, consensual leadership style is more successful in developing and maintaining democracy than a militant, uncompromising, confrontational one.”

comes a more rational consideration for political and economic choices and alternatives.

This conclusion has profound implications for the policy-making community. Policy-makers might want to consider inducing reforms from revolutionary leaders through complex negotiations even if these relations yield minor but significant outcomes over time. These negotiations may not work right away but at least they would have the effect of building confidence and engaging reluctant, highly ideological leaders in some form of reciprocity. Frank negotiations also have a positive demonstration effects for up-and-coming leaders—witness the effects of Nixon’s visit to China. Pressures, containment and embargos do not seem to have worked with revolutionary leaders in Hanoi, Beijing, or Havana. On the contrary, they dared revolutionaries to continue to hide their own intransigence behind confrontational perception of reality. In the final analysis, the most effective strategy in these situations seems to be serenity and fortitude.

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