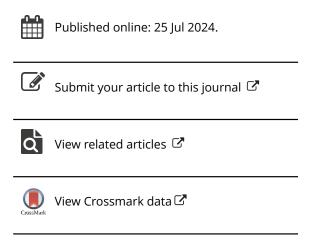# After authoritarianism: transitional justice and democratic stability

by Monika Nalepa, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, 300 pp., £ 26.99 (paperback), ISBN: 9781009073714

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BOOK REVIEW

After authoritarianism: transitional justice and democratic stability, by Monika Nalepa, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, 300 pp., £ 26.99 (paperback), ISBN: 9781009073714

The question of which "model" of transition a newly establishing democracy should undertake to maximize its stability is central in both academic literature and the practice of transitional justice. How do different transparency regimes relate to each other, and which is the best one to use in a particular setting? What are the impacts and mechanisms of lustration and truth commissions on democratic stability? Why do different outcomes result from purges versus lustration policies in terms of the quality of democracy? Monika Nalepa addresses these significant questions in her book, *After Authoritarianism: Transitional Justice and Democratic Stability*, by firstly developing formal theoretical models and secondly, empirically testing them with a novel dataset.

The role of transitional justice, a rather multidisciplinary field, is crucial during the process of democratization. However, the existence of successful examples of transformation, such as Spain or Brazil, achieved without engaging in the potentially unpleasant and risky process of transitional justice, has been a significant point of discussion. Until recently, empirical literature on transitional justice was scarce, primarily relying on qualitative evidence. A recent trend towards quantitative research though approached cautiously, promises a very promising direction in the field.

Comprised of two parts, *After Authoritarianism* begins with setting the motivation for the research question, a brief overview of the book, and a concise discussion of its contributions (chapter one). In the second chapter, which initiates the first—theoretical—section, Nalepa introduces the first formal model examining the impact of lustration and truth commissions on enhancing the quality of democracy by reducing the risk of blackmail through hidden information. The general implication derived from this model is straightforward: increasing the scope of lustration consistently improves the quality of representation. Moving on to the third chapter, the author develops a second formal model to explore the long-term effects of purges on the quality of democracy. Framed as a reverse delegation problem, Nalepa identifies distinct effects compared to the first model: the effectiveness of purge policies depends on the rigor of their implementation, the level of institutionalization of the previous regime, and the loyalty of agents to that regime.

In the next chapter, beginning the second—empirical—part of the book, the author discusses the original dataset used for testing models, the Global Transitional Justice Dataset (GTJD). This dataset introduces two key innovations: it records the number of events related to transitional justice after the start of transition, and it distinguishes between purges and lustrations. Subsequent chapters employ advanced econometric techniques based on the GTJD along with additional sources: while lustrations decrease the risk of blackmail, they do not eliminate it entirely (chapter five); truth

commissions contribute to a reduction in political corruption, yet several econometric nuances warrant further consideration (chapter six); purges, whether targeting former regime leadership or conducted comprehensively, enhance the quality of democracy, with those aimed at ex-leadership having a greater impact on the distribution of political and economic power (chapter seven). Chapter eight proposes a combined analysis of all personnel transitional justice mechanisms discussed earlier—truth commissions, lustrations, leadership purges, and comprehensive purges—to assess their effect on elite survival in political and business realms. This analysis yields mixed results compared to previous chapters: while chapter six shows a slight positive impact on democracy quality, this does not hold true for lustrations over longer time periods. However, once a certain threshold is reached, lustrations significantly strengthen their effect by not only rooting out hidden collaborators but also creating formidable barriers for former regime leaders in political and administrative domains. When accompanied by purges, the likelihood of these leaders transitioning to business roles in the post-authoritarian state remains minimal. Finally, the last chapter offers a broader discussion of the book's findings, contributions, and implications, linking them to issues of democratic backsliding, empirical transitional justice literature, and the overall quality of democracy.

After Authoritarianism is built on several definitive advantages. Firstly, the book employs a strong research strategy: developing game-theoretical models to rigorously build formal theory, and then testing these models against real-world data, resulting in more robust and credible research outcomes. Secondly, the book introduces not only new models but also a novel and original dataset—the GTJD—that can be utilized by other scholars interested in empirical research on related topics. Thirdly, the book contributes to the ongoing multidisciplinary discourse, primarily from the perspectives of qualitative political theory and legal studies, emphasizing the complexity and multidimensionality of the transitional justice process over simplicity and straightforwardness.

At the same time, one general point of caveat is that the author uses different terminology both in the development of formal models and in constructing the dataset compared to the broader literature. This leads to several implications: (i) the need for discussion of establishing broader and narrower definitions of terms used, and (ii) the direct comparison of the results from the book with broader literature can be challenging. Another point, regarding the GTJD, is that the measurement used for passed legislation might be confounded (e.g., unregulated actions might not be captured; not all passed legislation is implemented); hence, the derived results should be interpreted prudently.

Overall, *After Authoritarianism* not only exemplifies an advanced research strategy and a valuable contribution to the field of transitional justice but also sets forth numerous fruitful directions for both methodological and empirical scholarly investigations.

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