Democracy Paradox Podcast
Killian Clarke Warns Counterrevolution is a Threat to Nascent Democracies
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Transcript

Host Justin Kempf: Today's guest is Killian Clarke, an assistant professor in the Edmond A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and the author of *Return of Tyranny: Why Counterrevolutions Emerge and Succeed*. I've wanted to talk to Killian on the podcast for a long time, because he grapples with the reasons why people resist democratization. It's a theme that the podcast has long explored from a variety of different angles. But to help me introduce today's episode is Amanda C. Waterhouse. She's a postdoctoral democracy researcher at the Kellogg Institute. Now, Amanda, I know that your work touches on issues of protests and revolutions in Latin America, but it's always from a historical direction. I wanted to understand how you received Killian's findings on counterrevolutions. Did you find his ideas surprising and relevant for other research on revolutions and protest movements?

Amanda Waterhouse: Yeah, absolutely. And thank you so much for inviting me to be on today. So one thing that I found really interesting and illuminating and I think different from the historical literature on counterrevolution is that it divorces the definitions of revolution and counterrevolution from their location on the political spectrum to have them be about the process through which people come to power. He has this whole definition of counterrevolution as, quote, “an irregular effort in the aftermath of a successful revolution to restore a version of the prerevolutionary political regime.” So, we can see that this is about effort. It's not about success and it's about process rather than location on the political spectrum.

Then he says we have to define revolution if we're going to use it in the definition of counterrevolution. So, revolution is when, quote, “a regime has been overthrown through the mass mobilization of everyday citizens. He even talks a little bit in some of the chapters about why he's not giving these definitions a place on the political spectrum. In some cases there's these surprising things that happen in his coding where there are a small number of leftist and liberal counterrevolutions in his dataset. So, I found this really interesting that it's more about this contest between revolutionary challengers and incumbent elites. Even though counterrevolution has this impulse to preserve the status quo, it's not necessarily associated with rightism in his study.

Justin Kempf: What really struck me about his book and the interview was not so much the ideological challenges because he does note that a significant

number of the counterrevolutions do emerge from the right. But what really struck me was how citizens are engaged in the counterrevolutions and in particular how people who were previously members of the revolutionary struggle can switch sides to become members of the counterrevolutionary struggle. It really challenges our thoughts about how we think about democracy and democratization, because we're always thinking that people want democracy and that they're fighting for democracy, but as many people have argued democracy has to actually deliver for people to continue to support it.

So, we can see people rise up and be part of mass movements for counterrevolutionary change, which is shocking and even mind blowing for those of us who advocate for democracy. I mean, did those terms and those ideas really take you by surprise or has your research on Latin America made you feel like that's evident or typical or something that you expect within counterrevolutionary struggles?

Amanda Waterhouse: I think that's a really interesting question. A lot of the historical literature, on the period that I mentioned talks about what historian Sebastian Saiegh calls the silent majority, sort of repurposing that term for this historical moment. In the case he's talking about, it's the compliance of the masses with counter-revolutionary government. In his case it was the military government coming to power in Argentina. But I don't think that the literature displays this conception of mass mobilization towards counterrevolution. So that's really interesting.

The other thing that I thought was really interesting is he has this advice that he gives for democratic revolutionary governments to try to avoid counterrevolution. He says they can do so by preserving both elite coalitions and broad popular support. I was really interested in that because the National Front in Columbia is one example that he gives of that which is during the period that I study. Columbia is sometimes called the longest standing democracy in Latin America, but even if we ignore the fact that there was a military dictator in place for a lot of the 1950s, the national front was just sharing power between these two elite political parties and it was really difficult for people with different ideologies to break into that.

So it's interesting that the thing that can help these democratic revolutionary governments guard against counterrevolutionary mobilization is also something that in practice can sometimes look anti-democratic and I thought that was a really insightful point that he made.

Justin Kempf: It's definitely something that I have returned to over and over again on this podcast. The idea that strategies used to defend democracy can sometimes have anti-democratic elements and sometimes efforts to undermine democracy can have elements that are somehow democratic all at the same time. Again, it's something that we have to grapple with and we have to actually explore to understand how we can create democracy, how we establish democracies and what it means for the meaning and purpose for democracy as we move forward. So that's one of the great things that a conversation like this on counterrevolutions can help us to think differently about democracy.

Now, I know your work, Amanda isn't on counterrevolutions. But I understand that you've got a book that you're working on. Do you want to tell us a little bit about the book that you're working on? Just give us a sneak preview so that we can put it on our radars for when it comes out.

Amanda Waterhouse: Absolutely. Yeah. Thank you for asking. So my book is called *Designing Development*. It's under advanced contract with Columbia University Press. It essentially looks at United States Foreign Aid or international development during the Cold War period in Columbia. through the lens of architecture and the built environment. So, the book looks at architecture and urban planning starting in the late 1940s, going through the 1950s and it argues that the Colombian government had forms of architecture and urban planning in the late 1940s through the 1950s that sought to ferment public order in a time of increasing violence. There was so much violence in this period that historians have called it la violencia in Spanish.

In the 1960s when John F. Kennedy comes to power. His government consolidates all of these preexisting US foreign aid organizations into the big USAID, the Agency for International Development, and then I argue redeploys these architectural forms of fomenting public order in the service of anti-communism through housing developments, through Peace Corps efforts, which had trained architects working in the countryside and in the cities in Columbia. Then by the 1970s, I look at student movements, particularly architecture students in universities in Columbia who sought to undermine the public order in anti-communism that the Colombian elites and the US government were trying to foment through architecture.

Justin Kempf: I love the interdisciplinary approach. I've had a few different people on the podcast talk about the way that spatial elements can impact democratization and impact democracy and the way that even art can influence democracy itself. It's always fascinating to consider how those other aspects of life affect our politics. So, I think that's a fascinating study. But before we go, I

do want to remind everybody to be able to mark on their calendars for The Global Democracy Conference coming up in May. It's May 19th and 20th at the University of Notre Dame. I know that's aways away, but it's something that you should have on your calendar. Amanda, are you going to be there at the Global Democracy Conference?

Amanda Waterhouse: You know, I actually wasn't aware of it, which is embarrassing, and I maybe shouldn't say that publicly, but now that I am, I will be there.

Justin Kempf: It's an amazing conference and last year's conference was incredible. So, I encourage everybody to go there and to participate in the conversations that we regularly have in this podcast at the conference. One last note, the *Democracy Paradox* is made in partnership with the Kellogg Institute, part of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. But for now, here is my conversation with Killian Clarke.

Justin Kempf: Killian Clarke, welcome to the Democracy Paradox.

Killian Clarke: Great to be with you.

Justin Kempf: Well, Killian, I feel like I've been waiting for this new book that you've just written, *Return of Tyranny*, for a few years now. So, congratulations for getting the book out.

Killian Clarke: Thank you, Justin, and thank you for being patient. These first books based on dissertations are like writing a book twice, so they do take a while, but I appreciate the kind words.

Justin Kempf: So Killian counterrevolution can touch on many different things. They can touch on authoritarian regimes. They can touch on democratic regimes. I'd like to start with how they affect Democratic regimes, because something that I've been trying to understand through this podcast is why people turn against democracies. You take a very hard look at Egypt during the Arab Spring and it's a case with a lot of problems behind it. I mean, a lot of people would question how democratic the democracy was. But at the same time it's one of those cases where we saw people who participated in the democratic revolution turn against it and stand with el-Sisi when he staged his counterrevolution. I'd like to start here. Why do people turn against a democratic revolution and join a counterrevolution when they had been on the opposite side not that long ago?

Killian Clarke: That's a great question, Justin. And it really gets to the crux of the whole matter. It gets to the crux of the argument and the theory that I develop in the book. It's good that we're starting with democratic revolutions because those are the revolutions that, in the book I argue, are most susceptible to counterrevolution. The reason that counterrevolutions are more likely to topple democratic revolutions is precisely because of the dynamics you gestured to, which is that democratic revolutions are characterized by broad coalitions of different types of people who come together around a unifying goal of democracy. But they have a lot of different ideas about what that democracy is going to bring them and what it's going to entail.

What happened in Egypt and happens in many of the other cases that I looked at where counterrevolutions occur is that there is profound disappointment with what the revolution brings about and there's profound disaffection and bitterness. In the book I document that both on the elite level and on the mass level. In Egypt, the coalition behind the revolution was divided into two broad camps. A group of secularist parties and movements and then Islamist parties and movements, the largest of which was the Muslim Brotherhood. And the Muslim Brotherhood rapidly emerged as the strongest player. This is a story that many of us who follow the Egypt case know well.

When their leader was elected President, Mohamed Morsi, he decided early on in his administration that he didn't need to rule with the secularist wing of the coalition. He didn't need them. They were deeply bitter about that. They felt that they were being cut out of power and they were worried about the potential for the emergence of a new type of authoritarianism under Morsi. So that's the elite part of the story. The popular part of the story is that the Morsi administration did not do a good job of managing the economy or of managing discontent in society that was emerging. There was also an expectation that the revolution was going to fix problems that had been around for a long time. That it was going to improve people's lives, and, to a large extent, these expectations were not met.

So, people turned on the Morsi government. They were sick of the chaos of the revolution. Those grievances are what fueled this mass movement called Tamarod, which was the popular base of the counterrevolution. So, these dynamics are very common following democratic revolutions. The other cases where we see successful counterrevolutions to varying degrees have a lot of the same characteristics.

Justin Kempf: Is it typical for counterrevolutions to include mass movements behind them? Because when I think of a counterrevolution, I usually think of it

as being elite driven, more like a military coup. Do most counterrevolutions also include widespread popular mobilization?

Killian Clarke: Most successful counterrevolutions do. They are elite driven. They are led by the elites of the former regime, but the majority of the successful counterrevolutions that I analyzed and looked at have a mass component as well. The reason is that the old regime elite really can't force their way back into power without some sort of popular legitimacy. Their legitimacy has been destroyed by the revolution, and so without a new social base and some sort of popular support, they're unlikely to return to power and cement their rule. Most successful counterrevolutions have some element of what we saw in Egypt, which is some popular movement calling for or backing the counterrevolutionary forces, and oftentimes elements of that mass movement are drawn from the original revolutionary coalition.

Justin Kempf: So, should we think of counterrevolutions as a subset of revolutions? It sounds like a counterrevolution is a revolution that just follows on the heels of a previous revolution.

Killian Clarke: I think that's an interesting way of thinking about it and potentially a good one. In fact, the data set that I used to construct my own was a data set of successful revolutions constructed by Mark Beissinger, a political scientist at Princeton. Some of the counterrevolutions that I count are also counted as revolutions in his dataset. So, speaking exactly to your point. Now, not all of them, because sometimes the mass base of the counterrevolution isn't particularly organized. For some counterrevolutions, the mass component is more diffuse. It's more like counterrevolutionaries taking advantage of a lot of unrest in society that has not yet organized or coalesced into a movement that looks like the Tamarod movement. But yes, there are a number of examples that could well be considered just a different form of revolution.

Justin Kempf: So why are democracies particularly vulnerable to counterrevolutions? And let me caveat by saying that many democratic revolutions succeed. They don't face a counterrevolution. But you found that democracies are more vulnerable than autocratic regimes. Why is that?

Killian Clarke: Yeah, that's right. The data I collected shows that about 30% of democratic revolutions are reversed by counterrevolutions. Now, 30% percent is much higher than the proportion for what I call leftist or ethnonationalist revolutions. They mostly establish authoritarian regimes. Those authoritarian revolutionary regimes are overthrown at a much lower rate, so less than 10%. So, you're talking about 30% for democratic revolutions, less than 10% for

revolutions that establish autocracies. Those proportions are significant and different enough, they're statistically meaningful. So yes, democratic revolutions are more susceptible.

However, it's also important to note that 30% at an absolute level is not particularly high. So, 70% of democratic revolutions survive and they do so in various ways. I try to make it clear in the book that I'm not saying democratic revolutions are bound to be overthrown or that's an automatic outcome following a democratic revolution. Many of them succeed in either avoiding counterrevolution entirely or defeating them. So yes, the vulnerability is important, but it's important also to put it in context.

Justin Kempf: So why are democracies vulnerable though? What makes it so a democracy would be more likely to not just face a counterrevolution, but actually collapse due to a counterrevolution than a more autocratic regime?

Killian Clarke: The short answer is they don't have guns. To put it pithily, democratic revolutions generally are not waged through violence. They're usually waged through mass protest and unarmed negative coalitions. By contrast, leftist and ethnonational revolutions, revolutions that establish autocracies, are far more likely to be waged through some sort of organized armed violence. There are other things that matter as well. These authoritarian revolutionary regimes more often have strong foreign allies backing them. Democratic revolutions sometimes have foreign allies, but it's rarer. Usually, their backing from international forces is ambivalent or weak. But violence is a key part of this.

If you are a revolutionary, who comes to power with a guerilla force or a revolutionary army or some sort of insurgent group behind you, you can use that organization to consolidate your rule, and more importantly, you can use it to put down counterrevolutionary challenges. So, it's the presence of organized coercion that distinguishes these authoritarian revolutionary regimes from the democratic ones.

Justin Kempf: You also mentioned that counterrevolution is not widespread. It's not prevalent on the whole. It's not very successful. Why not? I would imagine that most regimes, even if they collapse, have some groups that support them and have opportunities to come back to power. Why don't they do it more often and when they attempt to, why aren't they more successful?

Killian Clarke: Yeah, this was something I was surprised by in the data as well. I had to think about it and figure out how to build a theory that accounted

for this surprising fact. But if you think about different types of regime change efforts or regime change campaigns, we have coups, we have rebellions, we have independence movements, and there's people who collect data on all of these things. So, you can look at the raw success rates of all these different forms of regime change. Counterrevolution has the lowest success rate. It has a lower success rate than coups. It has a lower success rate than revolutions. It has a lower success rate than insurgencies. It has a lower success rate than independence movements and that's striking because many of these forms of regime change are also very difficult to achieve.

The reason is because of the distribution of power that exists after a successful revolution has occurred. Essentially, the first round of the competition has just been played. Revolutionaries have come out on top through whatever means they use and that varies. Some of them use armed violence. Some of them use unarmed mass protests. Some of them use a combination of those two things. But whatever their tactics, they have proven that their mobilizational power, their capacity is greater than the old regime and the old regime has been forced out of power against their will, so the configuration of power favors the revolutionaries.

I make the point that net-net, should nothing change in this configuration of power, we would assume that any attempt by the old regime to come back would be thwarted or put down using exactly the same tactics that the revolutionaries used to seize power in the first place. So either they return to mass protest or rally their armed forces and then defeat the counter-revolution with arms. Whatever tactics they have at their disposal, they can deploy those again to defeat any counterrevolutions that are attempted. We see this happen. There are many failed counter revolutions that are essentially defeated the same way that the old regime was initially defeated for a successful counterrevolution to occur. Therefore, you need something in that distribution of power to change.

Again, getting back to your earlier question, that's where democratic revolutionaries are somewhat disadvantaged because they have a harder time taking that initial revolutionary power that they have at the beginning of the transition and turning that into a consolidated rule because they don't have coercion. They have to do that through other techniques, through these balancing acts that I talk about in the book.

Justin Kempf: Obviously, one element that democracy lacks is their own armed forces. Oftentimes, they're just coopting the armed forces from the previous regime, so you've essentially got the old regime embedded within this new democratic government, which is what's making it susceptible to

counterrevolution. Like in Egypt, it was the military forming coalitions with other groups within society that seized power. The military was initially part of the democratic government. El-Sisi was part of the democratic regime. He was the defense minister.

But another element that we have is that democracies, and you've alluded to this, have many different coalition partners, whereas a more autocratic movement that begins through a source of violence oftentimes has a single primary ideology, like a communist revolution where everybody's on board with the direction that the revolution is going. Whereas these democratic regimes have a lot of different ideas of where government should go and a lot of opportunity for fragmentation and for new coalitions to arise. Am I putting that right?

Killian Clarke: Yes, that's right and there's two pieces of what you just said that are important. The first is about the nature of the coalitions that come to power in these democratic revolutions versus these armed revolutions, leftist and ethnonational revolutions. It is true that in democratic revolutions, generally, the coalitions are broader and more diffused. They're less organized. In armed revolutions that establish authoritarian regimes, the coalitions are narrower. They're usually organized around a unifying ideology. Now, this isn't always true. Sometimes we overstate this. An interesting case, for example, is the Cuban Revolution which actually started off as a much broader coalition with different ideologies and the consolidation and narrowing of that coalition. They didn't even really embrace socialism until several years after they came to power. That narrowing happened afterwards. That's also true of the Iranian revolution.

There is some variation even within these armed revolutions, but generally speaking, they do tend to have narrower coalitions and a more cohesive ideology. That's the first piece of what you said. That's important. The second piece of what you said is about the presence of old regime coercive forces in the political arena during these democratic revolutionary transitions. That's not as much the case in the armed revolutions. The armed revolutions come to power and to the extent that the old regime's coercive forces remain, they've just lost a guerilla war, so they're usually in bad shape. They're easily dismantled and purged. The new government doesn't have to worry as much about the armies of the former dictator, whereas in democratic revolutions, they're often governing with them side by side.

So, dealing with the coercive forces from the old regime is one of the central challenges that democratic revolutionaries face, while they're also having to

deal with this challenge of having a very broad coalition with people with different ideas. In the book, I talk a lot about these trade-offs. The conflicting imperatives that democratic revolutionaries face precisely because they have to manage these old regime forces that they're trying to keep at bay and satisfy their coalition partners who they're also trying to satisfy as well as the discontent in society, the popular forces in society that have all these expectations about what the revolution is going to bring about.

Justin Kempf: You mentioned the Iranian revolution and that's one I think of as a difficult case. You implied that it was a violent revolution, but wasn't that a nonviolent revolution?

Killian Clarke: The Iranian revolution is one of the most difficult revolutions to classify into our classic accounts of revolution. In the book, I have an ideological based categorization for revolution. I break revolutions into democratic revolutions, leftist revolutions, and national revolutions. There are some revolutions that have elements of two of those ideologies. The Iranian Revolution is one of the only ones that you could make a case of classifying into any of those three categories, because there were elements of democratic demands, leftist demands, and Islamist demands.

Of course, also on the basis of the use of arms, which is what you pointed out, Justin, it was largely an unarmed revolution. There were some armed elements during the revolutionary process, but the establishment of a revolutionary armed force, the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, largely happened after. The revolutionary forces seized power, so it's a very difficult case to classify. There was an armed component to it, but it wasn't a revolution that looked like the Chinese Revolution of the Vietnamese Revolution, where there's sort of a guerilla insurgency fighting from the outset.

Justin Kempf: I think of the Iranian revolution as almost an exception that proves the rule in terms of the need to have an armed force because my understanding is the IRGC largely developed due to the war with Iraq. That happened shortly after the revolution in Iran and so it did develop those coercive capacities that were closely aligned with the state, but it didn't develop those coercive capacities through the actual revolution that began initially. So, I mean, it both had the coercive capacities to fight off counterrevolutions and at the same time, they developed from a completely different process and from a completely different reason than most revolutions.

Killian Clarke: Yes, I think that's right. I think Iran, in many cases is the exception that proves the rule. Another way of putting what you just said is if

coercion is a crucial element of what allows these authoritarian, revolutionary regimes to defeat counter-revolution and consolidate their rule, and usually that coercive organization is built during the revolutionary process, Iran is the exception where one member of the Revolutionary Coalition, the strongest member, realizes very quickly after the revolution occurs that they need to build up their own coercive organization. They do that very quickly. The IRGC does get strengthened by the Iran-Iraq War, but they actually start to build it up even before that, and they're able to build that organization very quickly. Then they use it to consolidate their rule.

So what actually began as a pseudo-democratic transition with a lot of pluralism and the potential for some kind of democratic regime within two years, the Khomeinists have used the IRGC to establish a dictatorship. That rarely happens that one member of what starts out as a broad coalition manages to first of all, rapidly build a coercive organization and, second of all, consolidate their role using it. That doesn't happen a lot, but it happened in Iran and I think transformed what began as more of a democratic revolution. It transformed it into something that looks a lot more like these more authoritarian revolutions.

Justin Kempf: Doesn't that have some elements to the Russian revolution too? Because Lenin seized power before they really had a communist army, but they started developing the army almost immediately in response to a counterrevolution that erupted within Russia and on top of that, the communist revolution happened on the heels of a Democratic revolution within Russia too.

Killian Clarke: The Bolsheviks had an armed force. They had a small armed organization and that's what allowed them to stage their initial coup. But obviously their coercive organization ballooned and expanded rapidly immediately thereafter in the face of the Whites and the counterrevolution. That happens a lot actually. I mean, we can go back to the Cubans. Castro's army, when he initially seized Havana, was pretty small. Then it expanded rapidly to be much larger than the army of Fulgencio Batista. So, that is relatively common. Often these revolutionary armies expand and grow in the face of counter-revolutionary challenges. These new governments use counterrevolutionary attempts as a call to arms to rally people and recruit them into their armed forces. I mean, the greatest boon to Castro's army was the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

Justin Kempf: So, one of the findings in your book is that counterrevolution has become less common since 1900. Why has that happened?

Killian Clarke: There's two reasons for that. There has been a sort of cyclical decline in counterrevolution. The periods when counterrevolutionary success rates were the highest of all were in the pre-World War II period and there's two reasons for the decline. The first is about the changing form of revolution over the last 12 decades. The early 20th century was an era largely marked by democratic revolutions. These were the democratic revolutions of the old empires in Europe. There were a number of democratic revolutions in Latin America during this time - Early democratic attempts in Latin American countries - and as we've discussed, democratic revolutions are vulnerable. They're more susceptible to counterrevolutions. A lot of these democratic revolutions in the early 20th century were overturned by counterrevolutions.

After World War II, the form of revolution changed. We still had democratic revolutions, but we also saw the emergence of leftist revolutions as the dominant form, and to a lesser extent, ethno-national revolutions, largely nationalist revolutions seeking independence. As we've discussed, these revolutions tend to be waged through arms. We saw the creation of a crop of revolutionary regimes during the Cold War that were more resistant to counterrevolution. This first inflection point, the end of World War II, the start of the Cold War, saw the rate of counterrevolutionary success decline. So, counterrevolution stops succeeding at such a high rate.

Then there's a second part to the story, which is what happens after the end of the Cold War. To some extent leftist revolutions decline and democratic revolutions return. Something else happens, which is that the world shifts from being a bipolar world. During the pre-World War II period, it was a multipolar world. After the Cold War ends, it's a unipolar world. We have one great power, the United States, so we have global hegemony. What happens with is the United States shifts its stance towards revolution. Whereas during the Cold War, the United States was the major global sponsor of counterrevolution and that was somewhat true during the pre-World War II period as well, particularly in Latin America. The US was a major sponsor of counterrevolution after the end of the Cold War.

The United States shifts. It stops seeing revolution as threatening and it largely steps back from sponsoring counterrevolutionary efforts across the world. Many of the revolutions occurring at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the 1990s were beneficial to the United States. They were revolutions against communist regimes. These are the revolutions that led to the fall of communism or they were revolutions against leftist dictatorships in other parts of the world. So the United States liked these revolutions or at least didn't dislike them as much as they had in the past.

After 1990, you see the rate of counterrevolutionary emergence decline. It's a combination of two things that contribute to a general trend of declining counter revolution from the early 20th century to the present with the caveat that in the last decade or so, the last 15 years, we have seen an uptick of counterrevolution, a small one, but a meaningful one.

Justin Kempf: It's so interesting that the United States is the sponsor of so many counterrevolutions throughout history, at least during the 20th century history, because the tone of your book is that counterrevolutions are typically bad. That they lead to autocratic and authoritarian governments. That they return bad governments back to power. How do you think about counterrevolutions? Am I reading too much into this or do you have a negative disposition towards counterrevolutions?

Killian Clarke: You know, in political science, we're supposed to keep our biases out of things, but of course it's impossible to do that. So, I definitely do not see counterrevolutions as a positive thing. They are almost always autocratic in nature. They're almost always about returning tyranny. There's a reason that the book is titled that. The unfortunate reality is the United States has been a sponsor of tyranny across the world for much of the 20th century, particularly during the Cold War. The US government had no problem backing dictators and opposing liberation movements, leftist and democratic movements.

Often the United States would back opponents of democratic movements or democratic revolutions because they, in my opinion, unreasonably saw these democratic revolutions as the kernels of potential communist revolutions and they worried about the types of groups that would come to power should democracies be established in these countries. So yeah, the United States was an active and aggressive sponsor of right wing, authoritarian counterrevolutions across the world for much of the 20th century.

Justin Kempf: At the same time, many revolutions are tyrannical. I mean, we think of the Chinese revolution, we think of the Russian Revolution, Cuban Revolution - many of the communist revolutions brought tyrannies to power. We think of the Iranian revolution as bringing a far more tyrannical government than the one that it replaced. Do some counter revolutions try to turn back those tyrannical governments and bring something that's more democratic or are they just seeking to replace one form of tyranny with another?

Killian Clarke: It's usually the latter. It's usually tyrants versus tyrants, unfortunately. I do talk about this a little bit in the book because there's one reading of the book, which I want to dispel, which is that the book is an

endorsement of violent revolution because I make the case pretty strongly and it's pretty clear in the data that violent revolutions, armed revolutions, authoritarian revolutions, as we've been discussing them, are more durable and they're more resistant to counter-revolution. So, if your main goal is establishing a revolutionary regime that's going to be resistant to counterrevolution, then armed resistance is the way to go.

However, we also have to pay attention to the types of governments, the types of regimes that armed movements establish. And they're often terrible. They're often just as brutal, if not more brutal than the regimes they got rid of. You're replacing one form of tyranny with another. So, the counterrevolutions against those types of regimes are generally tyrants versus tyrants. They're usually not about trying to establish democracy. The counterrevolutionaries following the Iranian revolution are all about restoring the Shah and restoring the monarchy. This is not about establishing democracy. You're making a choice between two forms of dictatorship. That's why I really do spend a lot of time in the book talking about the path to avoiding counterrevolution for democratic revolutionary governments because even though they're weaker, the form of government that they establish is better.

It's what we're hoping for. It's what we're looking for. It allows for pluralism and freedom and openness and liberalism, and so I want the book to be able to show and spell out a strategy and a path by which these types of weaker democratic revolutions can survive, consolidate their rule and survive counterrevolutionary attempts.

Justin Kempf: I got the impression that your book was partly building on the most recent research from Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way on durable authoritarianism. I've had them both as guests on the podcast in the past and their insight was exactly what yours is - that violent revolutions bring about more durable autocratic dictatorships. So, if your goal is to establish a violent, durable, authoritarian dictatorship, violent revolutions might be the direction to accomplish that.

But most of us listening to this podcast are not looking to establish violent autocratic dictatorships. I understand exactly what you're saying. That even though democracies might be more fragile when they're pursued through revolutionary means, through nonviolent means, they are still the only route to establishing those democratic regimes. The other option is going to establish not just a dictatorship, but a dictatorship that's even more difficult to be able to overthrow in the future.

Killian Clarke: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. I think there's ways in which this book can be read very well side by side with the Levitsky and Way book and a lot of the findings in their book are quite in sync with the findings in mine.

Justin Kempf: So, when does the revolutionary government become the Ancien Regime? Because we see revolutionary governments like in China and Russia and they're always scared of a counterrevolution. When a revolution finally comes to the Soviet Union, and we see this series of velvet revolutions happen, non-violent revolutions where they become democratic, they're not described as counter revolutions. These are genuine revolutions, partly because the Soviet Union's been in power so long and these are not attempts to bring the old regimes back to power. They're trying to bring something new. So when can we think of a revolutionary government becoming the established power and moving beyond a period where counterrevolution is even a threat?

Killian Clarke: Great question and this is a tricky one, both in the deeper sense and theoretical sense. It's also a tricky one for coding and for collecting data, which is one that I encountered when I was building this dataset. When does an effort count as counterrevolutionary versus when is it an effort to overthrow the regime. The answer in a principled sense is that the frame of reference has to be the old regime, the original old regime. Now, how do you establish that? That's tricky. Usually, you're looking for either elites from the old regime who were participating in the challenge. Sometimes they want a return to something that resembles the old regime. They want a return of the Shah, the return of monarchy or something like that.

If I see any of those things, I coded it as a counter-revolution, but I only look at 10 years past the establishment of the revolutionary government beyond 10 years. I think any challenge that occurs is unlikely to be referring to the old regime at that point, so we're really talking about something new or a different type of challenge. I mean, there's probably still Cubans in Miami who dream of overthrowing the communist regime in Cuba and bringing back something like a Batista regime, but I don't think there are many of them and I don't think they're likely to be getting any challenges off the ground. So usually once you see challenges beyond 10 years, they're usually of a different breed and they're not counterrevolutionary in nature.

Another trickiness here is that counterrevolution is used as an epithet. It's used to discredit opponents of these revolutionary regimes. So, if you pay attention to the way that governments like the Castro regime or the Islamic Republic talk about their opponents, they often use the term counterrevolutionary to describe

them. The green movement in Iran was characterized as a counterrevolutionary movement, even though it had nothing to do with the Shah and returning the old regime to power. So, you have to ignore what the dictators are saying because they often use counterrevolution as a term to discredit their opponents.

Justin Kempf: Let's return to Egypt for a few minutes. In Egypt, when you have the counterrevolutionary movement, you have a broad mass movement saying, we want to overturn the Morsi government. We want something different. Do you think that those people really thought of themselves as returning the old regime, because they weren't bringing back the former dictator? They were bringing somebody new. And I get the impression that many of them thought that it was temporary. That they were setting the seeds for new elections rather than bringing the former regime back to power.

Killian Clarke: Yeah, that's a great question. So there's a little bit of a sleight of hand in my definition of counterrevolution where I say it has to be an attempt to restore a version of the old regime. That caveat is really important because there are really no counterrevolutions that are trying to restore exactly the old regime to power. There's always a sense that it has to be a revised and updated version of the old regime and something that improves on the defects and the failures of the previous regime. Even the diehard counterrevolutionaries in these coalitions would never say that they're trying to restore the Mubarak regime to power or restore the Shah to power. They're trying to affect something that resembles the old regime, but it's not a copy.

In the Egypt case, there were essentially two types of people in this movement and I interviewed a lot of these people. I asked them exactly this question. What did you want? What did you think was going to come of this? You were calling for the military to step in and help you oust the Morsey government. What did you envision would come after that? I think there were two types of people. There were genuine counterrevolutionaries who wanted the military to rule, who were in favor of the military taking power, restoring order, and putting all of this revolution nonsense back in a box.

Justin Kempf: Some of those people were opposed to the revolution to begin with. It's more interesting when it's somebody who was a revolutionary that then says, ‘You know what? I just want to go back to what we had before.’

Killian Clarke: And that's the second group of people. The second group of people were in denial. They essentially wanted a rerun of what had happened in 2011. They wanted the military to come in and oust Morsi. Then they wanted, after a brief period of military rule, for the military to hand power to a new

democratic government. A new democratic transition that would ideally not have the Muslim Brotherhood as a part of it and that would reset the transition.

I think that they either were in denial or were naive about how likely this was or they realized that it was unlikely and were okay with the reality that the military was going to take power and they preferred that to the Morsi government. So, they had a more complicated set of motivations on paper. I think that they would say that they wanted a reset of the transition, but when I pushed them on this, they admitted that this was always a bit of a naive expectation.

Justin Kempf: Is it bothersome to you that it was the purported liberals who were the most likely to become counterrevolutionaries out of the original revolutionary group?

Killian Clarke: It does and I think it speaks to, unfortunately, some of the weaknesses and deficiencies of liberalism in the organized liberal parties in Egypt. Some of these liberal politicians and parties are not very liberal and they were unfortunately some of the first to start calling for the military to intervene. Egypt has a very complicated political arena and liberalism in Egypt, at least since the seventies, has always felt squeezed between at least two or three different powerful political currents. The first is the coalition behind the authoritarian government and the authoritarian elites. Second are the Islamists who have always been, at least since the seventies, the most powerful organized political force. Then there's also a strong history and current of leftism in Egypt and Naserism, socialism.

So, liberals in Egypt feel squeezed by these very powerful political currents on all sides. I think that those weaknesses have led them to ally with more powerful political blocks and it's usually been the authoritarians when push comes to shove.

Justin Kempf: I know that these are very specific cases. We're talking about cases where revolution has somewhat recently occurred. I mean, for most of the democratic world, we're well past that. I mean, he tUnited States, Europe, even in a lot of other places in the developing world democracies have lasted over 10 years at this point. At the same time, I think that understanding this phenomenon of counterrevolutions does make us ask questions about what it means for democracy itself. So, I'd like to ask you how has this study of counterrevolutions affected how you think about democracy? What lessons has it taught you about democracy that you really didn't understand before you thought deeply about the subject?

Killian Clarke: A lot of things actually. I never thought of myself as a scholar of democracy. I work in the Middle East. We don't have a lot of democracies and so I never thought of myself as a scholar of democracy. But after writing this book, I think I have something to offer conversations about democracy. One of the insights that I drew from this book, and we haven't talked about this yet, is I think there's an important difference between democracies that were established by revolutions versus democracies that were established by more elite processes: negotiations, pacts, democracy through strength to use the term of Dan Slater and, and his coauthor Wong. These more elite democratization processes, produce governments with a different set of challenges and weaknesses than the challenges and weaknesses of democracies established by revolution. They also end up with different pathologies and characteristics.

This is something I talk about in the conclusion of the book. For democratic revolutions, if they're able to survive counterrevolution, they have to make certain choices that guards them against counterrevolution but can undermine the quality of their democracy. I talk about cases in which democratic revolutionaries formed pacts, and these were pacts that were formed after the revolution occurred. They were basically the opposite of what happened in Egypt. The members of the Revolutionary Coalition came together and said we have got to stick together in order to oppose these very powerful forces from the old regime who have survived.

Cases like Venezuela, Columbia, Bolivia, and Burkina Faso are shadow cases that I've looked at where the counterrevolution occurred, so the military did attempt to come back to power. These pacts that had been formed were sufficiently strong that they were able to remobilize the revolution and stop counterrevolutions from succeeding. However, the pacts also had the implication of narrowing the space of democratic competition and in many ways undermining the quality of the democracies that were established. Dan Slater and Erica Simmons have this concept called collusive power sharing which they use to analyze the case of Bolivia and Indonesia, which by the way, are both cases of democratic revolution. I think what they're getting at is really important. It describes the kinds of democracies that emerge from democratic revolutions and survive counter revolution.

They have parties that have come together, but it's constrained the space of democratic competition and in many ways undermines the quality of democratic representation. If we look at another case that I talk about in the book, Tunisia and why that democratic experiment failed, I think a lot of these lessons are borne out where you have two political parties that essentially agreed to come together and there wasn't much policy space between them. They formed

something of a pact and dominated the political space. But people grew sick of that. They grew really disillusioned with the lack of options in their democracy and that was why they turned to this dictator Kais Saied, who's recently come to power, not through a counterrevolution, but through a different set of processes and mechanisms.

Justin Kempf: Do you feel that that offers lessons for more established democracies as well in terms of being a lesson of how to potentially ward off anti-democratic challenges, but also a warning about how it can affect the quality of your democracy if you take that approach too far?

Killian Clarke: I do think so. Yeah. Consolidated, established democracies generally aren't having to worry as much about the threat of counterrevolution or coups anymore, thankfully. But I think these points about democratic competition are really important and this idea of collusive power sharing that Slater and Simmons developed particularly in a two party system. The parliamentary systems of Europe have to worry about this less. They're structured in a way that different options can easily emerge and that they have a more diverse set of political players. But in two party systems like our own in the United States or in others these risks are really acute. If voters don't think that they have options and they don't think there's any meaningful difference between the two parties, then they will turn to outsiders and they'll turn to populists and they'll turn to rule breakers. I think that's where the temptations of authoritarian populism start to really emerge.

Justin Kempf: Well, Killian, thank you so much for joining me today. Like I said, I've been waiting for your book for a long time and it really is a great read. Again, the title is *Return of Tyranny*. Thank you so much for joining me today. Thank you so much for writing the book.

Killian Clarke: Thank you, Justin. It's great to be here in conversation with you. I really appreciate it.