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LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN AUTOCRATIC REGIMES

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Abstract

This chapter examines contemporary labor-management relations in autocratic regimes, drawing on two sets of countries, namely transitional peripheral economies in Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and hierarchical market economies in Latin America (Colombia and Honduras), for analysis. We discuss the political economy, work, and labor relations of these countries, highlighting the role of the state, business, and international non-government organizations. We also take into account the impact of large-scale (often in millions) migration of workers both internally within the country and cross-border. It is important to note that, just as there are different types of democratic systems, there are also different types of autocratic regimes with distinct political, economic, and social policy orientations, and this directly impacts the nature of labor relations. Under Latin American right-wing authoritarianism, a primary focus is on supporting a relatively small property-owning elite, and any countervailing worker power is seen as a direct attack on the latter. Even if workers have employment rights under the law, this zero-sum game view frequently results in extra-legal attacks on worker activists and their representatives, making union organization an extremely dangerous business. In contrast, the Central Asian autocracies, business elites are tied up within extended clan networks. Especially within Uzbekistan, a much closer emphasis has been placed on the provision of a critical mass of jobs as a means of buying political stability. Unions have been afforded a place in the system both for historical reasons and as proof of an ability to create a critical mass of decent work; at the same time, there is little room for union autonomy.

Keywords: autocratic regimes, labor-management relations, Central Asia, Latin America, trade unions, international labor organisations

JEL code: E24, E26, F23, F66, J08

1. Introduction

Labor-management relations are underpinned by political systems and ideologies. Scholars have argued for the need to draw a distinction 'between state (as an expression of economic, ideological, social and political relations of power) and regime (as a particular type of organization of the state apparatus)' (Brown 2016: 120, see also Slater and Fenner 2011). Slater and Fenner (2011: 15) posit that 'state power is the most powerful weapon in the authoritarian arsenal' and authoritarian durability is underpinned by the effectiveness of state agencies in promoting the rule of the former. Unions may represent an important check and balance on both state and employer power, and, indeed, historical evidence suggests that democracy and union power may expand on 'parallel tracks' (Baccoro et al. 2019: 14). Under state socialism, unions were subordinated as transmission belts of the ruling party, and this legacy has persisted in parts of central Asia. However, unions may also be co-opted or marginalized by right-wing populists with their pie in the sky promises and cultural wars. Extant research has documented that there has been a resurgence of violence against trade unionists, most notably, but not exclusively, in Latin America (Baccoro et al. 2019). As such, unions as countervailing power suppressed by autocratic governments vs. unions used by the governments to stabilize the regime appear to be the two fundamental aspects of unions and striking features of labor-management relations in autocratic regimes.

In this chapter, we examine contemporary labor-management relations in autocratic regimes, drawing on two sets of countries, namely transitional peripheral economies in Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and hierarchical market economies in Latin America (Colombia and Honduras), for analysis. We first outline autocratic regimes, the political economy of labor under autocracy, and characteristics of labor relations. We then examine the political economy of labor and labor relations under autocracy through the pairing of two countries in Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and two countries in Latin America (Colombia and Honduras). We highlight the role of the state, business, and international non-government organizations (NGOs) in shaping the economy and labor relations in these countries. We also take into account the impact of large-scale (often in millions) migration of workers both internally within the country and cross-border. These workers are often employed in a highly precarious manner with little protection or bargaining power, reinforcing the rule of the autocratic regime as well as the prerogative of the employer.

We acknowledge upfront the limitations of our understanding and thus coverage of the topic in this chapter, in part due to the relatively limited availability of literature in English.

Moreover, the definition of an autocratic regime is rather unclear, and the systems, strategies, and practices found in the countries commonly labeled as 'autocratic regimes' are also diverse and distinct. So are the characteristics of labor movement and union strategy in these countries. As such, our chapter provides only a cursory discussion instead of an in-depth and comprehensive account.

2. Autocratic regimes and characteristics of labor relations

2.1 Characteristics of autocratic regimes

Authoritarianism can be defined as rule by illiberal regimes and the groupings that constitute them. Autocracy is about measures to preserve such a regime (Yahkouchyk 2019). Implicit in this definition is that the regime lacks, or does not wish to put to the (regular) test, a sufficiently reliable base of followers to win free and fair elections, and/or it is convinced that it represents a superior system of government (Murphy 2019; Yahkouchyk 2019). Authoritarianism lacks a single defining ideology, although individual authoritarian regimes construct ideologies to maintain their power (whether against democratic movements or simply another prospective autocratic competitor), and resort to autocratic methods to fend off pressure towards democracy (Murphy 2019). Extremely autocratic societies are deemed totalitarian, in that the state seeks to control all aspects of social life, or at least those aspects that may be construed as political or have political implications (Kamenka 2017). At the end of the scale, predatory states may be deemed criminal, if the ruling elites concentrate on using the state to enrich themselves by extra-legal means, with other aspects of governance being deemed irrelevant, or, at best secondary (Wood 2004).

In autocratic regimes, power is often concentrated in the hands of one person and is thus personalized and 'relies on clientelistic relationships and control over access to political and economic resources' (Gast 2020: 4). Authoritarian regimes consist of different *types* and *degrees* of state central control (Hess 2013; Howell and Pringle 2019), as well as exhibiting different *qualities*. For example, China was considered by Fukuyama (2011) to have a 'higher quality' authoritarianism (Hess 2013), where the officially recognized trade unions, albeit politically not independent from the Chinese Communist Party, receive directions as well as resource support from the government to carry out their functions (Cooke 2020). While trade unions have received considerable criticisms for their institutional set-up and inability to defend workers' rights and interests (Howell 2008; Lee 2007; Lüthje 2014; Taylor and Li 2007), they

have been found to be positively associated with workers' wage level, productivity, workers' welfare, job satisfaction, and employment relations (e.g. Budd et al. 2014; Hu et al. 2018; Liu 2010; Li 2014; Lu et al. 2010; Yao and Zhong 2013; see more discussion about China in Chapter 14).

It is interesting to note that even for autocratic countries of the same political regime, such as former socialist countries, their labor institutions, notably the trade unions, may evolve in different directions with different functions and effects on labor relations, as Pringle and Clarke's (2011) comparative study of trade unions in China, Russia, and Vietnam shows. It is also important to note that even within the same region, say Latin America, authoritarian regimes may adopt different politico-economic policies which have distinct implications for labor-management relations. For example, Brazil and Argentina adopted a bureaucratic authoritarian system, Mexico adopted a more inclusionary authoritarian regime whereas Colombia adopted a neoliberal approach that favored privatization which has made it very challenging for organized labor since the 1990s (Cardenas and Juarez 1994). Here, the role of the state and societal traditions is critical in shaping labor-management relations through the distribution of power, resources, and responsibilities to institutional actors at various levels (Hess 2013). Equally, it is important to extend the multi-level approach to understanding autocratic regimes by considering regional differences within the same regime, as ruling elites are endowed with different levels of natural, economic, social, and political resources and have different preferences and opportunities in how they operate within the broader constraints. Rotating the appointment of bureaucratic elites across regions (e.g. in China and Kazakhstan) may be one way for the central authority to overcome the risks presented by decentralization and prevent the autocrats from harvesting too much resource and power (Hess 2013).

It is often assumed that emerging markets and developing countries share institutional characteristics and that these are best defined in terms of how they fall short vis-à-vis those encountered in the mature markets (Hall and Soskice 2001). However, there has been growing attention to the differences between these economies, and efforts to develop alternative capitalist typologies that differentiate countries according to the nature of institutions, the strength of ties and relative position of key stakeholders, and the regulation of firms and labor. This would include Latin America, which has been described as Hierarchical Market Economies (HMEs) and Central Asia, or Transitional Peripheral Economies (TPEs) (Demirbag and Wood 2018; Schneider 2009).

2.2 The political economy of labor under autocracy

Within authoritarian societies, labor and other social actors have very limited room for maneuvers or organization outside of government-controlled structures. This frequently takes the form of official national trade unions and federations (Caraway 2012). At the same time, autocratic states may have an interest in taking account of at least some of the pressures facing workers in order to avoid political instability. Moreover, completely predatory tactics backed up by omnipresent security forces may reduce the masses to focusing on quotidian survival, as evidenced by Equatorial Guinea or Papa Doc's Haiti (Wood 2004), but they bring with them risks of their own, above all around political succession (Haiti) or following on the loss of overseas sponsors (e.g. Mobuto's Zaire). In contrast, a focus on at least some aspects of national development, and incremental improvements in everyday livings may go a long way to securing political stability, as we have seen in China, as well as satisfying the vanity of rulers (e.g. grand public works and prestige infrastructural projects) (O'Donnel 1978). In practice, most authoritarian governments lie somewhere on the scale between developmental (in other words, actively seeking to promote national development) and predatory (primarily concerned with the extraction of rents). However, as Murphy (2019) notes, whilst autocratic governments may potentially engage in acts of good governance (in other words, the adoption of appropriate regulations and policies to promote national development and the rule of law), a frequent default is towards a predatory mode. Relative positioning is closely bound up with the structure of elites, and their historical relationship with wider society. For example, in several Central American countries, there has been a long history of dominance by handfuls of wealthy families, who intermarry and view the rest of society with barely veiled contempt (c.f. Delgado 2018).

A further feature of autocracies is the dominance or arbitrary nature of state power; rulers seek to exercise their power, often without the restraints of constitutionality, even if they may claim to keep to the rules of the latter. This means that autocratic states often have quite comprehensive bodies of labor law which may repress collective rights on the one hand but afford workers more substantive rights on the other (e.g. Wang 2020), but which the powerful can breach at will and with impunity (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). Moreover, workers may ultimately help facilitate this process: in times of uncertainty, labor and other social actors may seek relief through ad hoc government measures which may become 'trusted', hollowing out formal political processes, and, in doing so, they gradually 'learn' how to behave under an autocracy (Grigoriev and Dekalchuck 2017).

2.3 Implications for labor relations

Autocratic regimes are also characterized by a strong military rule that represses alternative political organizations that may pose, perceived or real, threats to the government. Therefore, labor movement/unionism relies heavily on association power, rather than structural power (Fox-Hodess 2019), drawing on external and especially international NGOs for pressure and support (e.g. Colombia, Honduras, and Myanmar). Association power is power deriving from being associated with powerful institutions or agencies, whereas structural power is power that is institutionalized through formal structures that frames actors' actions.

The industrialization and economic development of these regimes depend heavily on being part of the global economy, mainly at the lower end of the value chain, on the one hand, for example, garment manufacturing (Honduras, Myanmar), coffee and flower industries (Colombia); and is facing intensive international competition on the other, resulting in a large informal sector with limited workers organization or bargaining power, either collectively or individually. Even in export-oriented economic zones where workers' cooperation is critical for competitiveness, authoritarian rule widely exists, as was found the case in Myanmar (Arnold and Campbell 2017). Self-organizing strikes are often the main means for workers in autocratic regimes to express their discontent (Chan 2010; Godard 1992; Lee 2007).

The role of trade unions in autocratic systems can be located in between the two ends of a spectrum. The first is, in line with the former Soviet model (Pringle and Clarke 2011), which has to various extents, been exported to many of the more autocratic successor states, is that unions serve as a transmission belt for the ruling party, aiming to mobilize workers around support for the regime (Cook, 2018). Such unions historically gained legitimacy not only via ideology but also through the provision of benefits, including social and leisure facilities for their members. In doing so, they broadly act in concert with, rather than in opposition to managerial power, with workers being in some respect, consumers of union services, even if more modernizing ones gradually shifted to a role of mediators. It is important to note that trade unions in some of the ex-Soviet Union states have been experiencing increasing political, social and financial pressure post-independence as well as faced with powerful transnational corporations, some of the unions have started to show interest in collaboration with international labor NGOs for support (e.g. Croucher 2015). On the other end of the spectrum are unions that may emerge and challenge the status quo. Many genuinely emerge at the grassroots and challenge managerial authority in pursuit of better work and employment conditions for workers. In some instances, they may combine this with political campaigning, a well-known historical example being the South African independent trade unions (Maree 1989), although

many examples may be encountered across Latin America. However, some others may represent initiatives driven by a small number of activists working in concert with international groupings to bring about political change, with workplace issues being firmly subordinated; a reliance on external support is sometimes associated with challenging the status quo, but with the goal being the imposition of at best a partial version of democratization combined with neo-liberal policies (see Stewart 2009). In turn, anti-'colour revolution' tactics by political incumbents may weaken civil society actors, including unions, that have more ambitious objectives than simply replacing one set of oligarchic interests with another (Finkel and Brudny 2012). Finally, as Bishara (2020) notes, the relative historical experience of unions directly impacts their structures and choices in responding to authoritarian rule.

In the next section, we introduce four authoritarian states' political economies, and how labor relations play out therein for illustration. We have selected two countries in Latin America (Columbia and Honduras) and two in Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). We have selected these countries on the basis of their relative positioning on the authoritarian scale between developmental and predatory, as well as how autocratic they are. Specifically, Turkmenistan is one of the closest countries to the authoritarian pole in the present world and Honduras to the criminal state archetype. Although Columbia has the most democratic institutions amongst the four countries for comparison, a predatory right-wing elite still cast a long shadow over the country, and vested interests continue to exert their power through death squads and other mechanisms in the authoritarian playbook. Uzbekistan is one of the more developmental authoritarian states but still has strong predatory dimensions. In the two central Asian countries, unions are closely incorporated into state structures and regulated. In contrast, in the two Latin American countries, unions have nominal freedom to engage in their activities, but union officials and worker representatives face omnipresent threats of violence against them and their families. What all these countries have in common is that autocratic systems are relatively fluid, and have over the past two decades gradually been remade according to internal and external events, in contrast to ossified autocracies such as North Korea and Equatorial Guinea).

3. Hierarchical market economies in Latin America

In an influential 2009 paper, Ben Schneider (2009) argues that Latin American economies may be described as hierarchical market economies on account of a list of defining features: the

prominent role of (typically U.S.) multinational enterprises (MNEs), atomistic industrial relations, diversified groups of firms, and weak skills bases. Although distinct from mature varieties of capitalism, Schneider (2009) argues that such countries are not devoid of complementarities, that is sets of rules and practices that work well together if not to promote overall social progress, then in the interests of influential actors. An example of this would be the symbiotic relationships between local business groupings (and the elites that control them) and foreign MNEs. Such limited complementarities would yield benefits to powerful insiders, even if many more are worse off through their operation, and institutions as a whole not totally functional (Schneider 2009). Such systems are characterized by a lack of attention to developing industrial relations structures and skills, in part reflecting a zero-sum view by influential sections of the elite that hold that any sharing of power and resources represents unnecessary weakness, rather than the important concessions to buy future stability (Diamond 2008). Training is largely at the whim of firms, workers lack security of tenure or the ability to voice grievances, with labor regulations being unilaterally promulgated on a top-down basis by governments (Schneider 2009). Whilst the latter may be extensive, low levels of unionization make it hard for workers to enforce rights under the law (Schneider 2009). Local business groups tend to be quite centralized in terms of control, often under families who have owned them for generations, even as they are diverse in terms of sector.

Those indigenous businesses that venture abroad have tended to confine their attentions to the institutionally and culturally familiar environment of Latin America, offsetting risks through operations in more than one country. In turn, this means that reverse diffusion of innovative new HR practices from indigenous MNE subsidiaries will be very limited, thus reinforcing established paradigms of managing labor.

In addition to these common features, two other embedded aspects within each country have profound implications for the relative position of labor. Firstly, elite class formation is quite lop-sided, and dominated by compradors, militarists, and neo-latiafundistas, with considerable overlap between these groupings (Frank 1963). The former act as local intermediaries for foreign interests, invariably Western agricultural or mining MNEs (Chang 2017). The military caste saw its role as protecting countries from the wrong type of democracy, even after the post-cold war wave of democratization, and continue to underpin a kind of anti-politics that sets boundaries on what is deemed acceptable in terms of democratic debate and ruling party policy (Davies and Loveman 1997). Neo-latifundistas are large land owners, with workforces that are tied to the land by poverty, and in some cases, threats or actual force (Frank

1963; Griffen 1983). Here, it is worth noting that Columbia has a much larger and more diversified economy than Honduras, and there are also significant industrial and commercial interests; nonetheless, the former three groupings continue to exert disproportionate power. In turn, all three groupings have been consistently hostile to organized labor, and, indeed, see it is as a challenge to civil order and their own status and role in society (Davies and Loveman 1997; Pion-Berlin and Martinez 2017).

A second feature is a long and persistent history of zero-sum politics, whereby right-wing parties and their elite allies consistently refuse to accept that centrist or left-wing parties have any legitimacy to govern, and view even the slightest challenge from the latter as an existential threat (Davies and Loveman 1997; Hesketh 2019) (it is worth noting that such thinking is increasingly poisoning US politics). With this has been a long history of paramilitary death squads, targeting centrist and leftist politicians, unions, civil society, and worker representatives (Civico 2016). After the hard-right Uribe government, in Columbia, this tendency has been diluted, but recent events seem to indicate strong pressures to revert to the historical norm (see Rivera and Duncan 2018). Meanwhile, in Honduras, death squad activity has resurged, making the country one of the most dangerous in the world for trade unionists and local activists (Lakhani 2020); it is unclear if the newly democratically elected Honduran government will have the capacity to reign in both the security forces and their allies in the criminal gangs. Neither Honduras nor Columbia underwent the extensive experiments in authoritarian corporatism experienced by other Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico (Bensusán 2016); in turn, this has meant that unions were under less risk of cooptation but denied the formal legitimacy that authoritarian corporatist systems may confer on them.

Almost all countries in Latin America share the French-style civil law legal origin, although with higher levels of inequality to those encountered in continental European countries within this legal family. This would reflect the right-wing dominance in the former, making for poor stakeholder rights under the law, even if the original intentions of French civil law were somewhat different. Again, weak stakeholder rights disparity between law and enforcement within many Latin American countries, and the ability of elites to enforce their interests via legal, as well as extra-legal means (Lakhani 2020; Rivera and Duncan 2018). At the same time, there are many recorded instances of unions challenging autocrats and, indeed, succeeding in contributing to their downfall (Siedlecki, 2005), often through forging accommodations with other civil society actors (Valenzulela, 1989).

3.1 Columbia

3.1.1 Political economy

Colombia's social policy was ahead of its economic development at the onset of its industrialization even though it 'did not meet the conditions of socio-economic and political development that proved to be the prerequisite for welfare state creation in Western Europe' in many respects (Thoene 2019: 1). Colombia and other early Latin American industrializers 'decided to broadly follow the style and function of the European model introducing social rights and (yet) a rather truncated notion of citizenship' (Thoene 2019: 1). Despite limited implementational capacity to fulfill its welfare state institutional aspiration, these pro-labor ideologies, and social policies provided a social, economic, and political foundation for workers' collective demands for better social protection and citizens' rights through labor law reform and regulation (Thoene 2019).

3.1.2 Work and labor relations

According to Cardenas and Juarez (1994: 244), organized business groups in Colombia 'play a key role in providing stability and continuity to the political system and influence economic policy on a wide range of issues.' Colombia has adopted a neoliberal policy in its politico-economic development since the mid-1990s (Mathers and Novelli 2007), even during the economic, political, and social crisis that has confronted Latin America in the 2000s which has 'created an opportunity for leaders and parties of the left and center-left to come to power', yet which never manifested itself in Columbia (Moisá et al. 2019: 15). It is one of the few Latin American countries with a neoliberal continuity; in part, this reflected US preoccupation with sustaining a conservative bulwark in the region by whatever means necessary.

At the broadest level, right-wing dominance has made for overwhelming employer power. In practice, this translated to de facto common ground – and in some instances – an active collaboration with state and allied paramilitary extra-legal activities aimed at repressing unions and worker activists (Gill, 2007). As such, the Colombian state was 'penetrable by private sector groups', whereas labor organizations have much less influence on the state and its policies (Cardenas and Juarez 1994: 244). Colombia's neoliberal structural reforms beginning in the early 1990s were characterized by liberalization, decentralization, and privatization (Mathers and Novelli 2007), including labor and social security reforms, which 'transformed capital-labour relations and contributed to the erosion of working conditions and health protection at work, with devastating impacts on workers' health' (Torres-Tovar and

Luna-García 2019: 1). As Cardenas and Juarez (1994) observed, political factors have a strong influence in shaping Colombia's economic reform, in which the unions virtually had no say. This affected labor relations even in the public sector and in high-skilled jobs. For example, Ardila-Sierra and Abadia-Barrero's (2020: 1011) ethnographic study of medical professionals in the public healthcare sector revealed the negative impact of labor market deregulation as part of the neoliberal reforms on the physicians' employment terms and conditions, including low pay, reduced social security benefits, work intensification and reduced autonomy. These radical changes have triggered Colombian workers' mobilization and 'shaped new forms of workers' struggle and resistance' through collective identity building (Torres-Tovar and Luna-García 2019: 1).

In particular, associations of workers and former workers suffering from work-related illnesses and accidents have been active in Colombia since the mid-2000s (Torres-Tovar and Luna-García 2019). These workers' and former workers' illness associations were 'mainly from the mining, energy, food, agro-industrial, construction, tobacco and services sectors, and are primarily found in the central, coastal and north-eastern regions of the country' (Torres-Tovar and Luna-García 2019: 4). They operated either independently, or as part, of the unions. Workers joined these associations in recognition that developing solidarity would be beneficial to obtaining rights as well as receiving moral and emotional support. Fighting for the right to health and safety at work has been a key part of the labor organizing and collective actions vis-à-vis the endemic overexploitation and flexibilization practiced by employers in a neoliberal environment. More broadly, workers' mobilization and collective actions have been triggered by the insecurity in employment, health and safety protection, social security provision as a result of the country's neoliberal reform, and this political contention is 'part of the broader political demands related to health and social security policies in Colombia' (Torres-Tovar and Luna-García, 2019: 9).

Colombia's labor movement started to emerge and grow in the mid-1910s as industrialization commenced (Thoene 2019; see also Brett and Malagon 2013 for a detailed account of the history of unionism and major unions in Colombia). In contemporary Colombia, union activities and leadership took place in an extremely politically hostile environment and the country has one of the lowest union membership levels of 4 percent (Gill 2014), mainly concentrating in the public sector and state-owned companies. However, privatization and downsizing of state agencies since the 1990s have led to the reduction of union membership level as well as union strengths and substantial deterioration of workers' income level and social

security (Cardenas and Juarez 1994). It has been reported that over four thousand union activists have been assassinated between 1986-2000 (Mathers and Novelli 2007), although the situation has improved since the 2000s and anti-union killing has become more targeted (Gill 2014; Mejia and Uribe 2011). Gill (2014: 211) reported that 'the main reason behind the phenomena of anti-union violence is the persistence of a strategy within the private sector and sectors of the state to use violence to prevent people from exercising their labor rights.'

Even in industries that are of strategic importance in the economy, such as dockyards, where workers tend to have more institutional power, Colombian dockworkers appeared to have less institutional and shopfloor power than their counterparts in other Latin American countries such as Chile (Fox-Hodess 2019). Instead, Colombian dockworkers have relied on a human rights unionism strategy, and drawn on external (international and national) pressure and support to fight for recognition and 'coordinated shopfloor action' (Fox-Hodess 2019: 29). Fox-Hodess (2019: 29) argued that state and society play an important role in shaping workers' 'power differentials and divergent strategic pathways even when workers share a common position in the economic system'. Central to this was violence, with the property owner and employer rights being enforced through the close collaboration with the state; despite international pressures, often foreign MNEs were integral to this (Richani 2005).

Working with international NGOs and unions have been an important way for Colombian unions to develop organizing strategy and continue with their work on the ground (Gill 2014). However, international NGOs, including international unions have been mainly working to support Colombian unionism and labor movement offshore in part due to resource constraints and security concerns (Gill 2014). International support mainly took the form of financial support, experience sharing, training, and inviting Colombian union leaders for international tours and speeches to develop international solidarity by recognizing that the Colombian labor movement is part of the global labor movement (Gill 2014).

The corporate social responsibility movement and other third-party initiatives in the global commodity chain are another useful driving force for improving labor standards. For example, Brown (2013: 2572) study found that Fairtrade certification provides a useful international influence on improving labor standards in the banana production industry in Colombia, in that 'Fairtrade programs resonate with the local industry's longer-term strategy to promote voluntarism as the appropriate mechanism for alleviating poverty and inequality.' However, as the coverage of Fairtrade is uneven, it creates new forms of disparity of resources and competition among banana workers in different regions which tends to undermine labor

solidarity and 'in the face of an erosion of labor standards in the global banana economy and the reassertion of elite control in the region' (Brown 2013: 2572).

Domestically, globalization and violence have shaped Colombian banana workers' organizations which have found allies in leftist political and guerilla organizations in the earlier years of labor struggle, whereas banana growers 'relied on the neoliberal state and rightist paramilitaries to unleash an extraordinary wave of violence to crush the leftist unions' and wooed the right unionists to build common interests (Chomsky 2007: 90). Since the 1990s unions became 'right-dominated and adept at labor-management collaboration in the interest of their joint regional stake in the industry, but it also promoted international labor unity aimed at pressuring banana transnationals to accept minimum labor standards' (Chomsky 2007: 90).

The reach of international pressure, however, may be limited and transient, and often influenced by different agendas between the business and the NGO (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007), as well as 'by the capacity of managers and worker representatives at multiple levels to mobilize their capabilities' for framing, bridging and collaborative actions (Lévesque et al. 2018: 215). Employers have a strong prerogative in determining employment terms and conditions and depriving workers of any means to grievance redressal, which undermines workers' willingness and capacity to engage in collective actions for fear of job losses (Korovkin and Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2007). Where entry barriers are low, the influx of migrant workers from other Latin American countries further reduces the bargaining power of Colombian workers (Agudelo-Suárez et al. 2020). Pipkin's (2011: 2126) study revealed that nearly all companies visited 'employed time-and-motion studies to manage worker productivity', but none reported providing training over and above the minimum requirement of the government to help workers develop human capital. Such a labor strategy impacts the capacity of industrial upgrading of Colombia to enable it to move up the global value chain, reinforcing an employment system characteristic of informality and insecurity.

Despite the repression, 'resistance to neoliberal globalization has been robust, particularly in relation to the privatization of public services, as Mathers and Novelli's (2007: 236) study of a state-owned public utility provider company showed (see also Tubb and Rojas 2020). What contributed to the success was that the trade union of this state-owned company was able to, in the previous five years before the industrial action, transform itself from a '"corporate trade union" fighting for the "particular" interests of its members to a "social movement union" that linked up poor community-based consumers and trade unions and

operated on a range of scales from the local to the global' (Mathers and Novelli 2007: 236; see also Novelli 2004).

In the informal sector, Rosaldo's (2019: 1) study of the recycler rights movement found that 'despite being dismissed as too weak and fragmented to collectively organize', millions of informal workers have been mobilizing for labor rights since the 1980s. However, they continue to endure structural disadvantages and marginalized positions 'in the broader political economy' and social relations, as such, informal workers like recyclers continue to face exploitation, dispossession, and exclusion (Rosaldo 2019). Moreover, 'when organized recyclers became influential agents in local and national politics, conflicts exploded among them about how to navigate the twin threats' (Rosaldo 2019: 23).

3.2 Honduras

3.2.1 Political economy

Compared to Colombia, Hondura's economy was developed more slowly. Like many other less developed countries, the large urban informal sector in the process of industrialization and urbanization undermines the development of labor organizations and significantly impacts workers' bargaining power (Roberts 1996; Thoene 2019; see also Chapter 14). Competitive outsourcing and the threat of plant relocation further undermine workers' bargaining power through the leverage of industrial actions (Anner 2011). Similar to some other Latin American countries, Honduras experienced economic, political, and social crises since the late 2000s (Moisá et al. 2019). Following a US-supported coup, that removed the progressive Zelaya government in 2009, Honduras has regressed to a period of violent autocracy associated with the progressive criminalization of the state; associated with this has been symbiotic relationships between wealthy individuals and criminal gangs, making the country one of the most dangerous in the world for union activists (Spring, 2020). The criminal excesses of the government led to a landslide electoral defeat in 2021, leading to the election of Zelaya's wife, De Castro Zelaya as president; however, the new government faces in the Sisyphunian task of reigning in the criminalized security forces and their allies in the gangs.

3.2.2 Work and labor relations

According to Anner (2015: 298), Honduras 'has had one of the relatively strongest labor movements in Central America' as part of the legacy of 'the great banana workers' strike of the 1950s'. The country has a vibrant tradition of independent unionism and in the 1990s, Honduran

unions were organizing far more apparel export plants than any other country in the region (Anner 2011). Since the 2000s, however, anti-union violence escalated (Anner 2015). Similar to Colombia but a lesser extent, unions members and particularly union leaders in Honduras were often 'targets of repression and political violence' (Eade 2004: 71). If union repression in the 1980s in Central America was mainly carried out by the state which saw unions as a political threat, then repression of unionism in the 2000s in Honduras was exerted by employers under a permissive environment created by the state due to its inaction towards employers' violence (Anner 2015). As Eade (2004: 71) summarized: 'no organisation, be it a trade union, a faith-based agency, or an NGO, can have any impact on poverty if it has no office infrastructure, no financial security, no legal status, no paid staff, and a dispersed and poorly informed membership'. Moreover, resource constraints prevent union leaders from spending their time and energy, unpaid, to develop strategic alliances amongst unions to press for institutional reform at the national level (Eade 2004).

Activities related to the labor movement and workers' support in Honduras since the 1980s have often been funded and mobilized by international NGOs, particularly organizations from the US (e.g. Eade 2014). This donor-recipient relationship, while providing many benefits, is not conducive to fostering sustainable unionism through local autonomy, dialogue, and solidarity to advance workers' rights and interests. Eade's (2004) study revealed the union leaders' perceptions of international NGOs: these international NGOs are more preoccupied with the rural sector and poverty relief than organizing the workers through unionism; they are project-based and project goals-driven instead of having a long-term strategic view in their engagement in Honduras. Nevertheless, through working with the international NGOs, Honduran union leaders have developed 'an insight into debates on international cooperation', skills in organizational management and applying for funding, running projects and producing project reports, and learned from practices and experiences of other countries.

Anner (2015) observed that transnational corporate campaigns have emerged as a result of the repressive employer labor control regime in Honduras. Local activists were able to use the threat of bodily harm by employers to frame their concerns through international campaigns and pressure on brands to generate maximum impact. For example, with the assistance of international NGOs, union leaders were invited to speak in the universities in the US which then mobilized campaigns to boycott repressive employers in Honduras and forced them to respond by reopening the factories and rehiring workers.

4. Transitional peripheral economies in Central Asia

Transitional Peripheral Economies is a term used to define the peripheral post state socialist economies in the former Soviet Union: in other words, the successor states in the Caucusus and Central Asia, and Belarus (Demirbag et al., 2015). These states are defined not only by weak but also fluid institutions, with pre-Soviet era features slowly re-manifesting themselves (Demirbag et al. 2015). Unlike many states in East Africa, the departing colonial power devoted little attention to seeking to build institutions to serve the post-independence period; decolonization was rapid and unplanned. By fluid institutions, it is meant institutions undergoing changes with a fixed destination, and with regulations being subject to redefinition in response to events. This has led to divergence in the region in the post-independence period, with incoming governments seeking to rewrite rules in their interests (Demirbag et al. 2015; Wood and Demirbag 2015). Initial disorderly liberalizations have led to clan networks being strengthened, leading to internecine squabbles over rents. According to Croucher (2015: 949), clans are 'informal, vertical, kinship-based, informal organisations', 'they have played a central role in post-independence Central Asia… and provided a means of reconstituting political and social relations during and beyond the fall of Communism in ways that became increasingly inimical to the interests of labour.' The political elites in post-independence Central Asian countries 'maintain strong economic and social connections to powerful local clans and oligarchic groupings', business decisions are made by a few key shareholders and employees have little power (Croucher 2015: 949). In turn, firms seek to forge *ad hoc* solutions with regulators, with employees having to put up with what has been agreed. Contextual unpredictability has meant that many employers are reluctant to reinvest, although there remains much internal diversity in this respect (Demirbag et al. 2015; Serafini and Szamosi 2015).

The Central Asian transitional peripheral economies share many distinguishing features, which are salient to understanding the relative position of labor. Even at the height of Soviet power, clans inter-penetrated state structures, and, as noted above, this feature has become heightened in the post-Soviet era (Demirbag et al. 2015; Wood and Demirbag 2015). With this has come the reliance on informal networks of support. The latter is encountered in many emerging markets, but in Central Asia, their clan nature makes it difficult for outsiders to penetrate. In informal patronage-based networks more generally, access is often accorded in terms of what individuals can offer, either now or later. In clan networks, one has to be borne into a clan to have access to its operations and coverage (Edgar 2004; Peyrose 2015; Wood and

Demirbag 2015). This might seem similar to peasant-based informal networks in Africa, which often have tribal elements (Hydén 1983). However, the latter bear a very specific imprint of the colonial era, that through policies of divide and rule, reserved specific occupations on the colonial state for specific tribes. For example, in colonial Uganda, and Nigeria, 'martial' northern tribes gained preference in the military and more 'sedentary' southern tribes in the civil service. The latter provided both for persistent instability in the post-colonial period and has continued to mould staffing decisions in the public arena up until the present day. In contrast, the clan-based economies of Central Asia were not associated with the same degree of occupational segregation on the lines of indigenous clans, but rather those that were most advantaged on independence were those that were most adept in interpenetrating the Soviet state (Edgar 2004; Pelese et al. 2017). In short, access to work in Central Asia is bound up with clan status, the relative power of clans is not directly related to the provision of jobs and patronage within functional areas of the public sector and, indeed, the private sector.

A second differentiating feature of Central Asia is that of ideology. Unlike both established democracies and unstable countries that undergo frequent changes of government, long periods of power provide opportunities for embed ideologies, that, in turn, underpin the dominant narratives of the regime and provide justification for its continued power (Horak 2005). Both central Asian countries under review have established ideologies, that, in turn, impact the relative position of labor. Although they have distinct features (as outlined below), they share commonalities in an emphasis on national stories and traditions, broad secularism, and paternalism (Wood and Demirbag 2015). Why this matters for labor relations is that the legitimacy of the regimes relies on not just the rights of those in power, but also their obligations implicit and explicit in the dominant ideology. Again, official trade unions played a prominent role in the Soviet era; such unions have proven adept in surviving into the independence era and continue to influence the regulation of labor (see Fedorowycz et al. 2020). At the same time, such unions were originally designed as a means of control and building consent, which, in turn, has made it unlikely that they would turn to activities that would challenge the system (Robertson 2007). This does not mean that the regimes would countenance independent unions, or political movements, or abrogate the usage of forced or semi-forced labor. Rather, it means that a distinction is drawn between the ruling personalities and the mechanisms of the state; the former is depicted as benign, even if the latter is not, a phenomenon well documented in feudal Europe (Rosenthal 1967). At the same time, this does not let ruling elites off the hook; as benign guardians of the nation's destiny and its people, they are expected to provide a basic degree of

security in access to employment, social protection, and retirement. Indeed, both regimes rest at least part of the case for their right to rule on their ability to preserve large areas of industry and employment, and the ability of the retired to access to their deferred benefits (i.e. pensions) (Edgar 2004; Lombardozzi 2019; Pelese et al. 2017). To some extent, they have succeeded in this endeavor, in that they are able to draw ready favorable comparisons with other post-Soviet states that experimented with radical liberalization, and/or frequent policy departures, which both destroyed traditional bases of employment and impoverished those reliant on the system of social protection.

Thirdly, and in line with the latter, both countries embarked on large-scale programs of infrastructural improvement (c.f. Wood and Demirbag 2015). The latter was aimed at providing jobs, visible improvements in standards of living, better internal communications, and trade, as well as providing tangible symbols of national pride and regeneration. Of course, such efforts also have the Keynesian effects of spreading income and wealth around the economy. On the one hand, it has been argued that construction-led growth may prove unsustainable and does not necessarily kickstart other areas of the economy. On the other hand, it has certainly proven more effective in providing jobs and national infrastructure than the neo-liberal alternative. In short, this has sustained a significant pool of good jobs; this contrasts to many other emerging markets, where the issue is less an issue of repressive labor relations, but a lack of regular work making for little in the way of labor relations at all.

Fourthly, there are the pre-Soviet and Soviet legacies. Unlike many post-colonial societies, Uzbekistan has a long history backed up by written records, of past imperial glory, achievement, and grandeur, whilst Turkmenistan has linked national identity to the past achievements of the Seljuk Turkish kingdom (Demirbag and Wood 2018; Horak 2005; Peyrouse 2015). This makes it much easier to construct narratives of national unity and fend off challenges of formal or informal geographical fragmentation. The Soviet legacy has left both significant populations of Russian settlers; however, significant numbers have opted to return to Russia. The latter may reflect the extent to which they have faced increasing marginalization both politically and in terms of the prospects for government employment, but may also reflect the general uncertainty and unease common to many post-colonial settler populations (Malyuchenko 2015). A second common feature is of a legal regulatory tradition building on the Soviet variation of German type civil law, and long continuities in managerial practices, even as institutions have morphed in new directions (Demirbag and Wood 2018; Serafini and Szamosi 2015). In practical terms, this would translate into a tendency to stick to

proven organizational practices, an aversion to innovation, a reluctance to diverge from government policy, other than in areas of known regulatory impunity, and the circumscribing of property owner and employer rights (Serafini and Szamosi 2015), in contrast to Honduras and Columbia, where the former has been treated as paramount.

4.1 Uzbekistan

4.1.1 Political economy

The majority of settled peoples in Central Asia in the Soviet era were labeled as Uzbeks or Tajiks, the two, in turn, are defined as Turkic or Persian language speakers respectively (Edgar 2004). Uzbekistan was the geographical center of the empire of Timur the Great (Tamburlaine) and the post-Soviet government adopted a national ideology of antiquarianism, hearkening back to past grandeur (Demirbag and Wood 2018). Uzbekistan remains highly politically repressive, yet the ruling elite has staked its legitimacy on the ability to provide both material evidence of progress in the form of conspicuous building and infrastructural projects, and through avoiding the large-scale job losses and industrial collapse associated with shock therapy neo-liberal reforms. A strong focus in Uzbekistan has been on the maintenance of industry, and through the creation of new jobs through construction, on a scale that has been dubbed a construction-led growth regime (Demirbag and Wood 2018).

4.1.2 Work and labor relations

Although the relative efficiency of the state's efforts to generate or sustain jobs has been disputed, clear progress has been made in developing industry and supporting relatively broad-based overall growth, even in the face of productivity issues (Abdukrakhamanov and Zokirova 2019). A major success has been the preservation and expansion of the motor industry, including truck manufacture and a large GM plant producing affordable basic cars for local consumers (Demirbag and Wood 2018). Such initiatives have made for a. significant pool of good jobs; in other words, a significant number of the workforce are in regular employment, with the continuities and basic rights and responsibilities associated with it.

Surplus labor has been partially mopped up by construction, with often inferior security of tenure and regulatory of work, offset by relatively high wages (Bazin 2008). Many workers form small social groupings, *mardikor*, who jointly rent accommodation in areas of high labor demand, and who rely on roadside recruitment by brokers or employers directly. In turn, such workers are engaged by remaining factory owners seeking to cut costs through accessing

cheaper labor (Bazin 2008). Many workers have sought employment abroad, most notably in Russia, where Uzbeks constitute the largest grouping of foreign workers (Kadirova 2015). Remittances alleviate rural poverty, whilst allowing workers to better their relative position through exit abroad; indeed, it has been argued that migrant remittances have relieved a great deal of internal pressure that might otherwise have built up in the system (Malyuchenko 2015). In other words, many Uzbek employees work abroad, and, hence, fall under the host country's labor relations system; however, as the migrant jobs they fill are often precarious, their de facto rights would be precarious, with workers trading off poor conditions against savings for a future better life at home. Since 1990, there has still been abiding employment and earnings insecurity for many, and in addition to migrancy, a common strategy is engaging in informal sector activities to supplement earnings (Kamp 2005). This route is particularly attractive to women, who, owing to social pressure, are less likely to embark on migrancy, and face discrimination in terms of access to tertiary education and many jobs; work remains gendered (Nurdinova 2014).

Collective farms have been broken up, to be replaced by private farms leased under five or ten-year concessions, who nonetheless continue to grow centrally determined crops, according to specified production norms. In turn, the new farmers - often former collective farm managers-enter into sharecropping arrangements with peasants that have been rendered landless (Bazin 2008). There is widespread usage of child labor for the picking of cotton (Keller 2015), reflecting in some instances, a reversion to pre-capitalist labor relations. Despite official policies, even in the Soviet era, mechanization was unattractive both in terms of costs and the perverse effects of incentives; high unemployment and pressures to cut costs have made for the persistence and expansion of manual labor, exacerbated by patriarchy and cultural values (Keller 2015). The phenomena of cheap labor displacing machinery are not unique to Central Asia, for example, the decline of automated car washes as witnessed in the UK; by the same measure, the scale and scope are much larger in the former, and, in turn, this makes for a particularly sharp contrast to those in regular or unionized employment.

In the post-Soviet era, there is widespread impressing of town dwellers and school children to seasonally pick cotton to avoid fines, a loss of employment, or expulsion from school (Fischer-Daly 2019). Low costs have enabled the state to capture significant surpluses, allowing for apparently successful investment in downstream textiles industrial industries, and funding construction-led growth (Lombardozzi 2019). Whilst undeniably repressive, the system

has consequently been able to fund diversification; radical neo-liberal reforms might have led to significant job losses and capital flight (Lombardozzi 2019).

Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian country to adopt a post-independence labor code, in 1995. It eliminated many of the broad declarations in its Soviet-era predecessor (Atkamovich 2020). Trade unions were assigned the responsibility of monitoring compliance with labor law, along with state regulatory bodies, and there is provision made for centralized bargaining (Aktamovich 2020). Under the law, the official function of trade unions is to support government policy; unions are clustered under the officially controlled Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (Fischer-Daly 2019). In 2019, a system of mediation was adopted, which, to date, has not been widely taken up (Aktamovich 2020). Nonetheless, both an adverse external labor market and widespread flouting of labor regulations with impunity; in contrast, under the Soviet era, the presence of official unions and party officials meant that there were some mechanisms for mediating excesses of individual managers (Bazin 2008). In addition to the lack of worker representation, a vigilant security state means that workers are very reluctant to engage in any activity that could be taken as political dissent. However, extended clan networks facilitate mobility between jobs and occupations, making for high staff turnover rates (Bazin 2008).

4.2 Turkmenistan

4.2.1 Political economy

Turkmenistan vies with Equatorial Guinea as the most closed and repressive society on earth, with loyalty to the personality of the president being equated with loyalty to the nation (Kuru 2002; Peyrouse 2015; Wood 2004). However, after the 2006 death of the founding president, Saparmurat Niyazov, Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov attained the presidency. The former dominant role of a personality cult was replaced by a focus on the political system as a whole (Polese et al. 2017). Radchenko (2017) argues that this meant that although just as authoritarian, the system became less outlandish. As with Equatorial Guinea, whilst labor rights are non-existent, private sector employers and other actors are also in a tenuous position, although MNEs (and their expatriate staffing) from major foreign powers may be in a somewhat more favorable position. Indeed, all aspects of economic and social life remain under strict political control (Polese et al. 2017). However, unlike the Equatorial Guinean state, which is almost wholly criminal, the Turkmenistan state has some focus on national development objectives, in addition to serving ruling elites (Peyrouse 2015; Radchenko 2017). This is not to suggest that

such development objectives may not always be realistic or appropriate, such as large-scale efforts to remodel nature and grandiose architectural projects. At the same time, its efforts have had the effect of generating and sustaining employment on a much bigger scale than predatory states in Latin America and West Africa.

Following Berdymuhamedov's succession to the presidency, the country moved to a nominally multiple party system, with ostensibly opposition parties being formed to represent different interest groupings in society. The largest was the Organization of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan, which won 33 out 125 seats, with other parties including Agrarian interests and a Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Polese et al. 2017). All parties were established on a top-down basis, present speeches in parliament that are pre-approved by the government, and laws are typically rubber-stamped, meaning that neither labor nor employers possess a genuinely independent voice (Polese et al. 2017). The government appears to have learned the lessons of the color-coded revolutions, including avoiding excessive international controversy so as not to encourage external funding of civil society groupings, and giving formal representation to social interest groupings and public positions to their leaders, even if they lack real power (Polese et al. 2017).

Turkmenistan's history is rather more fragmented, within the late pre-colonial period, under the rule of five states, each of whom viewed the Turkmen as a potentially disloyal element; Turkmen had many variations in dialects and identity (Edgar 2004). However, the Soviet model of creating Soviet Socialist Republics and promoting identities within them strengthened notions of identity and unity (Akbarzadeh 1999; Edgar 2004). Whilst artificial construction of identities might not seem to be very durable, Edgar (2004) argues that all nations have at least partially constructed their national stories that can become quite embedded. Soviet rule leads to the standardization of both education and language, and the nurturing of national political elites to undermine the status and position of traditional rulers and associated feudal or 'backward' practices (Edgar 2004). In turn, the new elites were influenced both by secular nations of Turkic nationalism, and the economic and political meaning that could be secured through signing up to the new national identity (Edgar 2004). However, the Soviet language of class was captured and redeployed to further clan interests and to undermine rivals (Edgar 2004; Peyrouse 2015). Turkmenistan has embarked on a program of privatization, notably in terms of construction and maintenance of transport and communication facilities (Duryev and Ismail 2017). However, there is a concern that influential political insiders may gain disproportionate

representation among private firms securing control of formerly public assets (Duryev and Ismail 2017).

4.2.2 Work and labor relations

The 2006 Berdymuhamedov succession revived the welfare state, with pensions being restored to 200,000 citizens, who had been stripped of these rights, and an overhaul for the social security system (Peyrouse 2010). In other words, there is a significant degree of social protection, which, in turn, would somewhat alleviate pressures on workers to support large numbers of dependents. It should also be noted that there is no billing for utilities and rents are very low, compensating for low wages; if workers do poorly in terms of the wages, indirectly or directly, this is offset by benefits accruing elsewhere in the system (Peyrouse 2010). Labor legislation in Turkmenistan centers on the *Labor Code of Turkmenistan.* It has, in formal terms, much in common with that in other post-Soviet successor states, including the provisions regarding dispute resolution, however, being rather vague as to who can access the labor disputes commission (Rahimqulova, 2021); central concerns would include a lack of enforcement of what worker rights might be agriculture and the lack of space for independent trade unions.

Turkmenistan has developed as a significant gas exporter, slowly gaining the interest of non-Russian—most notably, Chinese—players. However, the collapse of gas prices in 2017 led to a collapse in state revenues, which may leave the state heavily in the debt of China, or Russia (Jakóbowski and Marszewski 2018); recent increases in the gas price in 2021 may have helped offset this. Unlike Uzbekistan, the country has little in the way of industry, other than in the oil and gas industry, where regular employment is concentrated. This makes for a very constricted playing field for work and labor relations. As is the case with Uzbekistan, this has led to large numbers of guest workers in Russia, typically occupying precarious jobs, trading off benefits and working conditions in return for the ability to regularly remit and save money. At the same time, this mitigates unemployment and accordingly relieves pressure on the system (Starr, 2014).

Regular purges mean that state power is highly concentrated around the presidency, and the position of other interest groupings including both employers and labor is precarious. The relative position of labor is further weakened by high levels of unemployment and restrictions on geographical mobility. In the early Soviet era, few Turkmen had access to regular employment, but from the 1930s onward, more and more were enticed or, at times, coerced into

regular employment (Peyrouse 2015). The departure of Russian nationals has opened up new opportunities for Turkmen nationals, although the skills and training system is in poor repair (Peyrouse 2015). There is extensive state regulation of foreign qualifications making it even harder to match skills with jobs, whilst women continue to suffer from labor market discrimination (Hofmann 2018). Agriculture remains a major employer, although the fragility of the vast Karukum irrigation scheme casts a shadow of doubt over the future of the sector and the jobs it provides (Duan et al. 2019; O'Hara 1999). Some forty percent of the workforce are employed in agriculture, with, as with Uzkebistan, an important role being accorded to cotton; in addition to poor labor conditions, what makes employment more precarious are threats of desertification and excess salination as a result of poorly planned irrigation schemes (Baydildina et al. 2000). Labor scandals have led to pressures for foreign buyers to boycott cotton from this country (Natta, 2021). The government has sought to improve the labor market position of ethnic Turkmen through encouraging ethnic Russians and Kazakhs to return home, the former through a crackdown on dual nationality and the latter through an aggressive repatriation program (Malynovska, 2006). This represented a sharp reversal from the pre-independence situation, where ethnic Turkmen faced systematic labor market discrimination outside of agricultural work (Al-Bassam, 1996).

Restrictions on foreign travel mean that nationals do not have the same opportunities for overseas migrant labor enjoyed by nationals of the other Central Asian states, outside of working in Russia. This limits the options of domestic labor, placing them in a vulnerable bargaining position vis-à-vis their employer (Stronski 2017). There is widespread evidence of the extensive usage of child and foreign (ethnic Turkmen from Tajikistan) labor in the cotton industry, leading to some customers boycotting the product and others more closely monitoring their supply chain. The agricultural sector is dominated by peasant associations who get quotas set by the government, who, in turn, buy their goods at a fixed price (Stronski 2017).

5. Summary

This chapter examines contemporary labor-management relations in autocratic regimes, drawing on two sets of countries, namely hierarchical market economies in Latin America (Colombia and Honduras) and transitional peripheral economies in Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), for analysis. Extant research findings suggest that in some autocratic regimes, union activism is heavily repressed and union leaders (and their families) may put their

lives in danger. Indeed, in regions such as Latin America and Central Asia, there has been a rise in violence against unionists and worker activists to prevent unions from being formed or developed (Anner 2015; Gill 2014). In Colombia, for example, the history of armed conflict, state-sanctioned/tolerated violence, and the very weak labor law enforcement all have a negative impact on the labor movement (Fox-Hodess 2019).

Two important notions—political consolidation and regime resilience/continuity—need to be born in mind as the broader context when examining labor-management relations in autocratic regimes (Ambrosio 2014). It is also important to note that, just as there are different types of democratic systems, there are also different types of autocratic regimes with distinct political, economic, and social policy orientations. In part, this reflects the nature of elites and how seriously they take the need to actively work to sustain a critical mass of regular jobs.

International NGOs and consumer-driven activism in (Western) client countries have been the main source of external support to the labor movement in many of the smaller autocratic countries such as Colombia, Honduras, and Myanmar (e.g. Anne 2015). In other words, labor movement relies on association power rather than structural power, i.e. power at the point of production (Fox-Hodess 2019). However, these external resources and pressure come with their own constraints and agendas, and not all governments and national trade unions welcome the presence of these foreign forces, thus the latter need to operates in a precarious environment and need to be creative in their organizing strategy (e.g. Hui 2021).

Where border control is relaxed, both officially and unofficially, the emigration of skilled and more marketable workers in their prime years of productivity tends to weaken the collective organizing strength of those who are left behind on the one hand, as evidenced from Kazakhstan to Russia (Croucher 2015) and Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand and Vietnam (see Chapter 14). On the other hand, the presence of immigrant workers on large scale may weaken the already weak bargaining power of the workers who are citizens of autocratic countries, as is found in some of the central Asian countries. For example, Morrison et al.'s (2020) study of immigrant workers in Russia found that they were treated with union indifference and resorted to self-organizing.

How will labor-management relations in autocratic regimes develop in the future? It depends on many factors, including, for example, the level of external influence on the political system, the country's economic competitiveness in the global economy, the level of border openness towards foreign migrant labor, and the capacity of the domestic economy and labor

market in retaining its own skilled workers. Moving forward, the acceleration of innovation and application of digital technology may provide more information power that assists the rise of the digital state, which may serve to consolidate the power of autocratic regimes or create new pressure for greater transparency and accountability of the state that would benefit labor, contingent upon the regime type and the level of centralization and control, including the level of monopoly power of communication networks. There is insufficient research on labor-management relations in autocratic regimes, including those covered in this chapter. A notable exception is China, which has attracted a substantial amount of research (see also Chapter 14). We call for further research on this subject, albeit with immense challenges (Fuchs et al. 2019), to shed light on the changes, resilience, diversity, and dynamics of autocratic regimes and how these impact labor-management relations. Future research should also adopt a pluralistic approach to investigating signs of collaboration between labor and management to extend current knowledge generated primarily from a protest dynamic lens.

Cross-references of chapters in this volume:

Labor-Management Relations in Transition Economies

Labor-Management Relations in Emerging Economies and Developing Countries

Labor Standards

Decent Work and the Quality of Employment

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