

*** A slightly amended version of this article is forthcoming in the journal
Democratization**

Why Monarchy Persists in Small States: The Cases of Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein

Jack Corbett, University of Southampton

Wouter Veenendaal, Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean

Lhawang Ugyel, The Australian National University

Abstract

Monarchical rule is said to have become anachronistic in a modern age of legal rational orders and representative institutions. And yet, despite successive waves of democratization having usurped their authority across much of the globe, a select few monarchs remain defiant, especially in small states. This stubborn persistence raises questions about the application of Huntington's "King's Dilemma" in which modern monarchs are apparently trapped in a historical cycle that will ultimately strip them of meaningful power. Drawing on in-depth historical research in three small states that have sought to combine democratic and monarchical rule – Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein – we argue that, contra Huntington, monarchs in small states are neither doomed to disappear nor are they likely to be overwhelmed by the dilemma posed by modernist development. The lesson is that the size of political units is a critical variable too often overlooked in existing studies.

Modern monarchs, Samuel Huntington famously argued, face a fundamental dilemma.¹ On the one hand, to promote social, cultural and economic development monarchs must centralise power. On the other hand, such reforms create a new cadre of elites whose political participation threatens to undermine their authority. By delaying modernist reform in favour of traditionalism the monarch can retain authority. But, stymieing progress increases the risk of popular revolt. As a result, Huntington argues, a peaceful transition from absolute monarchy to an electoral regime is virtually impossible. The modern monarch is caught in a perpetual trap that

they cannot ever hope to escape and as a result modernists must eventually strip them of all meaningful authority. In the ensuing half a century since Huntington outlined this prediction numerous cases would appear to bear his argument out. Most recently, the “Third Wave” is said to have all but brought an end to absolute monarchy as a modern political regime.² Instead, democratic constitutions have usurped their power, either dismantling royal households altogether or limiting their influence to the performance of rituals, ceremonies and traditions.

Huntington’s analysis remains one of the most sustained attempts to theorise both the rise of democratic regimes in the 20th Century *and* the demise of monarchy as a credible alternative. Where other scholars have tended to focus on the way industrialisation and economic growth in particular underpin social conditions that pave the way for democratic rule,³ Huntington focused on the means by which different regimes derive their legitimacy, thus underscoring the continued relevance of his work. The problem with his script, however, is that it struggles to explain the last remaining monarchies that have seemingly defied successive rolling waves of democratization to retain a level of authority and influence in modern politics. There are approximately twenty absolute or semi-absolute monarchical regimes in the world today, most of them located on the Arabian Peninsula. Interestingly however, many of these last monarchies are among the world’s smallest states (defined here as those countries with populations of less than 1.5 million). This is remarkable for a number of reasons, including the fact that small states are, on average, much more likely to be democratic than large ones,⁴ but also because the size and relative power of small states should, in theory, make them especially receptive to democratization via demonstration effects.⁵ The stubborn persistence of modern monarchs in small states raises questions about the application of Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma”, at least in these cases.

In this article we ask how monarchs in three small states – Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein – have managed to either negotiate or sidestep Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma”. By tracing how modern monarchs have involved themselves in the process of democratization we show that, contra Huntington, they are neither doomed to disappear nor are they likely to be overwhelmed by the dilemma posed by modernist development. We argue that the ability of monarchs in small states to retain legitimacy⁶ despite democratic reform can be explained by their size, which has two distinct effects: institutional fidelity and personalisation.

Institutional fidelity refers to the relative absence of revolution and propensity of small states to retain key features of political systems even amidst periods of considerable political change. In this important sense, small states are inherently conservative, albeit in a very different form to the ideologically conservative manner common to right wing parties in large states. The literature advances two explanations for this: 1) their inherent vulnerability in an international system made up of many more larger states means small states are typically unwilling to risk instability; and 2) reduced social distance (colloquially: “everybody knows everybody”) works against pluralism and public dissent.⁷

These same factors also result in power being more likely to be concentrated in the hands of individuals rather than legal rational institutions in small states. Based on this observation, we define personalisation as the tendency for politics to focus on personal characteristics and relations rather than abstract ideologies, policies, or political programs.⁸ For example, it is common for public figures in small states to play multiple social roles – political, economic, religious etc. – that are typically separate or specialised in larger states.⁹

The combination of institutional fidelity and personalisation means that monarchs in small states are often very popular – they are not remote or distant figures – which makes it easier for them to retain personal authority. And, they can also be relatively confident that the majority of their subjects will not seek to advance a more radical political agenda than their own. This can help us explain how monarchs have managed to either negotiate or sidestep the King’s Dilemma in our three cases: rather than competing forms of legitimacy small state monarchs have managed to portray themselves as *both* the custodian of tradition *and* the harbinger of modernization. The result is that small state monarchies can be remarkably durable.

To support this assertion the article is divided into the following sections. First, we flesh out our argument about the way state size shapes the transition from monarchy to democracy, and vice versa. We then outline our case selection and methodological approach. Thirdly, drawing on the public record and our own fieldwork in each of the three selected small monarchies, we provide in-depth qualitative case studies of the processes by which recent political changes have occurred in these countries. In Tonga the late King Tupou V’s decision to cede power to the legislative assembly ushered in a new era of democratic rule. Likewise, in Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck promoted democratic reform in the face of

societal opposition. Conversely, in Liechtenstein Prince Hans-Adam II has increased his power relative to democratic institutions on the back of popular disenchantment with elected representatives. We show that in each case the ability of the monarch to either promote or stymie democratisation is strongly related to the small size of our three cases. In the final section we return to the theoretical significance of this piece and its implications for how we understand the influence of state size on democratic transition and consolidation.

Monarchy, democratic transitions, and state size

Since at least the 1950-60s when decolonization led to the emergence of many new nation-states in Africa and Asia, democracy promotion efforts have focused on the necessary and sufficient conditions that brought these changes about. By and large we think that democracy is more likely to occur when countries are wealthy, socially homogenous, operate consociational institutions, have stable party systems, and are located near other democracies.¹⁰ In turn, creating these conditions has become key to democracy promotion efforts around the world.

The problem with these common theories of democratization is that they fail the most basic empirical tests because small states have been systematically excluded from most analyses.¹¹ Small states around the world are statistically more likely to have democratic governments than large ones, irrespective of the presence or absence of the above variables.¹² At the same time, as we discussed above, small states are also more likely to be monarchies, and various combinations of democracy and monarchy can be seen across this group of cases. 12 out of the 40 smallest states in the world (24 per cent) are monarchies, and while six of these are classified as ‘free’ by Freedom House, two are categorised as ‘partially free’, and four as ‘not free’. Indeed, we might think of monarchs in small states as existing on a continuum with ceremonial monarchs (e.g. Luxembourg and Lesotho) at one end and absolute monarchies (e.g. Bahrain, Brunei, and Swaziland) on the other. To examine how monarchs in small states deal with Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma”, in this article we zoom in on three members of the intermediate group of semi-constitutional monarchies: Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein.¹³ We define semi-constitutional monarchies as systems in which the actions of monarchs are circumscribed by a constitution, but in which monarchs, as independent and autonomous political actors, nonetheless have the capacity to exert a large measure of political influence.

Drawing on the existing literature on small state democracy, we argue that there are two primary reasons for the persistence of monarchy – institutional fidelity and personalization – in these settings. The “pragmatic conservatism” of small states has long been a feature of the scholarship on their politics. Paul Sutton, for instance, argues that:

“Those who live in small states cling tenaciously to familiar patterns of life. Their settled conservatism stems from a caution born of long experience with resources whose exploitation is severely limited by scale, by isolation, and by physical and economic hazards beyond their control. These constraints incline residents toward the maintenance of continuity, the practice of conservation, and the hedging of bets by taking on multiple occupations. (...) The persistence of monarchy and/or a special role for chiefs within their political systems is one expression of this fact, as is the limited role women play in political life as traditionally conceived”.¹⁴

In relation to monarchy, the inherent institutional fidelity (or ‘conservatism’) of small states can in part be attributed to their symbolic relationship with the very existence of the sovereign state. Historically, many small states would not exist but for the interventions of their monarchs, as monarchical families often played a key role in the birth of these political entities. This is the case for European microstates like Monaco and Liechtenstein, but also for the Gulf states, the southern African monarchies, and Bhutan, Brunei, and Tonga, where European colonizers recognized and to varying extents respected the pre-existing monarchical arrangements. More than in larger states, in which identities can be constructed on the basis of a greater variety of sources and objects, small state monarchies often become synonymous with the state itself.

The tendency to consider the monarchy an essential component of the identity of the state may further increase when the monarch also vocally defends national or traditional values of the country (s)he reigns, and in this sense represents a conservative political force. Small states are inherently vulnerable in the international system.¹⁵ If, under such circumstances, monarchs fulfill the role of national protectors, citizens may come to believe that the international survival of their state is inextricably linked to the monarchy. In turn, such perceptions enhance the legitimacy

and political position of monarchs among the small state population. The centrality of the monarch to the life of the nation in small states can also explain why they are able to achieve the delicate balance that Huntington believes is impossible between being the custodian of social traditions on the one hand and the harbinger of modernization and development on the other. To explain this link, however, we also need to acknowledge a second prevailing feature of small state politics: the ubiquity of personalization.

By virtue of their size, all politics, including both monarchy and democracy, in small states is defined by the reduced social proximity between the ruler and the ruled. Monarchs are rarely remote and distant figures in small states in the way they came to be perceived by revolutionary and republican movements in larger countries. In which case, contra Huntington, in small states they are able to both devolve authority and remaining *personally* popular. That is, the person often appears more popular than the institution they represent. Indeed, as we will show, monarchs in these contexts have been able to successfully entrench their authority while also initiating democratization. The effect of this is that, again, contra Huntington, the transition from monarchy to democracy can be relatively peaceful when initiated by a popular sovereign.

Case selection and approach

To investigate Huntington's argument against our own we examine the process of recent political change in three hitherto understudied cases: Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein. More than half of the world's last remaining absolute and semi-absolute monarchies are small states with less than 1.5 million inhabitants. But, small states are also much more likely than large ones to have stable and long lasting democratic regimes.¹⁶ This somewhat paradoxical combination makes them ideal cases for comparative analysis. In this article we look at three small states that have sought to combine democratic and monarchical elements, and which to varying degrees have experienced changes in the balance of power between the two. Huntington offers three possible strategies for monarchs seeking to escape the King's Dilemma: 1) promote movement towards modernisation; 2) combine monarchical rule and popular authority, 3) retain power by any means. We choose three cases that illustrate each of these strategies: Tonga, Bhutan and Liechtenstein respectively.

Our case selection is significant because it allows us to control for the full range of necessary and sufficient preconditions that democratization scholars commonly identify.¹⁷ All three countries have largely avoided colonisation, thus bracketing historical sociological explanations that emphasise the importance of colonial heritage as causing institutional fidelity, and have not been part of separatist or breakaway movements.¹⁸ In this sense they are outliers in the extant “Third Wave” debates. They also come from different regions of the world and have varying degrees of economic wealth, thus controlling for the main assumptions in the extant modernisation literature. In addition, our “most different” case selection¹⁹ enables us to more clearly identify the effects of smallness in each of the three cases. Civil society organisations and popular movements have played some role but, given their small size, the strength and capacity of such actors remains an ongoing concern for democracy promoters. In turn, as individual scholars of each of these countries have observed,²⁰ voluntarist theories of democratization tend to have more empirical purchase.

Having controlled for factors that democratization scholars identify as causing and sustaining transition, we then look within each case to identify how political transition occurred. Analytically, we combine original empirical material, including in-depth interviews with key political elites in all three countries, with secondary literature. The result is a series of historically orientated case studies that follow Cameron Thies’ guidelines for qualitative historical analysis involving ‘thick description’.²¹ After providing a brief overview of the political histories and basic facts (i.e. descriptive statistics) of our three cases, we discuss how the motivations, perspectives, and actions of three monarchs have influenced the trajectories of each regime. This comparative analysis allows us to identify commonalities and differences between our three cases, and to determine how the smallness of each country influenced political developments in recent decades.

Tonga’s path to democracy

The story of modern Tonga, an island nation with a population of just over 100,000 in the South Pacific, is often said to begin in 1875 with the promulgation of a written constitution establishing the monarchy and a landed gentry alongside certain Westminster-style institutions, including a legislature, judiciary, prime minister and cabinet. The rationale for the 1875 constitution was twofold: it allowed Tonga to look sufficiently like a modern state to avoid being colonised by larger powers, while also

enabling the then King Tupou I to consolidate and centralise authority.²² In the ensuing century the centralisation of authority enabled successive monarchs to retain a degree of sovereignty and pursue modernist-orientated reforms with considerable initial success. But, in the latter half of the 20th century, amidst a succession of costly government blunders and stalling economic progress, political agitation in the form of a pro-democracy movement gathered momentum. Popular disenchantment with the way power was being exercised placed considerable pressure on the government to pursue meaningful political reform. But, while the aging King Tupou IV held the throne these efforts were ignored or blocked.²³ After his death in 2006, the new King, Tupou V, initiated a reform process that resulted in democratically orientated constitutional amendments. Based on this brief summary, of our three cases the Tongan story appears to conform closest to Huntington's script. And yet, the continued authority of the monarch in Tongan society and the popularity of the King undermines Huntington's central claim.

The reason for this disjuncture becomes apparent when we probe deeper into the micro politics of more than a century of political reform. Christianity, not economic development, was central to the consolidation of power in late 19th century and early 20th century Tonga. Wesleyan missionaries were an important influence on the 1875 constitution-making process while the Church organisation provided Queen Salote, who ruled the islands from 1918 to 1965, with the means to further establish her authority. By and large, Salote eschewed economic modernisation with the important exception of her children who were educated overseas. This would prove crucial as her son and successor, Tupou IV, the first Tongan to gain a university degree, would ascend to the throne in 1965 with a modernist development agenda. Under the 1875 constitution the monarch is both head of state and head of government with the power to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Backed by the legal legitimacy but also unprecedented customary authority, Tupou IV oversaw investment in infrastructure and education in particular, but most importantly sought to open Tonga up to the influence of the outside world:

We [Privy Council] met every week, once a week, and so in that sense we would understand where he was coming from, what his thoughts were, and wanted us to focus on. We would provide him with reports ... [He was] very

hands on. It was not just a matter of reigning, he actually ruled. And so that is how the relationship was.²⁴

And, by and large, the initial results were impressive with the country held up as a regional model of growth and progress throughout the 1970s.²⁵ Echoing the inherent “King’s Dilemma”, however, to achieve these gains Tupou IV required an educated and technically competent elite. Many of these were drawn from the nobility but the new openness also provided scope for commoners to gain access to education, usually overseas and at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, in particular. It was here, in the 1970s, that Tonga’s pro-democracy movement emerged.

The extent to which the movement was ever unified or centrally organised remains contentious.²⁶ The common thread is the presence of undisputed figurehead, schoolteacher turned politician, Akilisi Pohiva. Pohiva attended USP in the 1970s and was later dismissed from the civil service for critical radio broadcasts. He subsequently won a landmark legal case against the government for unfair dismissal and denial of freedom of speech. In the interim he obtained a seat in Tonga’s legislative assembly. From 1981 the assembly had 18 members: 9 drawn from the 30 noble titleholders and 9 “people’s representatives” elected by popular vote from the population at large.²⁷ But, it had little meaningful power. Typically the Prime Minister was a close relative of the King and most of the ministers were nobles. Laws were initiated by the Cabinet and passed by the Assembly, which comprised of the Cabinet, the 9 nobles and the 9 peoples representatives. Bills required the King’s assent before becoming law and the people’s representatives had no prospect of forming government. But, membership of the assembly did provide Pohiva and his allies with a platform from which to criticise the way the country was run.

The pro-democracy movement’s initial concerns were corruption and accountability but over time their platform broadened to include Tonga’s system of entrenched privilege that ensured vast inequalities in the distribution of land and resources. Activism proceeded on numerous fronts, including in the assembly but also among an emerging civil society and the Atenisi Institute in particular.²⁸ After Pohiva’s radio broadcasts were halted in 1985, a monthly newspaper, *Kele’a*, became the main platform for the dissemination of democratic ideas.²⁹ Later, Kalafi Moala’s *Taimi O Tonga* became another important outlet for critical commentary.³⁰ Further support and resources came in the form of remittances from the growing Tongan

diaspora living in Australia and New Zealand. But, while the financial support was important, the simultaneous “brain drain” meant that many of the most capable and politically aware Tongans had left, thus easing political pressure.³¹ Key figures in the church also came to support the pro-democracy cause.

King Tupou IV and his government responded using all of the strategies that Huntington outlines, including attempts to co-opt progressive elites, repression, prosecution and intimidation.³² Pohiva and others spent time in prison as a result of their political actions. Appeals to culture, tradition and former glory of the Tongan people formed the other strand of the ruling class’s response.³³ And so, as long as Tupou IV remained in power, increasingly vocal calls for reform fell on deaf ears.³⁴ From 2004, with Tupou IV clearly ailing, the crown prince and his sister oversaw several progressive changes, including the establishment of a political reform committee.³⁵ While some welcomed these moves as positive steps, the scale and vocality of civil service strikes in 2005 further emboldened reformist claims that they did not go far enough.

Tupou IV died in September 2006 and was succeeded by his son, Tupou V. By 2010 the constitution was amended to provide that the ‘Form of Government’ is now a ‘Constitutional Monarchy’ (rather than ‘Constitutional Government’) in which:

The executive authority of the Kingdom shall vest in Cabinet, which shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly for the executive functions of Government.³⁶

The makeup of the Assembly was also altered with 17 people’s representatives now sitting alongside the 9 nobles in a 26 member legislature (the constitution also permits the Prime Minister to choose up to four additional ministers from outside the house). The Monarch still retains considerable powers, including the ability to veto bills and appoint the judiciary but Tupou V’s successor, Tupou VI, plays no role in Cabinet decision-making. And, symbolic of the magnitude of these changes, in the 2014 elections Pohiva was elected Prime Minister.

In relation to Huntington, the Tongan case is remarkable for several reasons, including most obviously the absence of modernist industrial development (Tonga’s GNI per capita hovers just above the US \$5,000 mark) and the role of religious institutions in particular, but also because it was marked by a transition of power that

followed with the terms of the nation's constitution.³⁷ That is not to understate the significance of the 2006 riots in which eight people were killed and considerable property destroyed. But, for now, 135 years after the 1875 constitution was first established, a new balance appears to have reached in which respect for Tongan traditions and the authority of the monarch is preserved – and even enhanced – alongside democratic norms and practices. Indeed, it is important to note that the aim of mainstream reformers was not to abolish the monarchy but to reform it from within and thus retain its centrality in the life of the nation. For the most part this settlement reflects the intentional decisions and actions (or non-decisions and non-actions) of key figures, including King Tupou IV and King Tupou V and Pohiva in particular.

Bhutan's transition to democracy

Bhutan, a small country with a population of 730,000 with a GDP per capita just over US \$2000, is located in the South Asian subcontinent. The closest Bhutan came to colonisation was when it lost some parts of its fertile southern Duars to the British in the Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65. Otherwise, unlike most of its neighbours in South Asia, Bhutan was never subject to colonial rule. In 2008 Bhutan held its first democratic elections. What makes this case especially interesting is that unlike Tonga, in Bhutan the King initiated reform in the face of significant popular opposition. And yet, despite the majority of Bhutanese preferring monarchy over democracy, the transition was peaceful with most observers arguing that it was a qualified success. The European Union Election Observation Mission, for example, stated that '24 March [2008] marks a successful and orderly change of political system in Bhutan from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy'; and that an 80 per cent voter turnout and the commitment of state institutions to support the democratic process provides a solid foundation for a credible democratic future.³⁸

The unique nature of this transition has generated considerable debate among academics. Here we focus on two areas of disagreement – the absence of popular protest and the motivations of the monarch – to flesh out our argument. As above, the overwhelming interpretation of Bhutan's transition is that it took place in the absence of popular movement for democracy, with Bhutan's monarchs the leading force for change.³⁹ In this common explanation there was no economic crisis nor was there any pressure from the international community.⁴⁰ The transition was 'peaceful, calm and unflinching'⁴¹; and was initiated by the King rather than a 'revolutionary movement

or a national catastrophe'.⁴² This 'radical step', involving the voluntary reallocation of power was introduced in the 'face of remarkable indifference towards democracy by the people'.⁴³

This indifference or even suspicion of democracy among Bhutanese is often attributed to demonstration effects with the 'messy' experience of neighbouring countries such as Nepal and India, where unrest, divisiveness and partisan politics are common, worrying the Bhutanese people and the urban population in particular.⁴⁴ In public consultations individuals expressed concern that the 'Constitution and democracy were coming too early to Bhutan, and that the interests of the people would be forgotten if the monarchy was to devolve power to the political parties'.⁴⁵ The King responded:

Bhutan, through good fortune and fate, could not hope for a better moment than now for this historical development and would never find another opportunity like this to introduce a Constitution that would provide a democratic system of government best suited for the future well-being of the nation ... In many countries, constitutions are drafted during times, under pressure from political influences and interest, but Bhutan is fortunate that the change came without any pressure or compulsion.⁴⁶

Obviously, the absence of societal opposition supports our thesis so it is important that we examine the credibility of the alternative explanation. The argument against the prevailing view is that it fails to take into account the pressure applied on the regime by the 'approximately 100,000 refugees, who criticise the absence of democracy from outside the country'.⁴⁷ These refugees, who claimed Bhutanese citizenship as a part of Southern Bhutan, agitated for increased influence, rights to citizenship and cultural and civil rights in the late 1980s. Two counter arguments are important here. The first is that even if the population of Southern Bhutan was more pro-democratic than the rest of the country they still constitute a considerable minority. More importantly, however, this argument overlooks the timing and sequence of decisions. The refugee issue was close to being resolved at the time the political reforms were initiated. A five-member core group under the leadership of the United States of America and comprising of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands and Norway was formed in September 2006 in New York. These

governments agreed to resettle the Southern Bhutanese refugees in their countries. That is not to say that these events did not play into the King's thinking, but it is hard to make a plausible case that his was not the decisive hand.

If we follow the prevailing view that the King was the key architect of this transition, the important point, in relation to Huntington, was his motivation. In Huntington's thesis, the Monarch only cedes power to democratic institutions if they think it will help them retain power. However, while this will help in the long term, in time, Huntington argues, democratic institutions will ultimately undermine monarchical authority. It is too early to test this argument in the Bhutan case – but see the below discussion of Liechtenstein – and so for now we will focus on the first point about the King's initial motivation.

The process of democratization started in 1953 when the Third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (r.1952-1972) created an independent parliament comprising of a mix of representatives from the government and the public. The Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r.1972-2006), continued the democratic reform process with the creation of *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogdus* (DYT) or the District Development Committee in every *dzongkhag* (administrative unit) in 1981 and the subsequent establishment of *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (GYT) or the Block Development Committee in every *gewog* (sub-administrative unit) in 1991. The DYT and GYT sought to involve the people in decision-making processes through local government elections. The Fourth King's second key decision involved the devolution of his executive powers to a Council of Ministers elected by Bhutan's parliament in 1998. Finally, these political changes culminated in the drafting of the Constitution in 2001, followed by the first democratic parliamentary elections held in 2008.

This sequence is said to support the prevailing view that Bhutan's democratic transition was a 'gift' of the King to the people.⁴⁸ In this interpretation, the King is a benevolent monarch who acted against his own interests by ceding power.⁴⁹ According to Gallenkamp, the transition to democracy in Bhutan was pursued by the King with an 'honest commitment to the wellbeing of the people and the nation'.⁵⁰ Kaul also adds that Bhutan's democracy is a 'gift' from the monarch who despite considerable personal authority with widespread support voluntarily gave up his powers.⁵¹

The alternate interpretation is that the King's decision to adopt the Constitution 'voluntarily' was crucially influenced by its closest neighbour, India.⁵²

To support this view, Hutt and Bothe allude to an increase in India's aid to Bhutan by 50 per cent at the same time that democratic reforms were initiated.⁵³ While the timing of these events is indeed important, the causal relationship is less certain. The increase in aid also came about just after Operation All Clear – a military operation initiated by the Royal Bhutan Army under the direct command of the Fourth King of Bhutan in 2003 against groups of Indian militants taking temporary shelter in the Southern foothills of Bhutan. The operation earned the 'admiration of the government of India' towards Bhutan, and a strengthening of the bilateral relations between the two countries, which in turn beget increased assistance from India.⁵⁴ Putting aside the importance of aid, however, Bothe further argues that in Bhutan the process of 'constitutionalization ... tends to reposition the monarchy in a concrete, dignified and elevated position of power'.⁵⁵ This argument falls in line with Huntington's view that modern monarch's only initiate democracy when it serves their interests.

The whole question of motivations is inherently complex, however, and so we cannot and do not dismiss this argument. Rather, in relation to Huntington, the important point is that regardless of intent, the increased authority of the monarch has indeed been the effect of democratic reforms. Sinpeng, for example, argues that in Bhutan the 'monarchy is here to stay'.⁵⁶ Indeed, the irony is that by construing democracy as a 'gift' and affirming the contingent nature of monarchical power, the King simultaneously devolved authority *and* cemented the monarchy's place in Bhutanese socio-political life. In doing so he ensured a peaceful transition to democracy and sidestepped Huntington's King's Dilemma, at least for a time.

***Gott, Fürst, und Vaterland*¹: the Principality of Liechtenstein**

Sandwiched between Austria and Switzerland, the Principality of Liechtenstein is an Alpine micro-monarchy with approximately 37.000 inhabitants and a territory of 160 square kilometers. According to figures of various international organizations, Liechtenstein has the highest GDP per capita figure in Europe, and possibly in the world (together with Qatar). The territory of contemporary Liechtenstein was purchased in 1699 and 1712 by the Austrian aristocratic family Von und Zu Liechtenstein. In ensuing centuries successive generations of this family ruled the territory from Vienna. After the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806,

¹ In English: "God, Prince, and Fatherland."

Liechtenstein became one of the 39 members of the German Confederation, a loose economic association of German-speaking territories. When this Confederation was terminated, and the newly created German and Austro-Hungarian Empires emerged, Liechtenstein effectively became a self-governing territory.⁵⁷ In 1921 a new constitution established a so-called “dualistic” system whereby both the Prince and the people rule (it had previously been an absolute monarchy).⁵⁸ The ensuing political system has been characterized as a constitutional monarchy, but in fact the role played by the *Landesfürst* or Prince is much greater than that of monarchs in other European constitutional monarchies. As a result, it makes more sense to categorize Liechtenstein as a semi-constitutional monarchy, which is comparable to Jordan, Morocco, and Thailand.

In strictly formal terms, the position of the Prince in the political system of Liechtenstein is not that different from the position of the British monarch in the political system of the United Kingdom. However, as David Beattie underscores, a key difference is that in contrast to monarchs in larger European monarchies, the Princes of Liechtenstein actually make use of their prerogatives.⁵⁹ On paper, the monarchy in Liechtenstein can veto laws and dismiss the government and parliament, and while these rights have not often been invoked, successive Princes of Liechtenstein have occasionally made use of these powers, or have threatened to do so. Alongside this tradition of monarchical intervention, Liechtenstein has a long history of direct democracy, but while the number of direct democracy instruments in the microstate is more extensive even than neighboring Switzerland, in practice it is much less frequently applied.⁶⁰

The case of Liechtenstein provides a clear demonstration that personal leadership matters in small states. The contemporary hereditary Prince – Hans Adam II – is widely regarded as having a much more confrontational and controversial ruling style than his predecessors,⁶¹ and since his inauguration in 1989 there have been a number of severe conflicts between the Prince and democratically elected politicians. In 1992, a conflict about Liechtenstein’s accession to the European Economic Area (EEA) sparked a 10-year constitutional crisis that centered on the position of the Prince in Liechtenstein politics. Arguing that the monarchy had played a crucial role in the establishment and survival of Liechtenstein, the Prince made it clear that he would not accept limitation of his powers, and even threatened to leave the country if his proposals for constitutional reform were not accepted.⁶² While

political parties were internally divided about the issue, during a referendum in 2003, 65 per cent percent of voters endorsed the constitutional proposals of the Prince, which are broadly seen to have augmented his powers.⁶³ The European Council and other international actors voiced their criticism of the reforms, which were considered to weaken Liechtenstein's democracy.

According to Prince Hans-Adam II, the constitutional reforms of 2003 have actually provided for a democratic legitimation of the monarchy in Liechtenstein, because they entail a regulation that provides for the abolishment of the monarchy.⁶⁴ According to the new constitution, if a majority of citizens votes for the abolition of the monarchy during a popular referendum, the monarchy will be dismissed.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the reforms have increased the influence of the Prince on the appointment of judges, and have reconfirmed and possibly extended his authority to veto decisions of parliament and results of popular referendums.⁶⁶ The consequences of the latter regulation became profoundly clear in the wake of a popular referendum on the abortion law in 2012, when the hereditary Prince already in advance to the vote announced that he would veto a law allowing for abortions, effectively rendering the referendum meaningless. According to critics of the monarchy, such as Liechtenstein's democracy movement, the 2003 reforms have distorted the constitutional dualism between Prince and people, because the Prince has increased his influence vis-à-vis all three branches of government (i.e. government, parliament, and the courts) and can veto outcomes of referendums and other plebiscites.⁶⁷ According to Wilfried Marxer, the 2003 reforms have actually eroded the authority of representative institutions.⁶⁸

The dynamics of Liechtenstein politics in the last two decades, and the enduring discussion about the role of the monarchy, are clearly also influenced by the smallness of the country.⁶⁹ Apart from the observation that traditional forms of leadership such as monarchy are more common in smaller settings,⁷⁰ it is also clear that small societies frequently have a 'dominant cultural code'⁷¹ to which all members of society are expected to subscribe, while those who express dissenting opinions tend to face social exclusion and ostracism.⁷² As the results of recently held referendums demonstrate, in Liechtenstein approximately two thirds of the population is highly supportive of the Prince, and considers the monarchy to be an essential part of the Liechtenstein identity. According to some observers, by threatening to withdraw to

Vienna and by referring to his critics as “enemies”, the current Prince strongly appeals to these emotional sentiments of the Liechtenstein population.⁷³

In defending the position of the monarchy in Liechtenstein, Prince Hans-Adam II has also frequently appealed to the lack of trust in elected politicians and political institutions. Referring to the parliament and government as ‘the oligarchy’,⁷⁴ the Prince cautions that the monarchy and the people must be protected against elected politicians, who not only tend to be corrupt, but will also permanently seek to maximize their influence. By identifying the political elite as the common enemy of both the monarchy and the people, the Prince essentially employs populist tactics to bolster his own position vis-à-vis the *Landtag* (parliament) and *Regierung* (government). As in other constitutional monarchies, survey data tends to reveal that people in Liechtenstein have more trust in the monarchy than in elected politicians,⁷⁵ and these sentiments are successfully exploited by the reigning Prince. According to critics, veiled attacks against politicians have resulted in self-censorship among the members of government and parliament, who are electorally dependent on maintaining a positive view of the Prince and face a Princely veto should they attempt to curb his authority.

In addition to denouncing elected politicians, the Prince of Liechtenstein also repeatedly appeals to nationalist sentiments by citing external threats to the Principality. The Council of Europe’s opposition to the constitutional reforms of 2003 was condemned by the Prince as an external attempt to interfere with the sovereignty and self-determination rights of the Liechtenstein people.⁷⁶ The global financial and economic crisis of 2008 generated strong international pressure on Liechtenstein to end its tax haven status and reform its banking system. In response, the Prince talked about his ‘powerful enemies in the north’ and expressed his confidence that the country would survive the ‘fourth Reich’ (a reference to the German government).⁷⁷ These remarks were broadly denounced, but clearly attest to the anti-foreigner sentiments that the Prince sometimes panders to.

Whereas the Prince plays a very active role in Liechtenstein politics, and ‘is unrepentant about causing controversy with speeches’,⁷⁸ both his predecessor and heir appear to have a more diplomatic and modest ruling style. In 2004, the reigning Prince indicated that he would leave the day-to-day management of the country in the hands of his son, the hereditary Prince Alois, who is regarded as less confrontational. This observation is in line with our broader supposition that personal leadership

makes a difference in small states, and to a large degree determines the course of small state politics. While the constitutional position of the Prince in the Liechtenstein system is unlikely to change, a passing of royal power strongly affects the practical authority of the monarchy vis-à-vis the other institutions in the political system of the Principality.

Conclusion: the king's dilemma in small states

In all three of our cases, a composite and fluctuating combination between representative democracy and monarchical rule can be observed. In two of our cases – Bhutan and Tonga – monarchical rulers have sought to appease liberal and progressive elements of society by absorbing them into the ruling regime.⁷⁹ In doing so they have retained their authority *and* provided an avenue or outlet for progressive politics. This strategy, Huntington argues, delays rather than resolves the King's Dilemma and as such is ultimately doomed to fail. In time, he maintains, progressive elements will undermine the legitimacy of the traditional order on which the authority of the monarch is based, leading to political change. Certainly, Huntington concedes that placating liberal elements is both necessary and effective in the early phases of modernisation. In Liechtenstein, however, the ruling Prince has recently sought to extend his authority by successfully exerting a power play against elected politicians, whom he refers to as “the oligarchy”. By using populist tactics, the Prince has in fact confronted and to some extent overmatched the liberal elements in Liechtenstein society. As this particular case shows, the supposedly linear pathway from “traditional” to “modern” forms of political authority rests on two questionable assumptions – that there is only one path to modernity and that all states must eventually follow it – and so we conclude by unpacking these assumptions and considering their implication for theories of democratic transition and consolidation.

While Huntington's King' Dilemma is a useful analytic device for unpacking the types of choices that today's monarchs face, our cases also appear to highlight its limitations, with reformers in all our three countries resolute in their belief that the monarchy retains a central role in modern society. In Tonga the monarch retains considerable formal powers and popular support. If anything, it is the role of the nobility that has been undermined by recent reforms. Similarly, in Bhutan the monarch enjoys the support and confidence of the people. Although the Constitution has reduced the absolute powers of the monarch, it continues to wield considerable

nominal power because of its popularity. In Liechtenstein, monarchy and (direct) democracy are the twin pillars of the political system. Despite considerable domestic and international opposition, the 2003 reforms have bolstered the position of the monarchy at the expense of representative institutions and direct democracy. As a result, we argue, Liechtenstein has joined Monaco as the least democratic country in Western Europe. A broader analysis of *all* remaining monarchies is required to definitively disprove Huntington's hypothesis but for now our aims are both more modest and fundamental: to explore the resilience of monarchs in three small states and so consider what their experience can reveal about existing theories and patterns of democratization. The lesson is that the size of political units is a critical variable too often overlooked in existing studies.

Like most of the world's last remaining monarchies, our three cases have populations of less than 1.5 million people. Their experience supports Paul Sutton's view that small states are more likely to retain institutional fidelity than large states.⁸⁰ In all three of our cases the monarchy is strongly linked to the existence and international sovereignty of the state, and in all three cases this notion appears to have bolstered the position of the monarchy vis-à-vis potential republican elements. In contrast to Huntington, and paradoxically from the perspective of democratization theory, to various extents the inhabitants of the three small states appear happy to relinquish some of their democratic rights to powerful monarchs. In addition to the prevalence of conservatism, part of the reason for this, we argue, is the personalisation of politics in these contexts. In all three cases the monarchs in question were not just symbolically popular, they were also *personally* popular. That is not to say that monarchs in large states cannot achieve personal popularity – quite the opposite – but rather that the significance of personalisation is magnified in small states due to the close proximity between the ruler and the ruled. The result is that monarchs are not remote or distant figures, thus undermining the potential for the regime to become a symbol of oppression.

In sum, while Huntington's "King's Dilemma" offers a useful analytic device that can help us understand the types of choices that monarchs are confronted with in the modern world, his prediction that monarchs must eventually disappear struggles to explain recent events in Liechtenstein, Tonga or Bhutan. Indeed, all three examples illustrate how both monarchy and democracy can be resilient and adaptive forms of political organisation. To be sure, this phenomenon may be isolated to small states.

But given that this group of countries are paradoxically *both* more democratic and more monarchical than large states, their experience is of considerably greater intellectual importance than the marginal position they currently occupy in comparative political science. By studying monarchy in small states we learn something important about large states, too.

Notes

¹ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 177.

² Huntington, *Third Wave*.

³ The most famous alternative is Lipset, "Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy." 69-105.

⁴ Diamond and Tsalik, *Size and Democracy*; Ankar, "Small Is Democratic, But Who Is Small?"; Veenendaal and Corbett, "Why Small States Offer Important Answers to Large Questions."

⁵ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 100-106; Bamert, Gilardi, and Wasserfallen, "Learning and the Diffusion of Regime Contention in the Arab Spring."

⁶ We follow Beetham, *The legitimization of power* in defining legitimacy as something that is both expressed and conferred.

⁷ Sutton, "Democracy and Good Governance in Small States", 204-205.

⁸ Veenendaal, "Size and Personalistic Politics".

⁹ Ibid; [omitted]

¹⁰ For review see Grugel and Bishop, *Democratization*.

¹¹ Veenendaal and Corbett, "Why Small States Offer Important Answers to Large Questions".

¹² Diamond and Tsalik, *Size and Democracy*; Ankar

¹³ cf. Schedler, "Authoritarianism's Last Line of Defense." Examples of semi-constitutional monarchies in large states are Jordan, Morocco, and Thailand.

¹⁴ Sutton, "Democracy and Good Governance in Small States", 204-205. See also Lowenthal, "Social Features"; Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*; White and Lindstrom, *Chiefs Today*.

¹⁵ [omitted]

¹⁶ Diamond and Taslik, *Size and Democracy*.

¹⁷ See Veenendaal and Corbett "Why Small States Offer Important Answers for Large Questions".

¹⁸ Sutton, "Democracy and Good Governance in Small States", 204-205.

¹⁹ Lijphart ...

²⁰ For example, Turner et al. "Democracy by Decree".

²¹ Thies, "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations."

²² Latukefu, "King George Tupou I of Tonga"; Latukefu, *The Pro-Democracy Movement in Tonga*; Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*; Campbell, *Island Kingdom*.

²³ Campbell, *Across the Threshold*.

²⁴ Interview with former Tongan Minister, June 2012.

²⁵ Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, 416.

²⁶ For discussion, see: Campbell, *Across the Threshold*; Campbell, *Tonga's Way to Democracy*.

²⁷ For discussion, see: Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*; Campbell, *Tonga's Way to Democracy*; Powles, *The Tongan Monarchy and the Constitution*.

²⁸ Latukefu, *The Pro-Democracy Movement in Tonga*; Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*; Helu, "Tradition and Good Governance".

²⁹ "King George Tupou I of Tonga", 55.

³⁰ See Moala, *Island Kingdom Strikes Back*.

³¹ Wallis, "Transnationalism and the Development of the Deterritorialized Tongan Nation-State"; Larmour, *Foreign Flowers*, 191.

³² For discussion, see Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*; Campbell, *Tonga's Way to Democracy*.

- ³³ For discussion, see: James, “Rank and Leadership in Tonga”; Campbell, *The Emergence of Parliamentary Politics in Tonga*.
- ³⁴ Campbell, *Across the Threshold*, 98.
- ³⁵ Campbell, *Across the Threshold*, 97.
- ³⁶ Cl. 51(1) cited in Powles, *The Tongan Monarchy and the Constitution*, 4.
- ³⁷ Powles, *The Tongan Monarchy and the Constitution*.
- ³⁸ European Union, *Bhutan: Final Report*, 3.
- ³⁹ Mathou, *Political Reform in Bhutan*, 614; Sinpeng, *Democracy from Above*; Kaul, *Bearing Better Witness in Bhutan*; Gallenkamp, *Democracy in Bhutan*; Turner et al., *Democratization by Decree*; Turner and Tshering, *Is Democracy Being Consolidated in Bhutan*.
- ⁴⁰ Turner et al., *Democratization by Decree*, 184-185.
- ⁴¹ Gallenkamp, *Democracy in Bhutan*, 2.
- ⁴² Wolf, *Bhutan’s Political Transition*, 3.
- ⁴³ Wolf, *Bhutan’s Political Transition*, 3.
- ⁴⁴ Cline, *Bhutan: Globalization, Democracy and Uncertainty*, 5-6.
- ⁴⁵ Tobgye, *The Constitution of Bhutan*, 21.
- ⁴⁶ Cited in Tobgye, *Making of the Constitution*, 21-22.
- ⁴⁷ Bothe, *The Monarch’s Gift*, 37.
- ⁴⁸ It could be argued that the “gift” of democracy could not be refused in Bhutan. The fact that voter turnout was close to 80 per cent in the 2008 general elections supports the view that the whole process received the tacit consent of the people.
- ⁴⁹ Kinga, “Constitution—The King’s Gift”.
- ⁵⁰ Gallenkamp, *Democracy in Bhutan*, 16.
- ⁵¹ Kaul, *Bearing Better Witness in Bhutan*, 69.
- ⁵² Bothe, *The Monarch’s Gift*, 37; Bothe, *In the Name of the King, Country and People on the Westminster Model and Bhutan’s Constitutional Transition*, 5.
- ⁵³ Hutt, *Nepal and Bhutan in 2005*; Bothe, *In the Name of the King, Country and People on the Westminster Model and Bhutan’s Constitutional Transition*.
- ⁵⁴ Mazumdar, *Bhutan’s Military Action against Indian Insurgents*, 577.
- ⁵⁵ Bothe, *In the Name of the King, Country and People on the Westminster Model and Bhutan’s Constitutional Transition*, 2.
- ⁵⁶ Sinpeng, *Democracy from Above*, 41.
- ⁵⁷ Raton, *Liechtenstein*, 24-35.
- ⁵⁸ Marxer, *Direct Democracy in Liechtenstein*, 1-2.
- ⁵⁹ Beattie, *Liechtenstein: a Modern History*, 224.
- ⁶⁰ Marxer, *Direct Democracy in Liechtenstein*, 13.
- ⁶¹ Beattie, *Liechtenstein: a Modern History*, 178-180; Marcinkowski and Marxer, *Politische Kommunikation und Volksentscheid*.
- ⁶² Beattie, *Liechtenstein: a Modern History*, 199-201. Furthermore, the Prince also argued that in this case, the name of the country would have to be changed as well, because it could no longer be named after his family.
- ⁶³ Venice Commission, *Opinion on the Amendments to the Constitution of Liechtenstein*.
- ⁶⁴ Liechtenstein, *The State in the Third Millennium*, 73-74.
- ⁶⁵ Constitution of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2009: Art. 113.
- ⁶⁶ Constitution of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2009: Art. 9.
- ⁶⁷ See: www.demokratiebewegung.li
- ⁶⁸ Marxer, *Direct Democracy in Liechtenstein*, 13.
- ⁶⁹ Veenendaal, *A Big Prince in a Tiny Realm*.
- ⁷⁰ Sutton, *Democracy and Good Governance in Small States*.
- ⁷¹ Baldacchino, *Islands and Despots*.
- ⁷² Lowenthal, “Social Features”, 38-39.
- ⁷³ Marcinkowski and Marxer, *Politische Kommunikation und Volksentscheid*.
- ⁷⁴ Liechtenstein, *The State in the Third Millennium*, 83.
- ⁷⁵ Marxer, *Institutionenvertrauen nach Parteiwahl*.
- ⁷⁶ Beattie, *Liechtenstein: a Modern History*, 215.
- ⁷⁷ (Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 17 May 2010)
- ⁷⁸ Beattie, *Liechtenstein: a Modern History*, 179.

⁷⁹ The election results of 2008 in Bhutan where the opposition party (whose president was the fourth king's brother-in-law) won only 2 of the 47 seats in the parliament provides some evidence that the public were ready for change, and that they wanted broad-based participation in governance.

⁸⁰ Sutton, *Democracy and Good Governance in Small States*.

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