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THE EVOLUTION OF SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The article provides a conceptual analysis of scientific approaches to the study of political indoctrination. To overcome terminological fragmentation and develop a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the authors employ four key approaches: institutional, substantial, sociological, and teleological. The study reveals that political indoctrination is a multilayered process where ideology intertwines with emotions, culture and institutional rituals. The authors conclude that the strength of an ideology is determined not by the sheer efficiency of indoctrination, but by the regime's ability to integrate it into everyday practices. Thus, political control through indoctrination is viewed not as a monolithic strategy, but as a dynamic process of adaptation of various institutions, including religious associations, to the political landscape.

Keywords: indoctrination, ideology, political control, propaganda.

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Саяси индоктринацияны зерттеудің ғылыми тәсілдерінің эволюциясы: тұжырымдамалық талдау

Мақалада саяси индоктринацияны зерттеудегі ғылыми тәсілдерге тұжырымдамалық талдау жасалады. Терминологиялық алақұлалықты еңсеру және аталған феноменді кешенді түсіну мақсатында авторлар төрт тәсілді қолданады: институционалдық, субстанционалдық, социологиялық және телеологиялық. Зерттеу нәтижесінде саяси индоктринация идеологияның эмоциялармен, мәдениетпен және институционалдық рәсімдермен астасып жатқан көп деңгейлі процесс екендігі анықталды. Идеологияның қуаты индоктринацияның тиімділігімен емес, режимнің оны күнделікті тәжірибеге кіріктіру қабілетімен айқындалатыны негізделген. Осылайша, индоктринация арқылы жүзеге асырылатын саяси бақылау монолитті стратегия емес, түрлі институттардың (соның ішінде діни бірлестіктердің) саяси кеңістікке бейімделуінің динамикалық процесі.

Түйін сөздер: индоктринация, идеология, саяси бақылау, насихат.

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Эволюция научных подходов к исследованию политической индоктринации: концептуальный анализ

В статье проводится концептуальный анализ научных подходов к исследованию политической индоктринации. С целью преодоления терминологической разрозненности авторы систематизируют исследовательское поле через призму четырех подходов: институционального, субстанционального, социологического и телеологического. В ходе исследования выявлено, что политическая индоктринация является многослойным процессом, в котором идеология тесно переплетается с эмоциями, культурой и институциональными ритуалами. Обосновано, что эффективность идеологии зависит не столько от механизмов внушения, сколько от способности режима интегрировать ее в повседневные практики. В работе делается вывод, что политический контроль через индоктринацию представляет собой не статичную стратегию, а динамический процесс адаптации институтов (включая религиозные объединения) к текущей политической повестке.

Ключевые слова: индоктринация, идеология, политический контроль, пропаганда.

Introduction

In both authoritarian and democratic political systems, the key issue of legitimacy and control remains a central control. Whereas in the XX-th century the focus of research on authoritarian countries was more based on overt repression and terrorizing political opponents, recently the focus has shifted towards the disclosure of more subtle management tools aimed at shaping public consciousness and voluntary consent (Hassan et al., 2022). Indeed, as more recent research demonstrates, despite an overall decline in the level of state violence, states' need for public support and political stability has not disappeared. Thus, there is an actualization of interest in such phenomena as political indoctrination.

Despite its importance and the availability of a various body of scientific literature, indoctrination remains a relatively underexplored and conceptually vague instrument of political control. Conceptual vagueness and the lack of comparable empirical data have traditionally served as major obstacles to systematic research in this field. As a result, we may encounter different interpretations of this phenomenon in scientific discourse, sometimes even contradicting each other. On the one hand, indoctrination is understood as a deliberate process of socialization promoted by the regime in order to align citizens' beliefs with official ideology, a process that is not limited to authoritarian contexts (Northmore-Ball et al., 2023). On the other hand, this term is often associated with negative methods of propaganda and brainwashing, reflecting a shift in its meaning over the course of the XX-th century from a notion closely related to "formal education" to one carrying predominantly negative connotations.

When the definition of indoctrination is placed in the broader context of power, its complexity becomes even more apparent. The phenomenon is closely intertwined with concepts such as "soft power", "meta-power" (Gallarotti, 2011) and the "three-dimensional view of power", all of which emphasize the formation of interests and preferences of one group through the influence exerted by others. According to the Gramscian theory of hegemony, in its radical interpretation, this process indicates a deep conflict of interests and is presented as a form of imposed ideological control. A related, yet even more encompassing perspective is offered by Michel Foucault, who analyzes power as a pervasive network of social relations in which resistance becomes largely impracticable. J.Galtung's theory of "cultural violence" is in a similar direction, which

shows indoctrination as a mechanism legitimizing direct and structural violence through ideologies and symbols, which we can clearly see in postcolonial studies (Oyedemi, 2016). Equally important is the informational dimension of indoctrination, examined through models of media capture, where control over information flows enables agenda manipulation and the mobilization of public support for policy decisions (Petrova, 2008).

Thus, contemporary political science lacks a comprehensive understanding of political indoctrination. The existing approaches are fragmented and rarely engage in constructive dialogue: some scholars emphasize its institutional and socialization-based dimensions, others focus on its relationship with theories of power and hegemony, while still others highlight the role of informational and media strategies. The purpose of this article is to conduct a conceptual analysis of the evolution of scientific approaches to the study of political indoctrination in order to overcome terminological fragmentation and to develop a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Literature review

A comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the evolution of political indoctrination is impossible without studying classical works in conjunction with modern trends. Within philosophical and critical traditions, the concepts developed by M. Foucault, A. Gramsci, J. Habermas, E. Herman, N. Chomsky, and R. J. Lifton are of particular relevance. Foucault's rhetorical framework is often characterized by an "ultra-radical" view of power and its pervasive influence across cultural domains, an approach that has gained increasing prominence in the study of international relations (Lukes, 2005). The concept of hegemony, put forward by the Italian thinker and politician A. Gramsci, links issues of power, culture and ideology. Gramsci understands hegemony as the ability of the ruling class to ensure its leadership and superiority (in terms of moral, political and intellectual) in relation to the dominant classes without resorting to violence (Gramsci, 1971).

Jurgen Habermas draws a distinction between domination and the "unforced force of the better argument". At the same time, he makes a reservation that in real-life situations, of course, there is always an inequality of power, advantages and opportunities, to which people adapt their preferences (Lukes, 2005). According to Edward Herman and Noam

Chomsky, modern American reality is far from democratic ideals. As mass media have ceased to function as arenas for informed public deliberation and instead operate to manufacture consent in the interests of political and economic elites (Chomsky et al., 2008; Nazarov, 2022).

Robert Jay Lifton provides a detailed analysis of “thought reform” or “brainwashing” techniques employed in China during the 1950s and 1960s, aimed at social control and personal transformation. These practices involved a two stage process: first, the extraction of confessions and the renunciation of past and present identities; second, “reeducation”, in which individuals were reshaped according to an ideological model (Lifton, 2005). Indoctrination can also be examined through a socio-epistemic lens, employing concepts such as “echo chambers” and “epistemic bubbles” to analyze the conditions under which belief formation becomes structurally constrained (Nguyen, 2020).

Thus, these studies have laid the theoretical foundations for the analysis of political indoctrination as a multilevel, systemic and imperceptible process of forming consent and subordination. These approaches served as a methodological basis for subsequent empirical studies of indoctrination in the field of media, education, authoritarian regimes and electoral processes. Of particular interest are the processes of indoctrination anchored in the institutional practices of ideological control. Within the framework of this direction, indoctrination is considered as a purposeful state strategy aimed at forming loyalty, preventing collective actions and reproducing the political order.

Recognizing that power cannot be sustained by coercion alone, the North Korean authorities have implemented extensive programs of ideological conditioning. A. Lankov, I. Kwak and C.B. Cho provide detailed accounts of the mechanisms through which daily life in North Korea is subject to pervasive control (Lankov, 2012). According to E.L. Glaeser, G.A.M. Ponzetto, A. Shleifer indoctrination through the influence of schooling is more noticeable when participating in political life than in public life (Glaeser et al., 2007). Jonna Alava describes the processes of indoctrination through patriotic education using the example of Russian schools starting on February 24, 2022, interpreting ideological transmission through the concepts of statehood, biopower and disciplinary power (Alava, 2025).

Public support for specific policies often depends on both the level of public awareness and the manner in which information is framed. The influ-

ence of wealthy actors over mass media represents one of the mechanisms through which income inequality translates into political inequality, particularly in democratic contexts, where policy outcomes tend to reflect the preferences of the affluent more than those of lower-income groups (Petrova, 2008). Information and communication technologies can strengthen authoritarian regimes, for example, by enhancing surveillance capabilities, increasing the accountability of officials, contributing to the indoctrination of the population and the involvement of citizens in political processes (Göbel, 2013). Chinese media use signaling theory, where propaganda is often used not to persuade, but to demonstrate the power of government in maintaining social control and political order (Huang, 2015).

The dominance of leading nations in global politics is often exercised through institutions presented as legitimate guarantors of collective interests. This process involves the formation of false consciousness, whereby subordinate nations come to perceive their interests as aligned with those of dominant powers (Gallarotti, 2011). The dominant regimes use any tactic (state, judicial, informational, etc.) in order to subordinate society to the state and form political control (Hassan et al., 2022). The led regime uses socialization processes to increase consistency between the views and principles of the regime and the beliefs of its citizens (Northmore-Ball et al., 2023).

Ruling regimes can use indoctrination to form ideological attitudes. Ideologies justifying such atrocities as genocide, the Holocaust, politicide, etc., label victims as dangerous threats or guilty criminals (Maynard, 2014). Such ideological constructions may generate perceptions of cultural and social extinction, framing violence as a defensive necessity (Oyedemi, 2016). The relationship between the external imposition of ideology and its internal institutionalization can be observed not only in cases of political violence, but also within armed groups and radical movements, where emotional dynamics interact closely with ideological commitment (Schubiger, 2017).

L. R. Iannaccone and E. Berman propose analyzing indoctrination within extremist and terrorist organizations through the lens of economic theory, conceptualizing ideological commitment in terms of supply and demand, as well as sellers and consumers of belief systems (Iannaccone et al., 2006). Another approach is based on considering militant Islamism as an alternative community to the Western one (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

Many authoritarian states have introduced compulsory military service with the explicit aim of creating opportunities for mass ideological conditioning. Alexander de Juan, Felix Hass and Jan Pier-skalla explore the processes of indoctrination using the example of compulsory military service in the GDR (de Juan et al., 2021). David M. Bouchier traces the transformation of Indonesia's state ideology of "Pancasila" from a secular framework toward a more explicitly religious orientation (Bouchier, 2019). In postwar Spain, the ideological apparatus of the regime relied on the Women's section of the Falange to stabilize and preserve authoritarian rule (Hidalgo et al., 2024).

An analysis of the scientific literature shows that the phenomenon of political indoctrination has received wide coverage in foreign and domestic studies. Indoctrination has been analyzed through philosophical and critical theories of power and ideology, media and propaganda studies, institutional analyses of political regimes, as well as through approaches emphasizing emotions and networked interactions. This interdisciplinary nature of research indicates the complexity and multidimensionality of this phenomenon.

Methodology

This study employs four analytical approaches: institutional, substantive, sociological and teleological. Using these methods, we make it possible to examine the evolution of scientific approaches to the study of political indoctrination.

The institutional approach focuses on organizations in which power becomes institutionalized and takes concrete form. In some definitions, politics is perceived as participation in the affairs of the state, the use of certain segments of the population to achieve their goals of state power. However, political activity is not confined to the state alone. Accordingly, alternative interpretations recognize a wide range of institutions and organizations as political actors.

The substantive approach emphasizes the direct relationship between politics and power, highlighting the core essence of political activity. Politics is understood as the struggle to gain and retain power, and as well as to govern using power. In Max Weber's formulation, politics represents the "striving to share in power or to influence the distribution of power", a process that may unfold between states, within a single state, or among different social groups.

The sociological approach conceptualizes society as a structured constellation of diverse groups with distinct interests and needs, in which power functions as the primary level. Within this framework, politics is analyzed as a set of relationships, practices and directions of activity through which social groups pursue and defend their interests and demands by various means, with power occupying a central role.

Finally, the teleological approach emphasizes politics as a particular mode of human existence, closely linked to the organization of collective life and the pursuit of goals. From this perspective, the boundaries of politics expand, as goal-setting is present in virtually all spheres of social activity. Consequently, political relations can be identified in a wide range of interactions, from relationships between spouses to those between teachers and students (Duka, 2004; Mannheim & Rich 1997).

Section 1. Institutional channels of political indoctrination

Political indoctrination operates through a variety of institutional channels, each characterized by distinct features, target audiences and temporal horizons of influence. The principal channels include the education system, mass media, the state apparatus and religious institutions. The institutional approach allows us to analyze political indoctrination, not as a set of disparate practices, but as a systemic process entrenched in the formal and informal structures of key public institutions.

The education system functions as a monopoly in the state on legitimate knowledge and structuring the daily life of the younger generation. Within the process of indoctrination, its core role lies in primary political socialization and the formation of long-term loyalty (Northmore-Ball et al., 2023). The institute of education operates through formalized curricula, ritualized practices (rulers, patriotic events) and disciplinary procedures (timetables, grading systems). Following Foucault's analysis, these routines do not merely transmit knowledge but also produce "docile bodies" that internalize specific patterns of behaviour as normative. The state educational system, by its scale and inclusiveness, is becoming a powerful institutional signal that demonstrates the regime's ability to mobilize resources and shape future citizens, thereby strengthening its legitimacy.

The mass media serve as an institution that constructs public reality and operationally manages mass consciousness. One of the main differ-

ences from the education system lies in their focus on correcting and reshaping the political socialization of the adult population. Media influence operates through control over communication channels and the production of symbols. Empirical research indicates that this institution is often subject to capture by economic elites, resulting in a correlation between high levels of inequality and low degrees of media freedom (Petrova, 2008). Authoritarian regimes often face an institutional dilemma in the face of digitalization [10]. One response to this challenge is exemplified by the Chinese model of internet filtering, where the transformation of the media institution takes the form of a hybrid structure combining censorship (risk management) with active propaganda (the expansion of influence).

The state bureaucracy and the army are formal institutions where loyalty is institutionalized through a system of rules, rewards and sanctions. The military, in particular, functions as a “total institution”, where high levels of efficiency are achieved through the isolation of service members from broader society and their immersion in a highly regulated environment (de Juan et al., 2021). In this context, indoctrination is embedded in the very institutional logic of subordination and the execution of orders. Political parties may also function as institutions of career advancement. The Workers’ Party of Korea, for instance, operates as a key channel of vertical mobility. Loyalty to the ruling regime is treated as a mandatory professional requirement and is cultivated through regular ideological sessions and meetings of criticism and self-criticism, which constitute an integral part of career progression.

Religious institutions provide the regime with access to the sacred sphere and powerful regulatory systems, which allows it to legitimize power not only on an instrumental level, but also on a value level. In order to justify their rule, states may enter into symbiotic relationships with religious institutions and draw upon their authority. Spanish Francoism, through the support of flamenco, created an institutional hybrid where the cultural and religious tradition became the vehicle of the state ideology. However, as the economic theory of religious extremism suggests (Iannaccone, 2006), once religious organizations enter the political arena, they may themselves become powerful institutions capable of directly competing with the state. Their strength lies in their ability to construct cohesive counter-social institutions characterized by a high degree of normative control over their members (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

Section 2. Substantive content: analysis of ideology and soft power as the content of indoctrination

The substantive dimension of indoctrination is grounded in ideology, which simultaneously functions as an epistemic resource and an emotional regulator. Under conditions of epistemic dependence, ideologies that justify destructive practices tend to be particularly effective: individuals accept them not out of naivety, but due to trust in authoritative sources such as political leaders, mass media and religious or communal institutions (Maynard, 2014). This process can be divided into six key mechanisms: dehumanization, attribution of blame, threat construction, de-identification, rhetoric of virtue and focus on the future. These tools form narratives legitimizing violence or suppression.

In extreme conditions, ideology operates as a moral compass. It plays a crucial role in emotional governance; for instance, within armed groups, ideology binds strangers together by fostering trust through shared values. Ideology cannot be reduced to a mere “instrument” of power; it is endogenous to social processes, embedded in actors’ strategies and historical contexts. Unlike classical ideologies such as communism and fascism, modern regimes increasingly use patriotism as a “soft” alternative to ethnic nationalism. Identification with a political community allows regimes to avoid the risks of alienating minorities while providing flexibility in the selection of symbols, for example by prioritizing ethno-cultural values over strictly civic ones. This approach is aimed at two goals, the formation of loyalty and the suppression of criticism, both in democratic and authoritarian regimes. State indoctrination differs from nation-building in its explicitly political orientation, functioning as a process of centralized control over culture. In the postmodern era, even “weak” ideologies, such as diffuse forms of nationalism, become instruments of legitimation, particularly when regimes face crises of identity.

Propaganda can be analytically distinguished into “hard” and “soft” forms. The first one demonstrates the power of the regime through visual control of public space, restrains protests through fear, but does not change beliefs. The second uses cultural codes to influence attitudes (Huang, 2015). The experience of the German Democratic Republic illustrates a synthesis of these approaches: conscripts devoted between 10 and 20 percent of their service time to ideologically charged activities (approximately 600 – 1 000 hours per service), combining lectures, examinations and ritual practices (de Juan

et al., 2021). However, as previous studies indicate, even intensive ideological training and socialization during military service did not erase pre-existing beliefs among officers, their perceptions of violence and the legitimacy of authority remained strongly influenced by social background (Scharpf, 2018).

Ideology manifests itself not only in politics, but also in daily practices. During apartheid in South Africa, racial violence was institutionalized through the “pencil test”, effectively linking human rights to hair texture. This phenomenon created a culture of self-correction, with black women straightening their hair in an attempt to “pass” into a category with broader privileges. Scholars associate this process with Eurocentric beauty standards, where African hair was labeled as “unprofessional” or “ugly”, which continues to persist on the post-apartheid era (Oyedemi, 2016).

In Indonesia, the ideology of Pancasila evolved into an instrument of religious nationalism, despite its origins as a secular consensus built around five principles. The focus has changed so much that in 2010 the Constitutional Court decided to recognize the blasphemy law. Former ideological opponents converged in their support for restrictions on “alien” ideas, illustrating how ideological frameworks are adapted to serve emerging elites (Bourchier, 2019). The effectiveness of indoctrination is limited by its dependence on context. In post-authoritarian societies, struggles over meaning continue outside formal power institutions, as demonstrated by competing interpretations of Pancasila. Even ideological training did not eliminate splits in the officer corps, where the traditions of the military often prevailed over party doctrine (Scharpf, 2018). The key paradox of indoctrination lies in the contradiction between hard (coercive) and soft (attractive) power. The first creates the illusion of control, but provokes resistance, the second forms voluntary submission, but requires legitimacy, which regimes often lose.

The substantive content of indoctrination is a multi-layered process where ideology is intertwined with emotions, culture and institutional rituals. Its effectiveness depends not only on the coherence of doctrinal elements but also on the capacity of epistemic authorities, such as the state, media and religion, to embed narratives into daily experience. As several cases demonstrate, even the most systematic attempts at control encounter resistance, whether through the persistence of latent beliefs or through cultural memory that reinterprets ideological symbols. This supports the argument that indoctrination does not produce “blank minds”, but instead oper-

ates in continuous interaction with pre-existing social structures.

Section 3. Sociological mechanisms: echo chambers and group interaction as tools of indoctrination

Contemporary mechanisms of indoctrination increasingly rely on socio-epistemic structures that shape perceptions of reality through group isolation and control over information flows. An epistemic bubble arises through the social selection of communities that are homogeneous in their views, when certain opinions or voices are passively excluded from discourse. For instance, social media users inadvertently construct such filters by consuming content exclusively from “like-minded” sources, thereby reinforcing their confidence in the correctness of their own views. In contrast, an echo chamber operates through the active discrediting of external authorities, whereby “outsider” voices are labeled as unreliable or hostile (Nguyen, 2020). Such mechanisms are similar to sectarian structures, in which isolation increases dependence on internal narratives, and collective distrust of the outside world becomes the basis for legitimizing power.

Group interaction in authoritarian regimes is often organized through rituals that transform individual loyalty into a social obligation. A salient example is the North Korean practice of “saenghwal chonghwa” meetings, during which participants publicly confess their “mistakes” by referencing ideological texts of the leaders and subsequently engage in mutual criticism. These rituals have two effects at once: first, conformal behaviour is formed due to fear of condemnation; second, the condition of social survival is determined by loyalty to the regime, when collective self-criticism blurs the boundaries between personal and political identity (Lankov et al., 2012).

Similar mechanisms work in military structures. The scale of repression is directly influenced by the ideological homogeneity of the officer corps. Officers who share the regime’s beliefs, for example, nationalist-oriented units in Latin American military juntas, tend to employ violence more actively, whereas members of other groups, such as more liberal cavalry units in the same juntas, demonstrate lower levels of compliance. This fact confirms that indoctrination is not just a brainwashing process, but a social contract where loyalty is expressed through willingness to participate in violence (Scharpf, 2018).

Indoctrination is often disguised as cultural traditions, where folk art is transformed into a tool

for legitimizing power. Under Francoist Spain, the Women's Section of the Falange converted folklore into a political project aimed at promoting the concept of "hispanicness" (*hispanidad*) and National-Catholic values through music and dance. This process had three strategies:

- racial construction, i.e. emphasizing the "authentic Spanish race" through folklore images;
- gender control, i.e. formation of a model of "modest and submissive" femininity through the aesthetics of performances;
- class inequality, i.e. the presentation of traditions as the property of elites, ignoring their national roots (Gramsci, 1971).

Such practices constitute a form of structural violence, in which no explicit aggressor is visible, yet violence is embedded within systems where cultural hierarchies, based on race, class or gender, determine access to resources and rights (Oyedemi, 2016). The power of regime is built not only on repression, but also on subtle social signals. Chinese officials use public praise of the leadership as a signal of loyalty, such rituals do not convey information, but rather demonstrate readiness to comply. Similarly, regimes cultivate citizens' belief in the inevitability of domination by projecting power through resource-intensive propaganda, including ceremonial parades and monumental architecture (Huang, 2015).

Framing or the construction of meaning plays a key role in this process. Regime legitimacy depends less on objective achievements than on how those achievements are interpreted through media and education. For example, political and economic successes may be framed as the result of a leader's wisdom, while crises are presented as "trials imposed by enemies". Such narratives turn into a part of the collective identity, which are repeated in group communication. Despite the effectiveness of these mechanisms, their effect is limited by social heterogeneity. Even under conditions of extensive control, ideological divisions within elites, such as those between military branches, create "blind spots" where repression weakens. Likewise, in post-colonial societies, structural violence (for example, racial discrimination in South Africa) generates counter-narratives that persist within informal networks, including families, religious communities and underground groups.

On the one hand, power seeks to impose monolithic control through echo chambers, ritualized practices and cultural instrumentalization, and on the other hand, social reality invariably contains fractures in which individuals and groups reproduce

alternative meanings, this tension reveals the dual nature of indoctrination as manifested through sociological mechanisms. The power of ideology is not determined by the effectiveness of indoctrination, but depends on the ability of regimes to integrate it into everyday practices, ranging from school lessons to public self-criticism. Yet, as cases ranging from North Korea to Francoist Spain demonstrate, it is precisely within these practices that the potential for resistance emerges, as social ties become a shield against total control and cultural traditions serve as tools for deconstructing official narratives.

Section 4. Teleological functions: political control as the ultimate goal of indoctrination

Political indoctrination constitutes a complex set of instruments aimed not at the temporary suppression of resistance, but at the construction of a durable system of compliance. It differs from coercion or cooptation, its goal is to create "ideal citizens" whose values and patterns of behaviour are fully integrated into the logic of the regime. The ultimate goal is the legitimation of power through the internalization of its norms and the reduction of reliance on direct violence. Depending on the political context, the mechanisms through which this goal is pursued may vary, combining rational manipulation of perception with the emotional construction of reality (Northmore-Ball et al., 2023).

The creation of binary narratives becomes a central element of political control, in which complex social dynamics are simplified to the confrontation of "good and evil". Public political processes serve less to punish specific individuals than to demonstrate the regime's capacity to define the boundaries of what is permissible. Through such rituals, power positions itself as the guarantor of order, translating abstract ideological conflicts into tangible public dramas (Hassan et al., 2022). Such a framework of narratives is reinforced through systemic censorship, which excludes alternative interpretations from public discourse. As a result, a form of collective, quasi-unconscious perception emerges in which resistance to authority is no longer associated with political choice, but with a violation of the natural order.

The effectiveness of indoctrination often does not depend on the persuasiveness of the content, and this is the key paradox of indoctrination. Propaganda functions as a signal of power in authoritarian regimes. Even when audiences receive messages with scepticism, the constant and resource-intensive reproduction of propaganda serves as evidence of the state's capacity to dominate the informational environment, for example, China's "Xinwen Lianbo" program.

This process, called “burning money”, can be traced in election campaigns in democratic regimes (Huang, 2015). This implicit message conveyed is roughly the following: “we possess sufficient power to impose messages you do not believe”. Consequently, such rituals affirm not ideological correctness, but the physical inevitability of authority.

In order for indoctrination to achieve teleological goals, its mechanisms must be integrated into daily practices. In North Korean sessions of mutual criticism (SMC), for instance, regular public self-denunciation and denunciation of others generate an atmosphere of generalized mistrust, in which the fear of social isolation outweighs the risks associated with resistance (Lankov et al., 2012). Through such institutions, citizens are transformed into agents of surveillance, thereby reducing the costs of repression for ruling elites. The indoctrination of the bureaucracy helps to increase the loyalty of officials through the standardization of procedures, but it does not always change personal beliefs (Dalgard-Nielsen, 2010). In this sense, indoctrination can remain effective even when internalization is superficial, provided that it produces structures that automate compliance (Northmore-Ball et al., 2023).

State terror represents one of the most extreme forms of political control and operates squarely within a teleological logic. In the pursuit of utopian projects of social transformation, leaders rationalize repression as a necessary step toward the “purification” of the social body (Scharpf, 2018). In this case, ideology solves two issues, legitimizing violence in front of the elites and forming the expectation of radical change among citizens, reducing their resistance to repression as a “temporary victim”. The aspiration toward an ideal society is used to justify the most brutal methods, revealing the dark dialectic inherent in indoctrination.

The teleological functions of political control go beyond tactical management, trying to restructure human perception and turning power not into external attribute, but into an internal imperative. Indoctrination may rely on narrative frameworks, signalling rituals or institutions of mutual surveillance to render compliance a voluntary choice and resistance a psychological impossibility. As modern research shows, such a transformation does not require complete persuasion, but requires full control over the context in which beliefs are formed.

Conclusion

The analysis of political indoctrination reveals it as multifaceted and strategic phenomenon whose

ultimate objective extends beyond the regulation of behaviour to the transformation of perceptions of reality, rendering power an integral element of collective consciousness. Democratic and authoritarian regimes fundamentally differ in their methods of achieving loyalty, while the former rely on persuasion, resolving discussions and doubts, the latter construct doctrines that are initially “beyond dispute” and “beyond reasoning”. The internalization of ideology remains vulnerable, even in conditions of total control, as can be seen from the experience of the German Democratic Republic, the institutional power of the regime does not guarantee a genuine internal assimilation of its values (de Juan et al., 2021). This paradox points to a fundamental limitation of indoctrination, its effectiveness inevitably encounters the human capacity for reflection, a constraint that becomes especially pronounced in the era of digital communication, which erodes the boundaries of isolation.

Nevertheless, authoritarian systems use the synthesis of signalling and structural mechanisms to compensate for the weaknesses of indoctrination. Propaganda often aims not at transforming beliefs, but at demonstrating the regime’s resource superiority and its capacity to impose even implausible narratives as a signal of the inevitability of control (Huang, 2015). In parallel, cultural violence is often used, acting through binary oppositions of “insiders” and “outsiders”, where political subordination is transformed into an existential choice and denial of doctrine is equivalent to self-denial (Oyedemi, 2016). In North Korea, for example, the combination of isolation, rituals of mutual criticism and propaganda produces an ecosystem in which resistance is perceived not as a political act, but as a violation of the natural order (Lankov et al., 2012).

Thus, political control through indoctrination should be understood not as a monolithic strategy, but as a dynamic process of adaptation. Regimes may sequentially or simultaneously employ ideological persuasion alongside mechanisms of power signalling, the institutionalization of fear and cultural hegemony, seeking to transform authority into an “invisible framework” of daily life. Historical experience suggests that even the most sophisticated systems confront a persistent dilemma, the more heavily they rely on coercion, the more fragile their legitimacy becomes. The stability of political control largely depends not on the degree of ideological unity, but on the balance between repression and the regime’s ability to offer social arrangements that society is willing to accept, even

if this technique is superficial and ritualistic. In this sense, indoctrination remains not an instrument of the end of history, but a means of governing its trajectory, under conditions in which power acknowledges that complete domination of minds is unattainable, yet complete freedom of thought remains impermissible.

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Conflict of interest

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G.K. Abdigalieva – Data collection and systematization; participation in data analysis and interpretation; preparation of specific sections of the manuscript.

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