<u>Does good government require strong leaders?</u>

Good governments often form the backbone of a well-functioning society. However, what truly characterises a good government? Modern academicians and political philosophers such as John Stuart Mill have often reached the consensus that a good government is one which 'tends to increase the sum of good qualities in the governed, collectively and individually'. A 'strong' leader, nevertheless, remains more difficult to define. Julius Caesar, Josef Stalin, and Donald Trump have all been deemed as 'strong' leaders but remain starkly different from each other. Their ideologies, historical circumstances, and following are extremely different but all provide powerful insights into the question above. This essay will evaluate a multitude of perspectives by highlighting political scenarios in differing time periods and geographical locations, to theorise if good government require strong leaders.

Strong leaders often run the risk of treading the line between authoritarianism and dictatorship. The shift towards dictatorship is identified by a shift in the principles reflected in government - the need to maintain power as opposed to disseminating power for the good of the people. Adolf Hitler was widely seen as a 'strong' leader before he transformed into a ruthless dictator, paranoid about losing his power. After the drastic effects of the Great Depression in 1929, Hitler's strong character and leadership presented itself as an attractive alternative to the weak Weimar Republic, drawing the masses in his favour. For example, in the 1932 presidential election, he presented himself as a prominent opponent of the famous Hindenburg, winning 38.6%[1] of the vote. The incompetency of the Weimar Republic's handling of the depression, heralded by the fact that there was no strong leader, imposed a great level of doubt in the minds of the public. However, this doubt would soon be compounded with fear, death, and grief. While Hitler ultimately gained complete power in 1933 in the Reichstag[2], it would be difficult to characterise it as a 'good' government. His leadership demonstrated how political institutions can become a vehicle for the leader to consolidate control, suppressing alternative voices while the leader's goals become synonymous with the party's goals. Strong leaders are ceded control of decision-making institutions, which become personalised.[3] A strong leader can therefore easily slip into the claws of greed, skewing their promises and ideals of bettering society, therefore ruining the very purpose of 'good' government.

Likewise, when one looks at Idi Amin, several similarities arise. Most authoritarian leaders are initially seen as strong but over time they tend to do more harm than good. Idi Amin's rise to power in Uganda was through a military coup in 1971, overthrowing the democratically elected President Milton Obote. Amin, then a Major General in the Ugandan Army, seized the opportunity when he noticed the widespread dissatisfaction with Obote's government[4], which was marred by allegations of corruption and inefficiency. In the start, Amin was welcomed as a powerful and charismatic leader by countless Ugandans to who he promised to restore order and address corruption in Uganda. His early

[1] "Hitler's Appointment As Chancellor, 1933 - Hitler into Power, 1929-1934 - Eduqas - GCSE History Revision - Eduqas - BBC Bitesize." *BBC Bitesize*, 17 Aug. 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpvhk7h/revision/3. Accessed 7 July 2024.

[2] "Germany 1933: from Democracy to Dictatorship." *Anne Frank Website*, www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/go-in-depth/germany-1933-democracy-dictatorship/. Accessed 7 July 2024.

[3] Brownlee, Jason. *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge UP, 2007.

[4] "The Rise to Power of the Butcher of Uganda." *Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training – Capturing, Preserving, and Sharing the Experiences of America's Diplomats*, adst.org/2016/08/rise-power-butcher-uganda/. Accessed 16 July 2024.

regime was characterized by a populist appeal, with promises of economic improvements and nationalistic policies. However, the initial popularity quickly faded as Amin's rule turned into a brutal dictatorship marked by widespread human rights abuses, political repression, and economic mismanagement. His government was notorious for the systematic torture. This included the execution of political opponents, leading to the deaths of an estimated 80,000 to 300,000 people.[5] Amin's economic policies were equally disastrous; his expulsion of the Asian community, who had been crucial to Uganda's economy, and his erratic economic actions led to a severe decline in agricultural and industrial output. His extravagant spending, including a lavish lifestyle and military adventures, further drained the country's resources. Additionally, Amin's often irrational decisions, such as the abrupt declaration of war against Tanzania in 1978, only exacerbated Uganda's instability and economic decline. Overall, Amin's rule is remembered for its profound human suffering and the near collapse of Uganda's political and economic systems, proving that strong leaders do not guarantee good governments.

However, sometimes authoritarianism can have positive effects on governments through 'benevolent dictatorship'. Lee Kuan Yew was the first and longest-serving Prime Minister of Singapore. While there are severe criticisms of his leadership with suppression of political opposition and constricting media, it was his leadership that transformed Singapore from a third-world country into a thriving metropolitan city from 1959 to 1990.[6] When he came into power, Singapore faced the risk of failure or becoming subordinate to a more dominant neighbouring country due to its lack of natural resources, which offered no inherent economic advantage either regionally or globally. However, Lee's strong leadership was characterized by straightforwardness, planning for succession years, strategic vision, and a commitment to meritocracy. His ability to implement effective policies, combat corruption, and foster economic development laid the foundation for Singapore's stability and prosperity. Not only did Lee through his years of leadership prove that strong leaders are necessary for good governments but he also ensured the consistency of his strong leadership. This can be clearly shown through Singapore's standings in global indices in recent years.. Singapore consistently performs well in the World Governance Indicators published by the World Bank. For instance, in the Governance Indicators Report 2022, Singapore ranked 1st globally for "Government Effectiveness," reflecting its high standards in public service delivery and administrative efficiency. [7]

Contrastingly, strong leaders can also facilitate unison and agreement in a democratic government. Oftentimes, in relatively new nations or recently independent countries such as Timor Leste, various political parties form government. Emerging from the Indonesian occupation with its political roots influenced by its former coloniser's political system (Portugal), Timor Leste was overwhelmed with the number of political parties aiming for a majority in parliament. With more than 26 parties in Parliament, it made it extremely difficult for laws to gain consensus and eventually pass. This

[5] "How Many People Did Amin Really Kill?" *Monitor*, 27 Sept. 2012, www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/uganda-50/how-many-people-did-amin-really-kill --1526590. Accessed 16 July 2024.
[6] *The Washington Post*, 22 Mar. 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/lee-kuan-yew-who-led-singapore-into-prosperit y-over-30-year-rule-dies-at-91/2015/03/22/00f7ccbe-d0d4-11e4-a62f-ee745911a4ff_story.ht ml. Accessed 15 July 2024.
[7] "Worldwide Governance Indicators." *DataBank | The World Bank*, databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators/preview/on. Accessed 19 July 2024.

significantly hampered the ability of Parliament to pass bills and important legislation that would ultimately benefit aspects of society. A strong leader, in such scenarios, would be especially beneficial in uniting parties with largely similar ideologies to gain a majority.

While evaluating this question, it also remains imperative to remember the different political contexts in which a strong leader can be defined. The man who brought down the mighty British empire in India, known as Mahatma or a Great Soul, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was diminutive in stature, did not lead a political party, stayed away from any conventional power structures, had no cadre and most importantly didn't endorse war. Yet he united millions of Indians with his call for Ahimsa or non-violence in the resistance against colonialism. Often plagued by self-doubt, he led with his strong moral conviction at the end. Once dismissed as a 'half-naked fakir' by Winston Churchill, Gandhi's legacy stands tall today with his statue in London's Parliament Square ironically near Churchill's statue. While Gandhi's leadership was not as conventional as others, his strong moral conduct inspired the masses and contributed significantly to the end of British Colonial rule in India. Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence engaged millions of Indians from diverse backgrounds in mass movements by advocating for peaceful resistance. In doing so, Gandhi mobilized widespread participation in the struggle for freedom which was utilised in mass movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement. His symbolic acts, such as the Salt March of 1930, in which he led a large group of people from Sabarmati Ashram on 12th March 1930 to Dandi[8], a coastal village in Gujarat, to break the salt law by producing salt from seawater, highlighted British exploitation and galvanized mass support. Furthermore, through the Swadeshi Movement, he promoted self-reliance and economic autonomy, while also addressing social issues like untouchability and poverty to unify the population. Mahatma Gandhi's contribution led to the Independence of India after almost 150 years, from its British colonisers. Referred to as the Father of the Nation, yet he chose not to become the country's first Prime Minister, resolutely staying away from power and its trappings. Today, India is considered one of the most powerful democracies with over 960 million people voting in its latest democratic elections.[9] While India has faced turbulent times one could argue that his leadership not only facilitated India's transition from colonial rule to self-governance but also set a standard for global resistances worldwide - he has been quoted by leaders like Martin Luther King and President Obama. Mahatma Gandhi drew his strength from his moral conviction, his originality of ideas and a belief in his actions which led to him forming a direct connection with the people, further supporting the statement that good governments require strong leaders by laying the foundation of India's democracy. His words ' Be the change you want to see' inspired a new nation and the world.

Interestingly, Gandhi's struggle against injustice began in the apartheid regime of South Africa where as a young lawyer, he was thrown off a train because he was in a Whites Only compartment. Many years later, another strong leader Nelson Mandela also emerged in South Africa with a similar aim - to remove the injustice of discrimination in South Africa because of the colour of a person's skin. In jail under brutal conditions for twenty-seven years, Mandela like Gandhi believed violent uprising against the oppressors was not a solution. His strength lay in his suffering - his many years in jail - and he

---

[8] bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/mhrd_ncert/help/Dandi_march.pdf. Accessed 17 July 2024.
[9] "Six Weeks, 969 Million Voters, 2,600 Parties: India's Mammoth Election Explained." *The Guardian*, 18 Apr. 2024, www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/18/india-mammoth-election-explained-narendra-modi-bjp. Accessed 21 June 2024.

emerged as the undisputed leader of the South African anti-apartheid struggle, becoming the first black president in South Africa in 1994. It is undoubtedly true that strong leaders have skillfully enhanced governments and led to the betterment of their countries throughout History and Nelson Mandela's leadership proves that good governments require strong leaders. The essence of a good government lies in its commitment to long-term development, however, while looking specifically at South Africa in the years Nelson Mandela was president, one can see the desperate need for a government that also prioritises inclusivity, unity, democratic principles, and peacebuilding. South Africa was struck by the potent issue of racial tension caused by decades of apartheid when Mandela took office. Apartheid was a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination enforced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Under this, the South African government implemented laws and policies designed to maintain white minority rule and use race to segregate the country's population. Black, Indian, and coloured citizens[10] faced severe disenfranchisement, constrained access to quality education and healthcare, and were often forcibly removed from 'designated for white' areas. As a result, there was significant mistrust and hostility among different racial groups which oftentimes led to violence. Mandela's presidency therefore was characterized by his determined efforts to unify his nation. One of his first significant actions was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)[11], which was an initiative designed to address the injustices and human rights violations committed during apartheid. It provided a platform for victims as well as perpetrators to share their experiences, fostering a process of national healing and accountability without resorting to retribution. This approach remained essential for building trust and reconciliation in a society that had endured painful divisions. Moreover, creating a "rainbow nation"[12] guided Manadela's leadership. This was a unified and inclusive South Africa where people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds could live together with mutual respect and equality; something that had lacked for centuries. He actively promoted policies that aimed to dismantle the remnants of apartheid, including reforms in education, healthcare, and housing to address the socio-economic disparities that had been exacerbated by the apartheid regime. The government in South Africa from 1994 to 1999 led to significant change in the country, fostering an environment for growth and progress. However, it is Nelson Mandela and his commitment to non-retributive social justice that facilitated these changes, highlighting that good governments are guided by strong leaders at their helm. After his death, the ANC government has struggled, beset by allegations of corruption. The strength of his moral leadership is what kept a divided nation united in the aftermath of Apartment.

The prompt however suggests that a strong leader is mandatory for a 'good' government. This subtly implies the central role of the leader and the functioning of a government in the hands of the leader, as opposed to the larger masses. One of the most popular forms of government is democracy which depends on the validation of millions of people in the form of electoral support. The leader, then, is simply as effective as their people allow them to be - especially in democratic systems. Collaboration and participation in decision-making procedures that include a range of viewpoints can lead to good governance by minimising the need for a single strong leader. For example, the direct democracy

---

[10] "Mandela: Struggle for Freedom." *CMHR*, humanrights.ca/exhibition/mandela-struggle-freedom. Accessed 17 July 2024.

[11] "LibGuides: Nelson Mandela Guide: Truth & Reconciliation Commission." *Cornell University Research Guides - LibGuides at Cornell University*, 1044, guides.library.cornell.edu/mandela/truth. Accessed 8 July 2024.

[12] "The Nobel Peace Prize 1993." *NobelPrize.org*, www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1993/mandela/article/. Accessed 9 July 2024.

approach used in Switzerland prioritises citizen engagement and group decision-making over strong individual leadership.[13]

In conclusion, a complex and intricate question, certainty is unattainable in its answers. It is clear that different social and political contexts are the ones that determine the necessity of strong leaders to form good governments and hence its requirement cannot be concluded. While good governments do not always require strong leaders, through this essay it has been shown that strong leaders can enhance the governance of a nation through various mediums ranging from being flagbearers of change to handling difficult situations. However, sometimes strong leaders do lead to the inefficiencies of a government, striping it of its fundamental functions. Hence, it is crucial to look at t specific instances rather than be overtly focused on misguided generalisations. Therefore, good governments do benefit from strong leaders, but their essentialness is debatable and disputable.

Works Cited

[13] "This is How Switzerland's Direct Democracy Works." *World Economic Forum*, 31 July 2017, www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/07/switzerland-direct-democracy-explained/. Accessed 20 July 2024.

Asians From Uganda, asiansfromuganda.org.uk/images/obituary-theguardian.pdf.

Accessed 10 July 2024.

Haynes, Michael. "Lee Kuan Yew: Singapore's Leadership & Global Powerhouse

Transformation." *BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP*, 22 Sept. 2023,

www.businessandleadership.com/leadership/item/lee-kuan-yew-leadership-transform

ed-singapore/. Accessed 31 June 2024.

Holmberg, S., and B. Rothstein. *Good government: The relevance of political*

science. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012.

"How Did Adolf Hitler Happen?" *The National WWII Museum | New Orleans*, 22

June 2017, www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/how-did-adolf-hitler-happen.

Accessed 7 July 2024.

"How Nelson Mandela Fought Apartheid—and Why His Work is Not Complete."

National Geographic, 17 July 2020,

www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/nelson-mandela-fought-apartheid-work-

not-complete. Accessed 9 June 2024.

Leopold, Mark. *Idi Amin: The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil*. Yale UP, 2020.

"Mahatma Gandhi Biography | Social Justice & Special Assistance Department."

sjsa.maharashtra.gov.in/en/mahatma-gandhi-biography. Accessed 16 June 2024.

Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*.

Hachette UK, 2008.

"Obituary: Idi Amin." *The Guardian*, 18 Aug. 2003,

www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/18/guardianobituaries. Accessed 10 July

2024.

"The People Have Spoken – The Effects of Direct Democracy in Switzerland." *The Perspective*, 15 May 2022, www.theperspective.se/2021/03/30/article/the-people-have-spoken-the-effects-of-direct-democracy-in-switzerland/. Accessed 25 July 2024.

Ryback, Timothy. "How Hitler Used Democracy to Take Power." *TIME*, 26 Apr. 2024, time.com/6971088/adolf-hitler-take-power-democracy/. Accessed 7 July 2024.

Stiftung, Bertelsmann. "Switzerland." *SGI | Sustainable Governance Indicators*, www.sgi-network.org/2020/Switzerland/Quality_of_Democracy. Accessed 21 July 2024.

"The Weimar Republic: How Did It Allow Hitler's Rise to Power?" *TheCollector*, 18 Apr. 2023, www.thecollector.com/weimar-republic-hitler-rise-to-power/. Accessed 7 July 2024.