WHY HISTORICALLY, MANY OPPRESSIVE REGIMES SURVIVED FOR A LONG TIME:
A SIMPLE MATHEMATICS-BASED EXPLANATION

Phenomenon. Historically, many oppressive regimes, in which most of the population was unhappy with the rulers, have successfully survived for a long time. Why did it happen that while the vast majority of people were clearly against the regime – and had the power (caused by sheer numbers) to overthrow it – they remain docile. That they had this power can be seen, e.g., from the fact that in many cases, after many decades (and sometime even centuries) of oppression, they reasonably easily overthrew the oppressive regime – but why have not they done this earlier?

In each specific case, historians provide convincing specific explanations for the delay. However, the phenomenon is so general that, in our opinion, deserves a general explanation, explanation not related to any specifics of the regime. Such a general explanation is what we aim to provide.

Our explanation. We are all individuals. We are all different. A person cannot simply follow what others say, cannot simply feel good towards everyone else and towards everyone’s actions and ideas -- our feeling of difference necessitates that we actively oppose some other people. For simplicity, let us denote by N the average number of other people with whom an individual actively disagrees.

This negative attitude can be expressed towards people we know – for the simple reason that it is difficult to seriously disagree with someone who we do not know. This means either people in our close vicinity – our family, our neighbors, our co-workers – or people in the elite about whom everyone knows.
In democratic situations, some of the active negative attitude is located against our neighbors, some against the elite, and there is a healthy amount of both. However, in an oppressive regime, an active opposition to the regime is immediately suppressed. As a result, all the active negative attitude becomes directed towards our neighbors. As a result, while most of the folks may be against the regime, they are so much negative against each other than they cannot get together to fight the regime. And so the oppressive regimes survive.

Side effect. An interesting side effect of this analysis is a possible explanation of why some ethnic groups—e.g., Jews—seem to have more internal disagreement than others—the joke says “two Jews, three opinions”. An explanation is simple: most of the time, Jews lived under regimes that were especially oppressive to them, so naturally their natural negativity turned to their own neighbors—i.e., to others from the same ethnic group.

So what do we recommend? Honestly, we are just trying to explain the phenomenon, we do not know what currently oppressed folks should do.

It may seem, at first glance, that a natural idea is for all the oppressed people to forget their negative feelings towards each other and to jointly fight against the oppression, but historical examples show that this is not always the right strategy: there are real and important differences, and some negative feelings towards each other are well justified. Let us give two examples:

- in the early 1930s, German Communists organized several joint strikes with the Nazis, strikes whose ultimate aim was to overthrow the Weimar regime which both considered to be oppressive—and, as history showed, this did not do any good to the German Communists;

- not to mention the French Revolution, when many folks got together to overthrow the oppressive king—and then many heroes of this successful revolution were guillotined by other revolutionaries.

So our goal is just to explain the historical phenomenon.
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