

Sketch each leader's power base & vulnerabilities

Think with the astuteness of machiavelli, the brilliance of schelling, the cunning of nixon while advised by kissinger, and the honesty of lao tzu. How would you estimate the answer to this question, for the purpose of an experimental test of ability to predict likely outcomes for the study of political science? Which 6 of these 12 politicians will stay in power longest? Survive => 100%, lose power or die first => 0% Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Palestinian National Authority, 1935 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran, 1939 Donald Trump, US President, 1946 Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, 1950 Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, 1952 Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, 1953 Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, 1954 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, 1954 Nicolas Maduro, President of Venezuela, 1962 Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, 1963 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, 1978 Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of North Korea, 1982/1983/1984 All the options are priced separately. As these guys lose power, the first 6 to lose power (by any means, retirement, leaving office, will have their price resolved to 0%. When there are only 6 left, the remaining ones will have their price resolved to 100%. Note that to lose power they have to really have stepped down from their current job (or taken a less significant, same country job), not just lost an election. i.e. if there is a gap then they aren't "out" until they actually don't have the power. Quitting being president and then moving on to being an ambassador or head of supreme court while someone else takes over the big job is considered being "out". For medical issues, (if the day-to-day operations of the country are handed to someone else for at least 7 days, or the leader has disappeared for at least 30 days), and there is clear indication & belief by the economist magazine that the person is dead or gone, then they will be considered "out". Note: Trump is considered to be the US president now, even though he's not quite inaugurated yet, for the purpose of deciding this market. i.e. if he fails to be inaugurated or is, but then stops being president, he'll be "out". Deadline will be extended if necessary.

ChatGPT

Below is one way to reason it through systematically, bearing in mind that *nobody* can be certain. In effect, you're placing bets on who's likeliest to stay in the same position the longest—whether by winning elections, forcibly retaining power, or successfully riding out crises. The logic below aims only to illustrate a plausible Machiavellian–Schelling–Nixon–Kissinger–Lao Tzu thought process, not to guarantee correctness.

(1) Mahmoud Abbas (b. 1935)

- **Pros:** Has led the Palestinian Authority for a long time; no obvious designated successor with the same level of international recognition.
- **Cons:** Very advanced age; Fatah/Hamas power struggles; uncertain health; limited resources; high-stress position and talk of possible successors.
- **Likely outcome:** Quite possible he steps down or is replaced within the near- to mid-term, or that health issues intervene.

(2) Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (b. 1939)

- **Pros:** Iran's Supreme Leader holds ultimate constitutional authority. Historically, Supreme Leaders stay in power until death.
- **Cons:** Also quite advanced in age; real possibility of health decline. Iran's politics can be opaque; factions exist; no official successor but rumored quiet jockeying.
- **Likely outcome:** Could remain *de jure* Supreme Leader until death, but that event might come sooner rather than later, so "longevity in power" is uncertain.

(3) Donald Trump (b. 1946)

- **Pros:** Occupied the top office in a powerful democracy. Has a loyal base that can influence politics.
- **Cons:** Democratic elections set a natural clock; risk of defeat after 1 or 2 terms; controversies, possible impeachments, etc.
- **Likely outcome:** U.S. presidents cannot hold that same office indefinitely. Even in the best case, *two-term maximum* means he's out by Jan 2025.

(4) Narendra Modi (b. 1950)

- **Pros:** Extremely popular in India during his first term, reelected in 2019. Largest democracy but often yields strong majority wins if leaders remain popular.
- **Cons:** Democratic constraints; the electorate can abruptly shift; health/age factor less pressing than for older candidates, but still a factor for the longer horizon.
- **Likely outcome:** Could feasibly remain PM well beyond 2024, but is not constitutionally *guaranteed* indefinite rule.

(5) Vladimir Putin (b. 1952)

- **Pros:** Longest-serving Russian leader since Stalin in terms of actual power; constitutional changes have repeatedly extended potential terms. Entrenched networks of power.
- **Cons:** Even strongmen can face shocks—economic trouble, popular unrest, or palace intrigue. But so far, has navigated all effectively.
- **Likely outcome:** High probability of retaining real power for a very long time, whether or not always "President" on paper.

(6) Xi Jinping (b. 1953)

- **Pros:** China's paramount leader; removed term limits; consolidated power strongly post-2012.
- **Cons:** Historically, "paramount leaders" last a long time, but extremely centralized control can also produce backlash. Still, Xi appears firmly entrenched.
- **Likely outcome:** Very strong bet to remain in office among the last in this group.

(7) Alexander Lukashenko (b. 1954)

- **Pros:** Ruled Belarus unchallenged since 1994; strong security apparatus.
- **Cons:** Large-scale protests erupted in 2020; faces increasing internal/external pressures. Relies heavily on Russian backing, which can be fickle.
- **Likely outcome:** Might be forced out if pressures (internal or from Moscow) become insurmountable. Not guaranteed short-term exit, but definitely more vulnerable than some bigger players.

(8) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (b. 1954)

- **Pros:** Has centralized power in Turkey since early 2000s; changed the constitution, became an executive president, overcame a coup attempt; retains core loyal support.
- **Cons:** Turkey is partly democratic, partly authoritarian. Economic shocks could undermine him. However, he's shown great political agility.
- **Likely outcome:** Quite possible to remain in power for the medium or even long run.

(9) Nicolás Maduro (b. 1962)

- **Pros:** Controls many levers of Venezuelan state power, especially after sidelining the opposition and consolidating with the military.
- **Cons:** Venezuela is under severe economic stress, hyperinflation, international pressure; large diaspora. The system's fragility is extraordinary.
- **Likely outcome:** Regime is already battered; could collapse or transform. High risk of an abrupt or forced exit.

(10) Viktor Orbán (b. 1963)

- **Pros:** Hungary's PM with strong majorities; has systematically weakened checks-and-balances. Relatively younger than many on this list.
- **Cons:** Still operates under an EU-member parliamentary system. Domestic or EU-level pushback can eventually matter. But so far, remains well-entrenched.
- **Likely outcome:** Could well be in office (or effectively controlling Hungary) for a long time yet, barring an unexpected electoral wave or shift in EU rules.

(11) Volodymyr Zelenskyy (b. 1978)

- **Pros:** Won a landslide in Ukraine initially. Charismatic.
- **Cons:** Democratic system; multiple crises (including war). Any leadership in a high-stress conflict situation is precarious.
- **Likely outcome:** Could remain influential in national politics, but indefinite retention of the *presidency* is far less assured than for autocrats or heavily entrenched leaders.

(12) Kim Jong Un (b. ~1982–1984)

- **Pros:** Near-absolute control in a hereditary dictatorship. No term limits. Younger than everyone else.
 - **Cons:** Internal coup or health crisis is the main threat in an opaque system. But there's no clear sign of instability toppling him soon.
 - **Likely outcome:** Typically, supreme leaders of North Korea last in office until death *unless* a hidden coup or health event occurs. Age is on his side.
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2) Make a “last-6-standing” projection

1. **Almost certain to exit sooner** (due to age, democracy, crises, or vulnerabilities):
 - **Mahmoud Abbas** (1935): Age + precarious position.
 - **Nicolás Maduro** (1962): Extreme instability.
 - **Donald Trump** (1946): Democratic term limits or electoral defeat; cannot remain president beyond 2 terms.
 - **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** (1978): War + democracy = uncertain; tough to remain president a decade out.
 - **Ayatollah Khamenei** (1939): Likely dies in office within the not-too-distant future, though that could be 1 year or 10. Still, high age risk.
 - **Alexander Lukashenko** (1954): Big protests, major reliance on external patronage, uncertain longevity.
2. **Likely to be among the last 6** (because of entrenched or near-absolute rule, fewer immediate constraints, relatively younger, or strong majority support):
 - **Xi Jinping** (1953): Entrenched, no term limit, powerful state.
 - **Vladimir Putin** (1952): Has repeatedly extended term.
 - **Kim Jong Un** (~1982–84): Hereditary dictatorship, still relatively young.
 - **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** (1954): Continues consolidating power; has shown resilience.
 - **Narendra Modi** (1950): Popular and electorally formidable in the world's largest democracy. While not guaranteed, he's relatively younger than some and politically dominant.
 - **Viktor Orbán** (1963): Has systematically reshaped Hungary's political landscape in his favor, is mid-career in age.

One might argue about the precise borderline cases (especially Khamenei vs. Orbán vs. Lukashenko vs. Modi). But if forced to pick a *final-6*, a reasoned guess is:

1. **Xi Jinping**
2. **Vladimir Putin**
3. **Kim Jong Un**
4. **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**
5. **Narendra Modi**
6. **Viktor Orbán**

3) Caveats & Uncertainties

- **Biological clocks:** Advanced age is the single biggest uncertainty for leaders like Khamenei, Abbas, and even Putin or Xi eventually—but not all 75–85-year-olds step down quickly.
- **Black swan events:** Coups, sudden wars, unexpected electoral landslides can topple even “untouchable” regimes.
- **Democratic shock:** Trump, Modi, Orbán, Erdogan operate with varying degrees of democracy; an electoral “wave” or crisis can remove them.
- **External interventions:** Maduro and Lukashenko rely on external patrons; if that patron changes course, they could fall fast.

Nonetheless, if one tries to think *strategically*—with a combination of Machiavellian cunning, Schelling’s game-theory brilliance, Nixon/Kissinger’s realpolitik, and Lao Tzu’s caution about the fragility of power—the **final 6** above are the most likely to be there *last*.

Exit Scenarios for each

Let's explore scenarios for each one which would lead to them being OUT. Let's look at one RARE EARLY, one RARE LATE, and one MOST LIKELY scenario for departure for each, including estimates of likely longevity, and including detailed imaginary specifics about each situation which could lead to it, with named agents and operatives to give color and character and understanding. Remember to use your multiple viewpoints and consult both Lao Tzu, Kissinger, as well as all of your other assets and guidance providers.

Below is an **imagined, scenario-based exploration** of how each leader might lose or leave power early, how they might paradoxically endure for an unusually long time, and what is the most likely path they might take out of office. These scenarios are **fictional thought experiments** designed to illustrate the variety of factors that shape political longevity. They are not predictions—merely speculative illustrations. In constructing them, we'll invoke multiple perspectives: Machiavellian realism (focus on raw power), Schelling's strategic game theories, Nixon & Kissinger's pragmatic realpolitik, and Lao Tzu's wisdom on the impermanence of power.

1) Mahmoud Abbas (b. 1935) – President of the State of Palestine & Palestinian National Authority

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A swift internal power transition initiated by Fatah's Revolutionary Council.
- **Imagined specifics:** Dr. Farid Barghouti, a rising star within Fatah, brokers a coalition with younger activists. They present Abbas with an ultimatum that he must appoint a "transitional leadership council" or risk a formal challenge to his legitimacy. Facing sudden health complications in the midst of mounting political pressure, Abbas agrees to retire abruptly.
- **Longevity:** Out within months.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** "All streams flow to the sea because it is lower than they." Even the most entrenched authority can yield suddenly if it stands too rigid.

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Defying advanced age, Abbas remains the figurehead until his early 90s.
- **Imagined specifics:** Despite rumors of ill health, Abbas continually reshuffles the Palestinian Authority's bureaucracies to preserve loyalty. Even Hamas–Fatah reconciliation talks stall, but international donors keep endorsing Abbas as the "known quantity." His health holds out.
- **Longevity:** Lasts another decade.
- **Kissinger's remark:** "International inertia can be surprisingly powerful in propping up leaders who are seen as the lesser risk."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** A combination of health issues and a negotiated transitional arrangement.
 - **Imagined specifics:** In ~2–3 years, a behind-the-scenes arrangement with Fatah's emerging generation and possible external (Egyptian or Jordanian) mediation quietly paves the way for Abbas to step down. He cedes formal power to a designated successor, retaining ceremonial influence.
 - **Longevity:** Out in the next few years.
 - **Machiavelli's note:** "A prince who is reliant on foreign support and an aging court is always at risk of silent palace revolution."
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2) Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (b. 1939) – Supreme Leader of Iran

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A sudden health crisis forces immediate transition.
- **Imagined specifics:** Khamenei suffers a rapid decline; within days, the Assembly of Experts is convened in emergency session. In a shock twist, a younger cleric—Ayatollah Rezvani, backed by the Revolutionary Guard intelligence wing—quickly emerges as the successor.
- **Longevity:** Out within a year.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** "When the great leader falters, the apparatus adapts swiftly, like water seeking a new channel."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Khamenei remains alive and cognitively capable into his mid-90s, outlasting multiple presidents.
- **Imagined specifics:** Despite rumors of ill health, advanced medical treatment keeps him stable. Hardline factions tighten the Revolutionary Guard's grip to ensure continuity. The next decade sees intensifying clampdowns, but Khamenei retains final say.
- **Longevity:** Another 10+ years in effective power.
- **Nixon's aside:** "Entrenched institutions sometimes endure beyond all predictions if they have a deeply committed security apparatus."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Gradual transition once health seriously declines; behind-the-scenes negotiations.

- **Imagined specifics:** Within ~3–5 years, as Khamenei's condition quietly deteriorates, powerful IRGC generals—Brigadier Rahimi and Major General Soleymani Jr.—position themselves behind a favored cleric. Khamenei “blesses” the succession to maintain unity, stepping back from day-to-day matters.
 - **Longevity:** Likely to remain “supreme” until passing, but functional power transitions earlier.
 - **Kissinger's remark:** “The supreme leader's real test is not immediate overthrow, but controlled handover.”
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3) Donald Trump (b. 1946) – U.S. President (as of the scenario's start)

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** Resignation or removal via impeachment.
- **Imagined specifics:** A perfect legal storm emerges: Special Counsel allegations meet with a serious Senate revolt led by Senator Mark Whitfield (fictitious). A meltdown in financial markets plus scandal over presidential business dealings leads to a negotiated exit, “in the interest of national stability.”
- **Longevity:** Gone within a year of taking office (a shocking, minimal-chance scenario).
- **Machiavelli's note:** “Republics have laws that can swiftly unseat a prince—if the barons unite.”

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Survives a full two terms in office, then wields enormous influence post-presidency.
- **Imagined specifics:** Wins reelection; attempts to circumvent the 22nd Amendment flop in the courts, but the Republican-dominated Senate orchestrates a friendly shift in the Supreme Court. Even after leaving the White House in 2025, Trump remains a kingmaker from the sidelines, overshadowing his successor.
- **Longevity:** Officially out in 2025, but still an enduring political powerbroker.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** “Leaving the stage can sometimes amplify one's echo.”

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Serves either one term or two, but is constitutionally out by 2025 (at the latest).
- **Imagined specifics:** He finishes his final allowable term; the changing political winds see a new candidate sworn in. Trump steps aside and focuses on his media empire, rallies, or kingmaking role.
- **Longevity:** Legally and constitutionally out within 4–8 years.

- **Kissinger's remark:** "Democracy's ultimate check on ambition is the turnover mandated by law."
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4) Narendra Modi (b. 1950) – Prime Minister of India

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A catastrophic scandal + massive rural unrest.
- **Imagined specifics:** Unprecedented monsoon failures lead to deep agrarian crises. In 202X, a scandal emerges tied to BJP allies profiteering off relief funds. Mass demonstrations led by activist Asha Prakash escalate, fracturing Modi's parliamentary majority. He resigns under party pressure.
- **Longevity:** Gone after a shocking single-term meltdown.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** "In a land where many voices speak, ignoring the humble farmers' cry can topple even the mighty."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Modi remains PM or de facto power holder for 15+ years.
- **Imagined specifics:** Despite fierce opposition, Modi's popularity among the middle class endures. He transitions to a more presidential style through constitutional amendments. The BJP stays dominant, led by protégé Varun Singh, but Modi retains final word.
- **Longevity:** A decade or more in the prime seat of power.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "When the prince resonates with popular sentiment, democracy can give him repeated mandates."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Another term or two, then retirement.
 - **Imagined specifics:** Modi wins reelection again, serving as PM until ~2029. Eventually, age and internal party dynamics convince him to step aside. He remains a "senior statesman," often consulted behind the scenes, but not the formal PM.
 - **Longevity:** ~8–10 more years in top post.
 - **Kissinger's remark:** "The democratic baton passes eventually, but a wise leader ensures continuity of legacy."
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5) Vladimir Putin (b. 1952) – President of Russia

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A sudden Kremlin coup from inside the security services.
- **Imagined specifics:** Deputy Chairman of the Security Council, Gen. Yevgeny Mirov (fictional), forms a clandestine alliance with top oligarchs disillusioned by an economic crash. They orchestrate a quasi-constitutional “unavailability” of Putin (possibly leveraging a fabricated health crisis). Putin is forced to resign “for health reasons.”
- **Longevity:** Overthrown within a short timeframe.
- **Machiavelli’s note:** “Even the strongest fortress can be betrayed from within.”

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Putin remains the ultimate authority for another 15–20 years.
- **Imagined specifics:** Repeated constitutional adjustments keep Putin either as president or powerful prime minister/president-of-the-state-council. He rules into his 80s, with a coterie of loyal siloviki. Russia’s economy adapts enough to prevent meltdown, and no major internal faction is strong enough to unseat him.
- **Longevity:** Potentially into the early 2040s.
- **Kissinger’s remark:** “In centralized systems, a single figure can become institutionalized well beyond normal timelines.”

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Gradual wear-down of popularity, but orchestrates a safe exit or partial power transfer.
- **Imagined specifics:** Over the next 5–10 years, domestic stresses—economic stagnation, pushback from younger elites—push Putin to publicly name a successor (perhaps a trusted figure like Dmitry Patrushev). He remains ‘above the fray’ in a powerful advisory or chairman role.
- **Longevity:** Possibly until the early 2030s in real power.
- **Nixon’s aside:** “He’ll manage a carefully choreographed departure to maintain his personal safety and status.”

6) Xi Jinping (b. 1953) – General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** Severe economic collapse triggers a Politburo revolt.
- **Imagined specifics:** A sudden housing-market crash leads to internal panic. Rising star in the Politburo Standing Committee, Hu Wei (fictional), forges alliances with key military leaders worried about public unrest. Xi is quietly “persuaded” to step aside in a forced transition.

- **Longevity:** Out within 1–2 years of a sudden crisis.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** "Water, though gentle, can wear away the mightiest rock."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Xi remains in command effectively for life, extending well into his 80s.
- **Imagined specifics:** Having removed term limits and consolidated power, Xi presides over a long era of "guided nationalism." Rival factions are systematically sidelined, and the CCP is further personalized around his leadership. By 2035–2040, Xi is still recognized as the paramount leader.
- **Longevity:** Another 15–20 years.
- **Kissinger's remark:** "He who captures the institutional core in a one-party state can remain enthroned well beyond normal expectations."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Xi leads for at least another decade, then transitions to an elder-statesman role.
- **Imagined specifics:** By the early/mid-2030s, Xi's health or changing generational demands prompt a well-controlled succession. He remains the CCP's "Elder Chairman," overshadowing successors but reducing daily involvement.
- **Longevity:** ~10–15 more years in top power.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "Long reigns in monolithic systems end by carefully orchestrating the next monarchy."

7) Alexander Lukashenko (b. 1954) – President of Belarus

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** Russia withdraws support or actively orchestrates his removal.
- **Imagined specifics:** Discontent in Belarus merges with Kremlin dissatisfaction. Vladimir Putin quietly backs Lukashenko's longtime rival, Colonel Stanislav Komarov, who organizes a swift handover under the guise of "stabilizing Belarus-Russia union relations." Lukashenko flees the country overnight.
- **Longevity:** Gone within months.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "A vassal prince depends on the suzerain's goodwill. Should that vanish, so too does his throne."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Lukashenko weathers protests and remains in place for another 10+ years.

- **Imagined specifics:** With the help of loyal security forces and partial, reluctant backing from Moscow, Lukashenko quashes opposition repeatedly. The economy is propped up by ad-hoc deals with Russia. By the 2030s, he is still “Europe’s longest-serving leader.”
- **Kissinger’s remark:** “A determined authoritarian in a small strategic state can endure if he remains a ‘useful buffer’ for great powers.”

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Gradual weakening, forced exit in 2–5 years.
 - **Imagined specifics:** Increasingly large protests, plus behind-the-scenes Kremlin pressure, eventually produce a ‘soft’ transition. A negotiated amnesty for Lukashenko and his family is arranged, and new elections are nominally recognized. Lukashenko “retires” to a secure dacha.
 - **Longevity:** Probably out within a few years.
 - **Lao Tzu’s note:** “Clinging too firmly to power is like grasping water; eventually it slips away.”
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8) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (b. 1954) – President of Turkey

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** An unexpected fracturing of the AKP plus economic freefall.
- **Imagined specifics:** A currency crisis triggers hyperinflation. Former allies like Mehmet Yilmaz, once an AKP insider, join an opposition coalition. Mass protests erupt in Istanbul. Erdoğan tries to declare emergency powers, but the military chief General Selim Kaya withholds support. Erdoğan steps down under intense pressure.
- **Longevity:** Out swiftly, within 1–2 years.
- **Machiavelli’s note:** “In times of severe crisis, strongmen rely on institutions that may desert them if survival is at stake.”

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Erdoğan remains at the helm for another decade or more, reshaping Turkey’s system further.
- **Imagined specifics:** Constitutional changes empower the presidency indefinitely. Key media outlets are fully co-opted. Loyal allies control the judiciary and the military. Repeated electoral wins—amid alleged irregularities—extend Erdoğan’s reign into the 2030s.
- **Kissinger’s remark:** “Charismatic populism combined with institutional taming can yield a surprisingly durable rule.”

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Erdoğan wins a couple more electoral cycles, eventually retires or is forced to loosen grip.
 - **Imagined specifics:** As domestic demands for renewal grow, Erdoğan anoints a successor (someone in the AKP inner circle, like Ibrahim Demir), ensuring his legacy. He steps aside in ~5–8 years, possibly retaining behind-the-scenes influence.
 - **Longevity:** Perhaps ~2030 or so.
 - **Lao Tzu's note:** "To dominate too long risks all turning against you; the wise leader leaves on his own terms."
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9) Nicolás Maduro (b. 1962) – President of Venezuela

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** Opposition forces unify with key military factions; abrupt regime collapse.
- **Imagined specifics:** High-ranking general María Varela leads "Operation Phoenix," a peaceful standoff that forces Maduro to seek asylum abroad. Citing catastrophic economic mismanagement, the military steps in to form a transitional council.
- **Longevity:** Gone almost overnight.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "When the captain depends on discipline but the ranks suffer privation, rebellion is swift."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Maduro, against all odds, stays another 10+ years through external backing and internal suppression.
- **Imagined specifics:** With discreet but crucial support from key allies (perhaps non-Western powers providing resources), Maduro manages to keep the Venezuelan military hierarchy loyal. The opposition remains fractured. Despite poverty, no coup achieves critical mass.
- **Longevity:** Rules well into the 2030s.
- **Kissinger's aside:** "In some failing states, inertia sets in; ironically, the very dysfunction can keep a dictator afloat if no faction is strong enough to topple him."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Gradual erosion, a negotiated transition or forced exile within a few years.
- **Imagined specifics:** Ongoing sanctions and regional pressure push the military to negotiate Maduro's departure. In ~2–5 years, a transitional authority is formed after quiet dialogues involving the OAS (Organization of American States). Maduro departs for Cuba or an allied country.
- **Longevity:** Out in the medium term.

- **Lao Tzu's note:** "A tree with rotten roots eventually falls; the only question is when the storm arrives."
-

10) Viktor Orbán (b. 1963) – Prime Minister of Hungary

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A dramatic EU-level clampdown or sudden electoral revolt.
- **Imagined specifics:** Ongoing disputes over rule-of-law funding cause the EU to freeze essential transfers. Hungary's economy falters. A new coalition led by András Tóth, a moderate conservative turned critic of Orbán, unexpectedly wins a large majority. Orbán is forced to concede after failing to form a government.
- **Longevity:** Out in a single shocking election.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "Even the cunning reformer can be undone if resources dry up and foes unite."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Orbán remains a central figure, possibly rotating through titles, for 15+ more years.
- **Imagined specifics:** Fidesz cements near-permanent parliamentary dominance. Orbán becomes President, then later returns as PM, effectively overshadowing all successors. EU never musters the unanimous will to force his exit.
- **Longevity:** Could remain in command into the mid-2030s or beyond.
- **Kissinger's remark:** "A leader who skillfully manipulates democratic institutions can create a near 'one-party' environment if no external power strongly intervenes."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Orbán continues for 5–10 more years, then yields to an ally or faces eventual electoral fatigue.
 - **Imagined specifics:** Orbán staves off short-term threats but eventually the Hungarian electorate, particularly younger voters, grow restless. After a final term, he transitions to a behind-the-scenes 'kingmaker' role, letting a close ally (like Dóra Kovács) become PM.
 - **Longevity:** Possibly out by the early 2030s.
 - **Lao Tzu's note:** "Nothing stands forever, even if built with cunning scaffolds."
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11) Volodymyr Zelenskyy (b. 1978) – President of Ukraine

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** Collapses politically under war/financial stress.
- **Imagined specifics:** War drags on with no resolution; domestic frustration surges. A powerful political figure, ex-Prime Minister Karina Bondarenko, forms a cross-party coalition demanding Zelenskyy's resignation, threatening impeachment. Weakened by a security crisis, Zelenskyy steps down.
- **Longevity:** Out within a single term.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "High expectations can be a double-edged sword: if the prince cannot deliver, the people quickly turn."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Unexpectedly, Zelenskyy unifies the country, wins multiple elections, and remains in office a decade or more.
- **Imagined specifics:** With foreign aid boosting Ukraine's economy and a successful resolution to major conflicts, Zelenskyy's popularity surges. He amends constitutional term limits (under intense public support) to continue leading reconstruction well into the 2030s.
- **Longevity:** Possibly 10–12 years as a wartime and reconstruction leader.
- **Kissinger's reflection:** "War can catalyze extraordinary expansions of authority if a leader is seen as a savior."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Serves another term or so, eventually replaced by normal democratic transitions.
 - **Imagined specifics:** After navigating the war's critical phases, Zelenskyy's support either stabilizes or slowly wanes. He may lose or forgo reelection within ~4–8 years, returning to the private sector or taking on a statesman role.
 - **Longevity:** ~1–2 terms from now.
 - **Lao Tzu's note:** "Even for the popular hero, the wheel of democracy turns inevitably."
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12) Kim Jong Un (b. ~1982–1984) – Supreme Leader of North Korea

Rare Early Scenario

- **Event:** A dramatic internal coup by disaffected elites or a serious health crisis.
- **Imagined specifics:** Growing dissatisfaction among the Kim family's close circles leads Colonel Cho Song-ho to orchestrate a quiet but decisive power grab, capitalizing on

Kim's rumored heart condition. Kim is either incapacitated or vanishes from public view. The new leadership claims "continuity," but Kim is out.

- **Longevity:** Gone abruptly in 1–2 years.
- **Machiavelli's note:** "In absolute courts, the dagger in the night can appear suddenly, though rarely."

Rare Late Scenario

- **Event:** Kim Jong Un rules for 40 more years, dying as an elderly Supreme Leader.
- **Imagined specifics:** He cultivates his children or siblings as potential heirs, continuing the dynastic tradition. Minor economic liberalization and carefully chosen foreign deals keep the elite satisfied. He remains unchallenged well into the 2060s.
- **Longevity:** Decades more in total control.
- **Kissinger's remark:** "A totalitarian monarchy can endure if it pacifies the ruling elite, even if the populace suffers."

Most Likely Scenario

- **Event:** Kim remains in power another 10–20 years, possibly stepping aside only if health problems arise or to hand over to a chosen relative.
- **Imagined specifics:** Kim's hold on the regime remains strong, but around 2040 or 2045, he starts grooming a direct successor, perhaps a son or sister. By the mid-2040s, rumors swirl that Kim is easing out of day-to-day control, though he remains the ultimate authority.
- **Longevity:** Likely a prolonged rule but with potential health or familial transitions in 15–20 years.
- **Lao Tzu's note:** "When all power is concentrated, it becomes brittle; yet it can stand for long if it keeps the center solid."

Concluding Thoughts

From a **Machiavellian** vantage, internal conspiracies and structural weaknesses are the most potent threats to each leader.

From **Schelling's** strategic viewpoint, every leader balances alliances and threats in a complex game that can flip unexpectedly.

From a **Nixon–Kissinger** realpolitik lens, foreign patrons, economic realities, and institutional controls often decide who lasts.

From **Lao Tzu**, the ultimate warning is that clinging too tightly to power fosters rigidity, and rigidity leads to a brittle fall.

In all cases, **longevity** is a dance between personal networks, constitutional frameworks, health, luck, and how deeply these leaders entrench themselves in the state's institutions. Their eventual departures—be they abrupt or gradual—are subject to many unpredictable tides.

World change scenarios

"Continue as Normal"

SCENARIO 1: “Continue as Normal”

Outline & Causes

- **Global context (2025–2030):** No single earth-shattering event disrupts the status quo. Major powers remain locked in familiar patterns of diplomatic tension and sporadic crisis, but nothing escalates into all-out war.
- **Economies:** Modest growth or mild recessions in various regions; a few trade spats, but nothing cataclysmic.
- **Society & Tech:** Ongoing incremental development—5G/6G networks, moderate AI improvements, but no “singularity.”

Risks

- **Slow-Burn Crises:** Nations with fragile economies (e.g., Venezuela) see continued struggles. Belarus continues managing internal dissent but no decisive overthrow. India, the U.S., EU, Russia, China all remain wary of each other but work through standard diplomatic channels.
- **Leadership Fatigue:** Aging or embattled leaders face mounting pressures, but not necessarily a single flashpoint that topples them quickly.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Autocrats Extend Terms:** Figures like Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, and Erdoğan continue to refine constitutional or institutional measures to stay in power.
- **Democratic Turnover:** Donald Trump either serves his constitutionally limited second term (ending 2025) or is out earlier. Modi potentially wins reelection but eventually steps aside. Orbán remains strong in Hungary until an electoral shift eventually arrives.
- **Gradual Exits:** Mahmoud Abbas or Khamenei likely depart due to age or health, replaced quietly from within their respective institutions. Maduro might hold on with continued military loyalty, or slip away in a negotiated exit. Lukashenko’s longevity remains precarious but not necessarily abruptly ended.

In short, the “continue as normal” scenario yields **incremental** departures rather than dramatic collapses, with the world largely mirroring its 2020s patterns.

“The AI Singularity”

SCENARIO 2: “The AI Singularity”

Outline & Causes

- **Tech Breakthrough (mid–late 2020s):** A private consortium—codenamed “Omnex Foundation”—develops a near-AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) system. This system rapidly outperforms humans in strategic decision-making, logistical optimization, and political negotiation.
- **Geo-Economic Shock:** Corporations in the AI race demand new regulations. Governments scramble to harness or contain this “super-intelligent” resource.

Risks

- **Political Instability:** Leaders who adopt the AI’s counsel (e.g., advanced propaganda, enhanced security) can crush dissent with uncanny predictive policing. Others fear losing sovereignty to the tech giants controlling the AGI.
- **Ethical Crises:** Citizen movements protest the erosion of free will. Rival states suspect each other of unleashing AI-driven espionage or sabotage.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Entrenchment via AI:** Xi Jinping and Putin leverage state-run AGI systems to tighten surveillance, turning them into nearly unbeatable “digital autocrats.” Kim Jong Un similarly upgrades domestic controls.
- **AI-Driven Overthrows:** Some leaders (like Maduro) lack resources to integrate cutting-edge AI and therefore cannot quell internal revolt. A sudden wave of “algorithmic activism” topples him. Lukashenko, too, may be outmaneuvered by advanced digital sabotage.
- **New Kingmakers:** Western democracies might see an “AI compliance” rift: those who fully integrate next-gen AI for governance vs. those who resist. A pro-AI faction in the U.S. or India might supplant current leaders if the technology promises swift economic gains.

In this scenario, **AI** becomes the **main lever of power**, re-sculpting political landscapes more than any human plot or revolution.

“U.S. Is a Dictatorship—Says the EU”

SCENARIO 3: “U.S. Is a Dictatorship—Says the EU”

Outline & Causes

- **Political Upheaval in the U.S. (Late 2020s):** Severe partisan strife after contested elections. A president (not necessarily Trump) refuses to concede defeat, claims election irregularities, imposes emergency powers. Congress is sidelined or rubber-stamped.
- **EU’s Accusation:** European leaders, led by a bold Commission President, label the U.S. an “authoritarian regime,” imposing sanctions and restricting trade, sparking a major diplomatic crisis.

Risks

- **Global Alliances Shake:** Traditional NATO ties fracture. Canada, the UK, and others face a dilemma: remain aligned with the U.S., or side with the EU’s condemnation?
- **Potential for Armed Conflict:** Military standoffs near U.S. bases overseas if host countries question the American presence. Domestic unrest within the U.S. escalates if half the population rejects the “emergency” rule.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Polarizing Domino Effect:**
 - **Orbán and Erdoğan:** Seize the rhetorical moment to align with or against the new “U.S. strongman,” possibly reconfiguring alliances.
 - **Putin and Xi:** Exploit the Western rift, proclaiming themselves “voices of stability,” further entrenching their rule.
 - **Trump (if relevant):** If he’s still in power or returns, he might align with the new authoritarian direction. Otherwise, a new extremist figure in the U.S. could overshadow him.
- **Democracies in Disarray:** India under Modi might try to navigate a neutral path; Europe attempts to unify but faces internal disagreements.
- **Outcomes:** Some U.S. states or political figures push for a reversion to democracy, culminating in a messy, perhaps violent, leadership standoff. The shockwaves disrupt global economic networks.

In this scenario, the **U.S.-EU rupture** redefines global power balances, with high risk of internal American strife and a major reorientation of alliances.

“The West vs. The Rest”

SCENARIO 4: “The West vs. The Rest—Major Global Conflict Over Religious & Lifestyle Differences”

Outline & Causes

- **Ideological Tensions (Late 2020s):** Various conservative and religious movements worldwide unify to oppose perceived “Western liberalism,” focusing on moral, social, and lifestyle divides. The West, feeling threatened, doubles down on imposing sanctions, rhetorical condemnation, and interventions.
- **Polarizing Catalyst:** A flashpoint occurs—perhaps a violent protest outside a major Western embassy in the Middle East—sparks unstoppable chain reactions.

Risks

- **Bloc Formation:** Countries with strong nationalist or religious governments (e.g., Iran under its Supreme Leader’s orbit, Turkey under Erdoğan, certain African or Asian governments) loosely align against the “decadent West.”
- **Cyber/Proxy Wars:** Direct confrontation is costly, so each side funds proxy conflicts or unleashes cyber-sabotage targeting civilian infrastructure.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Hardliners Empowered:**
 - **Khamenei (or successor):** Gains renewed moral authority across certain regions, extending the Iranian Supreme Leader’s influence.
 - **Erdogan:** Emerges as a champion of conservative Islamic leadership, justifying further centralization of power.
 - **Modi:** Might face internal calls to pick a side, intensifying Hindu nationalist sentiment. Possibly extends his rule by rallying national unity.
- **Western Leaders Under Pressure:** The U.S. President, EU heads, and other democratic leaders face domestic pushback if the conflict escalates. Some might lose power if populations tire of continuous religious-lifestyle “culture wars.”
- **Autocrats Reinforce Position:** Putin, Xi, Kim Jong Un—though not necessarily aligned religiously—could exploit the chaos to tighten control at home, presenting themselves as guardians of stability.

In this scenario, **cultural and religious divides** overshadow other issues, producing an era of cross-continental alliances and heightened authoritarian resilience.

“The Division of Russia”

SCENARIO 5: “The Division of Russia”

Outline & Causes

- **Economic & Ethnic Fractures (Late 2020s):** Prolonged stagnation, combined with secessionist movements in regions like Chechnya, Tatarstan, or the Far East. Once-loyal oligarchs and regional governors rebel against Moscow's central control.
- **Catalyst:** A shock event—maybe a disputed leadership transition if Putin (or his successor) loses internal Kremlin support, or an external conflict that drains Russia's resources.

Risks

- **Fragmented Power:** Potential civil strife, as multiple factions in the military, security services, and local elites stake claims. Nuclear safety concerns escalate.
- **International Intervention:** Neighboring countries or global powers might covertly support certain factions, seeking influence or resources. This risks an extremely volatile regional war.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Putin's Fate:**
 - Could be forced to step down if internal factions see him as responsible for the unraveling.
 - A new figure (e.g., a strong governor or oligarch with private security) might declare partial autonomy, effectively defying the Kremlin.
- **Impact on Lukashenko & Others:** With Russia in chaos, Belarus might lose vital economic ties. Lukashenko could be replaced quickly without Russia's backing. Ukraine's Zelenskyy (or his successor) might see an opportunity to reclaim territories or negotiate a new arrangement.
- **Global Dominoes:** Xi Jinping or Khamenei might pivot quickly—looking for gains in Central Asia or forging alliances with emergent Russian breakaway states. Europe watches with alarm at the meltdown of a nuclear-armed behemoth.

In this scenario, the **crumbling of the Russian Federation** drastically reshapes Eurasian geopolitics, causing unpredictable leadership shifts across the region.

“China vs. Russia—Only One Can
Stand”

SCENARIO 6: “China vs. Russia—Only One Can Stand”

Outline & Causes

- **Geopolitical Clash (2027–2028):** Tensions over Central Asia’s energy resources and spheres of influence boil over. China invests heavily in infrastructure (the “New Silk Road 2.0”), overshadowing Russia’s presence in its former Soviet republics. Diplomatic spats escalate into a direct confrontation.
- **Military Incidents:** Border skirmishes or naval showdowns around contested Arctic routes. Each side probes the other’s resolve.

Risks

- **Miscalculation Leading to War:** Both are nuclear powers, so conventional conflict might remain limited but extremely risky. Allies like Belarus or certain Central Asian states may be forced to pick sides.
- **Global Economic Shock:** Western countries, ironically, might become partial bystanders or exploit the tension. Energy markets whipsaw.

Effects on Leadership Transitions

- **Putin (or Successor) Under Siege:** If Russia suffers humiliations, Kremlin factions might remove the top leader. Internal fractures could lead to partial “division” of Russia, as in Scenario 5, or a frantic consolidation behind a hawkish new figure.
- **Xi Jinping’s Calculus:** If China wins a short conflict or exerts overwhelming economic pressure, Xi’s personal grip could intensify—solidifying him as a triumphant nationalist leader. If the conflict becomes costly or stalemates, domestic elites may push for a less confrontational approach, risking Xi’s position.
- **Ripple Effects:**
 - **Lukashenko** in Belarus or **Maduro** in Venezuela might lose crucial Russian support.
 - **Kim Jong Un** might see advantage in allying with China more openly, reinforcing his own regime.
 - **Erdogan** and **Modi** watch from the sidelines, possibly playing mediators or opportunists, shaping their political fortunes at home by rebalancing alliances.

In this scenario, the **Sino-Russian rivalry** explodes into open conflict or near-conflict—altering the leadership dynamics in Moscow and Beijing with planet-wide ramifications.

Final Note

Across these six imagined paths, the fate of each leader hinges on **internal dynamics** (health, institutions, personal power base) and **external shocks** (global conflicts, technological revolutions, ideological rifts). As Lao Tzu might say, “All things are in flux—power is no different.” The interplay of Machiavellian strategy, Schelling-esque game theory, realpolitik from Nixon/Kissinger vantage points, and the inexorable turning of time ensures that no single scenario is predictable or stable forever.