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The Many Faces of Authoritarian Persistence

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates into strategies of autocratic power maintenance. The cumulative thesis consists of four studies which conjointly examine why and how authoritarian regimes manage to survive. The first study inquires how different authoritarian regimes make use of the Internet to legitimate their rule. By proposing a new concept of e-government in autocracies, the qualitative analysis shows that while the non-competitive regimes of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan use their official websites primarily to impress an international audience, the platforms of the competitive regimes of Kazakhstan and Russia reveal a surprising citizen responsiveness. The second study, co-authored with Carsten Q. Schneider, empirically tests Gerschewski's (2013) three pillars which suggest that autocratic stability is stipulated by various forms of repression, cooptation, and legitimation. The fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis illustrates that it is indeed not one of these aspects in isolation but rather their combined effects which keep electoral regimes stable. The third study continues the inquiry about authoritarian persistence in autocracies in general. It conceptualizes the theoretical framework of the hexagon - a modified version of the three pillars which is rooted in set theory - and points to five combinations of the various strategies of repression, cooptation, and legitimation which authoritarian regimes use to remain in power. The last study applies quantitative and qualitative text analysis to examine the rhetoric strategies of autocrats. The study reveals that hegemonic regimes attempt to speak like democrats to simulate pluralism and thereby strengthen their rule. Overall, this dissertation provides a deeper understanding of authoritarian claims to legitimacy. Furthermore, the results of the various analyses collectively contribute to novel and multifaceted perspectives on authoritarian persistence.

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