

Party Organizations and the Dynamics of Autocratic Rule: Co-optation, Repression, and Regime Change

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Abstract

This dissertation is about political parties in autocracies. The recent institutionalist turn in comparative authoritarianism has renewed attention to the role of political parties by highlighting the strategic value of these institutions for autocratic leaders. Scholars suggest that political parties in autocracies enable autocrats to credibly commit to sharing power with or channeling state benefits to political elites and the masses, thereby helping autocrats to mitigate potential elite and mass dissent. Yet, research largely overlooks the issue that not all political parties have organizational features that can help autocrats achieve these objectives. Despite important advancements in the literature, scholars of autocracy have so far paid insufficient attention to the variation in explicit organizational features of political parties. By introducing the most comprehensive data set on party organizations covering more than 600 parties from 134 autocracies between 1970 and 2019, this dissertation addresses this gap. In individual articles, I theorize that the variation in party organizational features shapes autocrats' incentives and abilities to co-opt support, violently repress opponents, and institute democratizing reforms to maintain themselves in power. Taken together, individual articles demonstrate the importance of focusing on the organizational features of parties to fully understand how parties shape substantial political outcomes in autocracies.

Key Words: Autocratic Institutions, Party Organizations, Co-optation, Repression, Regime Change, Democratization