

Playing the Enemy

Information, Deception, and Dictatorial Survival

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Abstract

What strategies do autocrats use to maintain power? Across three papers, I examine puzzling aspects of autocratic rule. These range from personalist dictators publicizing failed conspiracies to opposition involvement in and service provision informed through query sessions under competitive authoritarianism. Personalist dictators in hostile environments can cultivate a robust reputation for invincibility through public accusations. If successful, it fully deters any potential future rivals.

Competitive authoritarian regimes may grant opposition elites regular opportunities to publicly criticize the government during question times. It can discourage public dissent in situations where collective action against the regime would have succeeded, had no opposition deputies given public statements. Such biased question times are one option for autocrats to stabilize their rule through query sessions. Another is informational question times: partisan deputies with low affinities towards democracy are inclined to inform about grievances among society so autocrats can improve service provision.

Overall, this dissertation clarifies how and when autocrats can gather and manipulate information to maintain power, and what roles repression plays in this regard.

Key Words: personalist rule, competitive authoritarianism, dictatorial survival, information, persuasion, repression, conspiracies, public dissent, game theory.