CONFERENCE IN THE CONFERENCE AT SPSA 2014

COMPARATIVE AUTHORITARIANISM: CHINA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND BEYOND

Why has democratization occurred in some authoritarian countries (like some Middle Eastern countries during the Arab Spring? Why has some authoritarian regimes been resilient (like China so far)?   Some authoritarian regimes face challenges from popular protests and democratization movements.   By contrast, some other authoritarian regimes are apparently immune from regime change.   Although most of the human beings have historically and geographically lived under authoritarian rule, majority of the studies in political scientists have focused on politics in democratic countries. The papers in this "conference in the conference" try to fill this hole in political science. Interestingly, many authoritarian regimes have faced social unrest, and they have been democratized in some cases while they have survived in other cases. What explanations would account for this variation? To answer this question, the papers in the panels draw empirical evidence from China, the Middle East, and other authoritarian countries. Panel 1 focuses on how rulers manage political communication and information to maintain the authoritarian regime, Panel 2 focuses on how authoritarian rulers institutionalize governance for survival of the regime, and Panel 3 seek theoretical implications on comparative authoritarianism based on empirical evidence from China, Middle Eastern countries, and other authoritarian countries.

PANEL 1: COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION, AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Chair/Discussant: Hiroki Takeuchi (Southern Methodist University: htakeuch@smu.edu)

INSTITUTIONS FOR ASSESSING POPULAR DISCONTENT IN COMMUNIST PARTY-STATES

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This paper offers a theoretical argument concerning how communist party-states address the challenge of collecting information on popular discontent. It argues that a wide range of party and state institutions are involved in information gathering (state security; various government agencies; various communist party departments; and the media).   Although most of these institutions engage in the involuntary extraction of information, some also promote voluntary transmission of information by citizens, primarily in the form of petitions and complaints. The paper argues that responsiveness to citizen preferences is essential for effective authoritarian governance and for building regime legitimacy. The empirical evidence for this paper comes from Bulgarian, Soviet, East German, and Chinese archival materials, as well as from interviews conducted in China.

E-MONITORING AND REGIME IMPROVEMENT IN CHINA: TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES AND SYSTEMIC LIMITATIONS

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Information technologies are often regarded as "liberation technologies" (Larry Diamond), because mobile phones and the Internet enable citizens to organize and coordinate resistance against autocratic rule. However, all political systems—democracies and autocracies alike—depend fundamentally on information feedbacks to maintain their equilibrium, and digital technologies greatly facilitate the gathering and processing of such information. The better the information flows between regime and society are, the more political authorities are able to fine-tune their policies in line with the stability requirements of the system. The "liberation technology" perspective misses that information technologies can also serve to stabilize autocratic regimes, for example by enhancing surveillance, accountability, indoctrination, and participation. It follows that improved information flows can both strengthen and undermine autocratic rule, and the puzzle is how autocratic regime elites deal with this dilemma. China is a good case to study this issue, because an increasing number of local governments are applying information technologies to strengthen their "social management" capabilities. This paper contributes to a better understanding of the capabilities and limitations of e-monitoring in China by introducing the results of first-hand research on e-monitoring platforms in three Chinese provinces. It illuminates how information technologies are used to gather information about the preferences and grievances of the local population, how this information is processed, and how it motivates government action. On the other hand, it sheds light on the systemic limitations that prevent such solutions from being implemented more broadly than is presently the case.

AUTHORITARIAN REBELS: (MIS)APPROPRIATION OF REVOLUTIONARY SYMBOLS IN THE JUNE 30 / JULY 3 EGYPTIAN RESTORATION

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One of the pillars sustaining authoritarian rule is maintaining the dominance in the political discourse. Thus, competitiveness and adaptability in the media and cultural domains can be important factors to explain the pattern of resilience and collapse of authoritarian regimes facing revolutionary situation. In Egypt, the Mubarak regime had mobilized the media and intellectuals for maintaining hegemony in cultural and other various domains. This hegemony was shaken by unprecedented intrusion into the domain of political discourse by young revolutionaries, who were tech-savvy equipped with mobile phones and the social media during the uprising in January and February of 2011. Facing the regime crumbling day by day, the military changed sides and took the side of the demonstrators under the banner of "people and military, one hand," deserting internal security officers and newly empowered businessmen who had been colleagues with the ruling coalition. On the other hand, the revolutionary coup in July 3, 2013, restored much of former authoritarian rule. Most importantly, state hegemony on political discourse was reinstated. In doing so, symbols and slogans of revolution were (mis)appropriated or usurped by the state that was led by the military-security reunion to grab the hegemonic position in the political discourse still dominated and saturated by revolutionary themes. The Egyptian state

regained control not only by simply co-opting many of the youth rebels and liberal opposition politicians but also by adapting to and hijacking the revolutionary discourse that had appeared after the downfall of the Mubarak regime. This paper analyses the (mis)appropriation of revolutionary symbols and slogans by pro-coup officials and politicians, who took up their remarks to legitimize extra-legal power grab.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NATIONALIST PROTESTS IN CHINA: A SUBNATIONAL APPROACH

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Anti-Japanese protests have dominated headlines and diplomatic relations between China and Japan in 2012 as well as in 2010 and 2005. Using an original city-level dataset of anti-Japanese protests in 2012, we evaluate several prominent arguments about the domestic role of nationalist protest in authoritarian regimes. Specifically, we evaluate the degree to which variation in nationalist protest at the subnational level reflects: a) *venting*, i.e. a channel for expressing or diverting domestic or anti-regime discontent in cities where socioeconomic grievances are highest; b) *propaganda*, i.e. a reflection of anti-Japanese patriotic education efforts since the early 1990s; c) a spontaneous reflection of *sincere anti-Japanese grievances*, i.e. the degree of victimization during Japan's invasion and occupation of China during World War II; and d) *mobilizational resources*, i.e. the availability of human and physical capital that facilitates social organization and mobilization.

PANEL 2: INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

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ADAPTIVE AUTHORITARIANISM: EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM CONTEMPORARY CHINA'S LOCAL STATE

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The contemporary one-party rule in the People's Republic of China represents a gold-mine for comparative research on modern autocracies, not least since the CCP successfully weathered the third (or even fourth) wave of global democratization. One of the most often cited manifestations of the political system "with Chinese characteristics" is its amazing output performance, which builds on the capacity to safeguard relatively effective policy implementation and public goods provision to a sufficient—albeit not ideal—degree. This ability has led to the CCP regime being perceived as fundamentally different to other communist regimes that have ultimately experienced systemic collapse, to contemporary non-democratic and unstable "failing states" in the third world, and to the kind of authoritarian systems that have lately been seen in a state of outright collapse in the Middle East. There is already a strand of excellent social science research which convincingly explains this effectiveness by unraveling

China's "adaptive authoritarianism": in particular, its readiness and ability to undertake continuous, problem-oriented institutional and ideological reforms. These studies investigate the pillars of China's political system stability, or even legitimacy, mainly at the macro or meso level, and do not systematically trace system adaptation and adaptive policy implementation down to the lowest levels of government and politics in China. However, this paper contends that Chinese authoritarian resilience up to the very day should as well be explored where government decisions are tried, policies get implemented, and "the state meets people." Therefore, the paper sets out a proposal for the design and continuous testing of a research model for the complementary analysis of political system adaptability "on the ground": that is, for long-term qualitative explorations of all kinds of policy reforms, especially the circumstances of their local implementation. Moreover, preliminary findings from related intensive field research since 2008 are reported, which support the overall proposal.

ON DELIBERATIVE AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNANCE

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Why would an authoritarian regime set up deliberative institutions to allow people to complain publicly, if as often presumed, complaints facilitate protests and cause social instability? We address this question from a theoretical perspective, arguing that deliberation is a process of hierarchical communication not only between the government and the citizens, but also among the citizens. We show that it serves two functions. First, it helps the government respond to fluctuant public opinion. Meanwhile, it may also help to reshape the citizens' beliefs. Specifically, deliberation disorganizes citizens if they find themselves split over government policies. If deliberation, however, reveals that a protest can be successful, the government identifies the danger and improves the policy to ease the opposition. When the citizens are perceived to be sufficiently homogeneous, deliberation is allowed. We further investigate two deliberative mechanisms that combine a private poll with either a committed responsiveness or a garbling strategy. We show that they strictly enhance the government's payoff by constraining it from over-manipulating citizens' learning, thus amplifying the disorganization effect.

WHY HAVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES IN SYRIA, EGYPT, LIBYA AND TUNISIA PRODUCED DIFFERENT OUTCOMES AFTER THE ARAB SPRING?

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After almost three years since the Arab Spring began in late 2010, it is instructive now to trace, explain, and compare how various authoritarian regimes, their institutions, levels of consolidation and social control, and societies they rule led to different political trajectories in the Middle East and North Africa. While popular uprisings succeeded in toppling some regimes, other rulers are still successful in staying in power. A comparison of Egypt, Syria, Libya and Tunisia shows that the legacy of the previous regime, institutional and constitutional choices during the time of "transition," socioeconomic conditions, and lack or presence of ethnic,

sectarian and geographic diversity are important factors to account for the variation in the outcomes of regime change and transitions in the wake of the Arab Spring. This paper draws upon a wide literature on democratization and authoritarianism in comparative politics in order to describe and explain different outcomes of the Arab Spring.

DANCING IN ANOTHER BALL ROOM? WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF CHINA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS?

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Since the beginning of the 1990s, local people's congresses (LPC) have become increasingly active as local legislative institutions in China. Recent discussions show that LPCs have changed from the rubber stamps to the iron stamps. However, another political participation scheme in China's authoritarian regime, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) has been understudied. This paper analyzes the proposals submitted to the Yangzhou Municipal Committee of the CPPCC. It finds that the CPPCC has collaborated with delegates of the Yangzhou Municipal People's Congress (MPC). Moreover, members of MPC and CPPCC from the districts that do not have their representatives in the Party Committee (*Dang Wei*) tend to be more active in the MPC and CPPCC. This paper finds that delegates of the Yangzhou MPC represented the interests of their constituencies based on their geographically determined electoral areas while members of the CPPCC represented interest groups formed based on local business communities. It argues that LPCs and local committees of the CPPCC have become venues to present and coordinate various competing interests of the local community.

PANEL 3: THEORY OF COMPARATIVE AUTHORITARIANISM?

Chair/Discussant: Martin K. Dimitrov (Tulane Universtiy: mdimito@tulane.edu)

POWER TOOL OR DULL BLADE? SELECTORATE THEORY FOR AUTOCRACIES

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This paper assesses the utility of selectorate theory as a tool for understanding authoritarian politics by evaluating the validity of its key assumptions, examining its use in the literature on authoritarianism, and exploring the implications of modifications to the theory. Rather than a "power tool for explaining politics," selectorate theory as articulated in Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) is a blunt instrument for understanding authoritarian rule.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL WEAPON: RULING PARTIES IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

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Why do some authoritarian parties strengthen over time and others decay? What explains the prominence of ruling parties in autocracies, despite the absence of free and fair elections? Existing studies posit that one-party states are found to be the most durable authoritarian regime type, yet the existence of strong parties is not a random treatment. Because the relationship between strong parties and strong regimes is endogenous, these findings suffer from a clear selection problem. The question of how we get strong parties in the first place has been largely ignored, and we lack theories of how some parties institutionalize over time. Authoritarian parties are not a monolith: some are created before the regime comes into power and some are created after. They have different constituencies and also vary in strength and levels of institutionalization. This project aims to explain variation in party strength across regimes and over time by analyzing over 170 ruling parties in autocracies from 1975 to 2008. As a point of departure from existing studies, I focus on parties, rather than regimes, as the outcome variable and construct measures of party strength that are independent of regime duration. I argue that parties created out of long or intense conflict prior to the start of the regime are more likely to be strong parties because such conflict necessitates organizational infrastructure and shapes de facto constituencies. This argument runs contrary to a number of formal models and empirical studies that posit or assume that dictators can create an effective party at any time. Identifying the causes of party strength can help us understand when and how ruling parties have an independent effect on regime stability in autocracies.

IS THERE AN ECONOMIC VOTE IN ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES?

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In the study of western democracies it is a truism that the state of the economy affects election outcomes: voters support the incumbent government when the economy is doing well; otherwise, they vote against it. There exists strong empirical support for the claim that an "economic vote" exists in the United States, in Western Europe, and increasingly in new or low-income democracies in other regions of the world as well. However, we know much less about the strength of this relationship in the so-called electoral autocracies—regimes in which regular, contested, multi-party elections determine who holds power, but elections that are systematically biased in favor of the incumbent.

It is not obvious whether the economic vote should be larger or smaller in electoral autocracies than in democracies. One line of argument, bolstered by research across developed democracies, finds that economic voting is strongest when there is high clarity of responsibility—that is, when voters can easily identify who is responsible for economic policy. Thus, we should expect the economic vote to be especially strong under one-party dominance of the state, as is true in most electoral autocracies. But there are also forceful arguments to the contrary: recent work implies the economic vote may be weakened in electoral autocracies by the presence of clientelistic

networks of patronage, by the absence of credible opposition parties or candidates, or by the incumbent's ability to coerce or intimidate voters and commit electoral fraud.

Using an original dataset of all electoral autocracies since 1950, this paper will assess these competing claims by measuring the effect of economic growth on ruling party survival in elections and attempting to account for variation in the size of the economic vote across these regimes. Variables of particular interest are the age of the regime and time in power of the incumbent, the type of executive, the size of the state relative to total economic output, and the openness of elections.

"KILLING ME SOFTLY": UNDERMINING OPPOSITION PARTIES BY GERRYMANDERING IN COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

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Authoritarian regimes hold regular elections because, as some argue, elections help the ruling elite achieve various political objectives. The instrumental values of elections manifest themselves only when the ruling elite wins the elections. How can the elite ensure electoral successes? This paper examines one understudied factor in the literature of competitive authoritarianism: gerrymandering. Unlike in democracies, where gerrymandering is deemed to strengthen the incumbency advantage, gerrymandering in authoritarian regimes is commonly used to undermine it, so that the opposition incumbents are unable to foster a stable local support network. I provide a systematic study of electoral redistricting in Hong Kong, based on a dataset that tracks the boundary change of 38,000 residential buildings (or 84 percent of the total households). The empirical findings show that (1) buildings located in opposition-controlled constituencies are more likely to be redistricted; (2) an average level of redistricting would reduce incumbents' vote share by 5 percent; and (3) redistricting makes incumbents more likely to opt out of reelection.