Article:

Review Essay

Shifting Patterns of Governance in Authoritarian Regimes

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Uwe Backes and Steffen Kailitz (ed.), *Ideocracies in Comparison: Legitimation – Cooptation – Repression* (London: Routledge, 2016), 400 pp., £90.00, ISBN 9781138848856 (hbk)

Julia Bader, *China's Foreign Relations and the Survival of Autocracies* (London: Routledge, 2015), 222 pp., £90.00, ISBN 9780415660952 (hbk)

Agustina Giraudy, *Democrats and Autocrats: Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity within Democratic Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 240 pp., £50.00, ISBN 9780198706861 (hbk)

Introduction

Over the past decade, as the Third Wave of democratisation has stalled and began to recede, attention has increasingly shifted to understanding the internal workings and governance of non-democratic regimes. Core distinctions between military, party and personalist regime types have received renewed attention (Brooker, 2014; Cheibub, 2007; Gandhi, 2010) and new classifications of non- or semi-democratic regime types are proliferating in number and complexity. Concepts such as competitive authoritarianism indicate the evolution of traditional, rigid forms of non-democratic regime to more disguised or fluid formations (Levitsky and Way, 2010). He and Warren (2011: 269) note that such hybrid 'regimes mix authoritarian rule with political devices including elections, consultative forums, political parties and legislatures that we would normally associate with democracy.' In adopting the appearance and language of democracy non-democratic regimes have sought to legitimise their rule on terms that are deemed acceptable by the international community. Recognising the array of forms of governance in authoritarian

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regimes is an important task in moving away from a simple binary democratic-authoritarian classification. In turn, this has the potential to raise challenging questions for the governance of democratic regimes, due to the disillusionment with 'politics as usual' and the rise of populist and exclusionary regimes, which may presage processes of de-democratisation (see Tilly, 2006).

This essay considers variations in forms of authoritarian governance as they have emerged and consolidated in the contemporary era. The aim is to determine whether there are common themes that can be identified in the governance of authoritarian regimes. It also examines how these patterns of governance have changed and evolved in relation to opportunities and threats in the broader context. The three books considered here draw out variations in authoritarian governance across differing temporal and geographical spaces and scales. The edited collection by Backes and Kailitz examines the role of ideology in animating a particular regime type historically, providing an important measure of how legitimacy can be sought and managed by non-democratic regimes. The role of black knights in the form of 'counter-hegemonic powers whose economic, military and/or diplomatic efforts may blunt American or European Union…democratising or other pressure' (Way, 2015: 691) is gaining in significance (see also Chou, 2016). In this line, Bader examines the growing influence of China as an international actor and potential black knight, bringing a focus to the export of authoritarian soft-power. Finally, Giraudy examines the existence of subnational authoritarian regimes in nominally democratic states, an issue that has implications that reach beyond the study of authoritarian governance to challenge established beliefs about democratic systems and their homogeneity. Together the three books provide a comprehensive assessment of some of the key issues in the study of authoritarian regimes, contributing to the task of revealing hidden depths that have previously been overlooked or obscured.

The essay begins by examining the role of ideology and the forms of legitimation strategies adopted authoritarian regimes to maintain order and control. In the second section the focus shifts to the apparent rise of authoritarian soft power in the form of the black knight, addressing the extent to which such regimes can use support to generate international legitimacy and allies. The third section shifts the focus to the subnational level, considering

how authoritarian enclaves can persist in democratic states and the associated governance implications for such regimes. Finally, the essay brings together the themes that have been developed to draw out lessons for the assessment of authoritarian governance.

Ideocracies and Legitimation of Authoritarian Governance

Authoritarian legitimacy is an area of significance, in view of its role in generating stability and reducing threats. In the absence of authority that has been gained through legitimacy a regime will be forced to rely on coercion and the exercise of power as domination to maintain order (see Haugaard, 2010). By successfully appealing to a wider ideological base, a regime is able to move the focus of attention beyond the immediate issues around government structures and focus on the future ideal. Considering the role of ideology, Brooker (2014: 114 emphasis in original) has argued that:

> the ideological claim to legitimacy has been distinctive in having both a *narrower* sense, which is focused on the… right to rule, and a *broader* sense that involves a less direct legitimation of the regime in terms of the goals and principles enshrined in the ideology.

Drawing a distinction between the narrow and broad forms of ideological legitimation enables a closer consideration of the relative strength of the regime. In the absence of a broad ideological base a governing elite will be forced to rely more heavily on coercive measures to maintain control, a practice that in turn threatens the longer-term viability as discontent and dissent fester in the absence of positive dispositions regarding the regime.

Attempts by non-democratic regimes to generate legitimacy have increasingly seen them turn to tools and approaches normally associated with democratic political systems. In the absence of negative feedback mechanisms, non-democratic regimes must find other ways of recognising and addressing demands from below (see Dryzek, 1988). Elections have become an important measure of generating a sense of legitimacy (Levitsky and Way, 2010) and as mechanisms for managing internal power relations (Golosov, 2016). While elections present a risk of disrupting the regime's hold on power, they can be manipulated to ensure that the opposition is effectively prevented from gaining power (see Morgenbesser, 2016). As He (2014; see also He and Warren, 2011) has argued, the use of deliberation by the Chinese regime provides a way of improving governance and enhancing its authority. Adoption of

mechanisms associated with democratic political systems by authoritarian regimes illustrates the fact they are not in themselves inherently democratic, rather they are simply tools of governance. Recognising the fluidity in the governance arrangements of authoritarian regimes is important, in order to enable a more balanced assessment of their capacities.

The socialist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union demonstrate the way in which ideological bases need to be protected and nurtured. While the degree of true support for these regimes among the population may have been low, they were able to point to a shared ideology to create an identity sufficiently robust to prevent serious challenges emerging from within for much of their existence. Focusing on the role of ideology, Backes and Kailitz (2016: 1) argue that ideocracies as a particular regime type rely heavily on a broad ideological base, as:

> ideocratic rulers not only claim to have the right to rule but also, on the basis of the utopian regime ideology, claim to be free to control and (radically) transform all aspects of society.

The extreme degree of control and self-justification of such regimes puts them into a category of their own, as they seek to overhaul social, political and economic relations in pursuit of the ideal. Although the number of ideocracies has fallen since their peak in the 20th century, the echoes of communist and fascist regimes continue to be felt today. Many of the tools these regimes developed and adopted translate to less ideologically driven regimes, which seek to develop legitimacy that will enable them to reshape the system in their image. The evolution of the Erdogan regime in Turkey provides an example of a democratic regime that has relied on a broad ideological base to establish and maintain control, moving in a more exclusionary authoritarian direction over time (Öniş, 2015).

Radical change envisaged by ideocratic regimes requires the establishment and maintenance of control over the population, to ensure support and stability. Kailitz (308) asserts that while 'no ideocracy can ever truly dominate society in all spheres [this] does not… undermine the fact that… ideocracies strive for such domination.' Working towards control in this manner such regimes rely on a degree of tolerance from 'the politically indifferent' (305) while actively controlling internal opponents. The cases considered in

Ideocracies in Comparison: Legitimation – Cooptation – Repression, focusing primarily on fascist (Italy and Germany) and communist (the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), China, North Korea, Cuba), demonstrate that attempts to exert control in this manner have historically been linked with totalitarian political systems. In contrast with other forms of non-democratic regime types, totalitarian regimes are driven by a chiliastic ideal, 'characteristically focused and projected forward to a final state of mankind.' (Friedrich and Brzezinski, 1956: 22) This means that while the ideocratic category is useful in describing historical cases, it may be less successful in capturing the range of disguised or competitive authoritarian regimes that proliferate in the contemporary period (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

A key element of the states considered in the collection, manifest in their attempt to transform society, is a complete rejection of the existing order. Distinguishing between different forms of ideology, Bernholz (73) identifies 'those referring to the real world and those of a metaphysical nature.' The regimes examined in the book were primarily rooted in the real world, focused on working towards the achievement of some earthly utopia. By contrast, contemporary ideocratic regimes, such as Iran are rooted more firmly in the metaphysical, potentially leading to tensions between the revealed ideology and the structures of governance (Ghobadzadeh and Rahim, 2016). Although Iran is generally classified as a theocracy, locating it within the broader frame of ideocracy enables comparisons with other such regimes to be drawn. The Iranian regime has relied on a religious base to justify the construction of an institutional and social environment that advances a particular vision of society, suppressing or removing views that challenge the espoused ideology. Giving greater attention to regimes that rely on ideological bases in this manner is increasingly important in the face of resurgent religious narratives internationally.

In focusing on the role of ideology and attempting to move away from the (totalitarian) regime structure, Griffin (272) argues that 'neat distinctions between ideocratic and democratic societies cannot be drawn', as democratic states can also seek to control and stifle pluralism that conflicts with the society's perceived values (see also Chou, 2011). A central theme in the governance of ideocratic regimes is what steps can be taken to ensure compliance beyond the winning coalition or inner elite (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith,

2011). Backes and Kailitz (5) identify legitimation, co-optation and repression as the three core tools at the regime's disposal. These tools represent increasingly harder forms of control and as such legitimation strategies are preferred. Turning to more direct control in the form of co-optation and repression will impose greater costs on the regime, in terms of resources and credibility, and are therefore less sustainable over the longer-term. The ability of a regime to rely on a legitimation strategy is dependent on its capacity to deliver on promises made. As Schmidt (293) notes, the costs of failing to achieve targets are significant, ranging from reinterpretation of ideals or stagnation through to collapse. Maintaining effective output or performance legitimacy therefore becomes vital to the continued stability of the regime, with co-optation and repression held in reserve and deployed selectively.

The use of repression by ideocratic regimes may be limited by the desire to ensure longer-term sustainability, yet represents an important element of their practice. As noted above, the regime will attempt to limit direct opposition to its rule, with the use of violence as a key mechanism. Bernholz (76) argues that 'ideological solutions need to be kept simple… [enabling the regime] to identify scapegoats' capable of carrying the blame for failures. Further unpacking the forms of political violence used, Maćków (340) draws a distinction between repression targeting opponents and oppression which 'constitutes non-selective (widely spread) political violence, often extending to whole societies, and generally has a preventative character.' The use of political violence in this regard should be seen as a form of regulation, maintaining stability and enabling effective governance, with increases being clearly linked to a loss of control. As Arendt (1966: 464-66) argued, terror in the form of political violence passes through phases involving the elimination of resistance, elimination of perceived threats and finally the introduction of randomised, indiscriminate terror. The regulative character of political violence in such regimes further reinforces the notion that ideocracies exist at the more extreme of the spectrum of non-democratic regime types.

Rise of the Black Knight

The number of ideocracies appears to have declined over the past century, while the range of authoritarian regimes remains broad and relatively numerous. As noted above, learning by authoritarian regimes has led to new means of shielding from external influence (Escribà-

Folch and Wright, 2015; Levitsky and Way, 2010). In addition, questions have been raised regarding the extent to which international autocracy promotion may be emerging as a phenomenon by which non-democratic regimes insulate themselves by supporting likeminded regimes (Way, 2015). The use of resources to develop and support allies was an important tool for both sides during the Cold War, as they sought to gain the upper hand in the competition for global influence. The continued spread of globalisation and the associated increase in regional integration in the contemporary period have provided new fora in which democratic and non-democratic regimes can engage in mutual support (Ambrosio, 2008; Bearce and Tirone, 2010). Following a script set down by Western democracy promoters (Whitehead, 2015), authoritarian regimes are able to use soft power and resources to influence states abroad that share their aims (Agné, 2014).

Of the supposed black knights, China has been identified as a leading proponent due to its growing economic and political influence, adopting subtle forms of support to achieve its goals (Hartig, 2015). This contrasts with Russia's explicit and arguably more confrontational approach to promoting its interests abroad (Hudson, 2015). The apparent success of China in portraying itself as a positive influence on the international stage has even led to questions regarding the ability of autocratic regimes to influence established democratic states in times of disillusionment with democratic politics (Chou et al, 2016). In spite of the apparent spread of autocratic assistance and influence internationally, the direct causal effect is not immediately obvious, as recipient states are still faced with domestic priorities. Recent work has reinforced the fact that pressure from external democracy or autocracy promoters to influence a state is filtered through the interests and agendas of domestic elites (Freyburg and Richter, 2015; Hackenesch, 2015).

In this context Julia Bader's *China's Foreign Relations and the Survival of Autocracies* provides a detailed and considered examination of how China has attempted to act on and influence domestic politics in three of its neighbours. Focusing on how China has engaged Burma, Cambodia, and Mongolia, Bader is able to tease out the role of domestic incentives in acceding to foreign pressure. Central to the argument is the selectorate theory, which aims to identify 'the different distributional patterns that can be observed in autocratic and democratic regimes as an incentive for major powers to cultivate autocracies elsewhere' (6;

also Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 2011). The analysis identifies which groups exercise control within the state and the breadth of the governing coalition. The exercise of authoritarian soft power benefits from the presence of a relatively narrow coalition able to exert its will over the instruments of the state. As Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013) note, elite motivations will determine the priorities of the regime and the ability of foreign pressure and influence to impact domestic practice, as the ultimate goal of the incumbent regime is survival and the avoidance of future punishment (see also Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2015).

Analysing the cases, Bader argues that the relationship between the size of the winning coalition and willingness to comply is not immediately apparent. Burma, with a relatively small winning coalition would appear to be susceptible to overtures from China. However, the relationship has been complicated by the fact that China 'recognized the need for better governance and a more legitimate government' (56) in Burma to safeguard its own reputation. This raises an important and potentially neglected aspect of the literature on authoritarian diffusion, that of reputational risk. As an international actor, China is increasingly visible and influential, making it difficult to openly support regimes that are deemed overly harsh and illegitimate (also illustrated in China's difficult relations with North Korea). In contrast to Burma, Cambodia has readily accepted Chinese influence and has sought to strengthen ties. The difference between the two regimes can be traced to the more secure domestic situation of the Burmese junta. A further factor that Bader briefly refers to is the degree of cultural affinity and historical ties, as these can influence the perception of pressure being exerted. Further development of this factor could include consideration of the role of culture in shaping potential for influence (see Shin, 2012).

China's relationship with Mongolia presents a further complication in terms of the influence of authoritarian soft power. In contrast to Burma and Cambodia, Mongolia is a democratic state with a large winning coalition and historical tensions that complicate the relationship. In order to gain influence the Chinese state must find ways of building trust and support as 'policymakers…can hardly take a very pro-Chinese position in public because of the strong Sino-phobic emotions among the Mongolian population' (95). In such a context, support from China will be viewed with suspicion, reducing the potential effectiveness of soft power.

The effects of the global financial crisis are identified as a turning point in the relations between the two countries, as Mongolia was forced to turn increasingly to China for support. Together, the cases suggest that while the institutional patterns and the size of the winning coalition are significant in determining how China engages, deeper contextual factors and changes in the external environment have a significant role to play in determining how such influence is interpreted.

Bader identifies a number of patterns in considering the wider implications of regime type on China's foreign influence. At an aggregate level, China has tended to target autocratic regimes in line with the notion of smaller winning coalitions. It is also argued that larger countries tend to receive more attention from China, suggesting that more pragmatic concerns around economic benefits shape such behaviour, alongside issues of regional stability. In contrast to democracy promotion, it could be argued that autocracy promotion is driven less by idealistic values and more by pragmatic real politic, bolstering the position of the autocratic core. Bader's analysis also suggests that autocratic states with higher levels of trade with China tend to last longer than those that do not, presenting China as a stabilising force overall.

The Challenge of Subnational Authoritarianism

A further issue with regards to authoritarian governance is the relative influence of institutions and elites at the national and subnational level. Within the territory of a democratic state it is possible that some subnational units may operate in ways that can be classified as authoritarian, due to factors such as historical practices, culture or geography. This is even possible in democratic political systems where the costs for the central state of challenging entrenched interests may be high. Behrend and Whitehead (2016: 155) argue that 'democracy's spread *within* nation-states remains uneven. In many countries that are democratic at the national level, the degree to which citizens' rights are respected may vary markedly from one sub-unit to another.' Democratic structures present the opportunity for illiberal elites to distort the system to suit their particular interests, playing on local cultural or social interests. On the other side, Gilley (2010) argues that it is also possible for democratic enclaves to emerge in authoritarian states. Regardless of the direction, where the subnational governance patterns differ from those at the national level there is the

possibility of tension and conflicting interests. The existence of subnational enclaves in democratic states may suggest shallow democratisation or limited capacity, and as such may resolve over time as consolidation takes place or point to risk of future de-democratisation.

China presents a complex and interesting case with which to illustrate patterns of subnational governance in authoritarian regimes. The view of the Chinese state as a unified entity obscures levels of subnational variation in the degree of control exercised and openness to non-state actors. Teets (2014:1) has argued that the situation facing civil society in China is not 'one of state control and repression, of a David civil society opposing a Goliath state', instead pointing to a form of consultative authoritarianism where civil society actors are included where they are deemed useful (see also Fewsmith, 2013). Subnational levels of government determine the degree of freedom permitted within the guidance of the central state, with these decisions shaped by the level of capacity and the associated need for support from civil society actors, as well as to defuse tension. Civil society activities can serve as a useful gauge for internal discontent, partially drawing on the historical practice of using the will of the people to challenge decisions of the central state in the interest of just and effective rule (see He, 2014; Hung, 2011). In providing space for subnational governments to develop best practice, the Chinese state has been able to draw on successful innovations and encourage their adoption more broadly (Teets, 2014).

In addition to permitting participation of civil society actors, developments in the Chinese political system also suggest the emergence of opportunities for more proactive participation. He and Warren (2011: 274) argue that deliberative authoritarianism, where there is 'space for people to discuss issues, and to engage in the give and take of reasons, to which decisions are then responsive', has emerged in a context where the decision making powers are too dispersed to allow more direct forms of control. The reasons for the introduction of deliberative practices are complicated, but can be linked to the desire of the regime to pre-empt more direct challenges to the legitimacy of the regime and manage any calls for reform that emerge (He and Warren, 2011). Introducing reforms that give the appearance of liberalisation present risks, as they can be used to challenge the regime where internal opposition adopt the opportunities and make them real (Ritter, 2015). Therefore, although the regime permits a degree of deliberation He (2014: 73) notes that

there are shortcomings in authoritarian deliberation in the form of 'constraints imposed by the… CCP leadership, the elitist disposition, and the control over political discourse by officials.' This suggests that when examining democratic and authoritarian regimes it is important to consider the variation that exists behind the national façade and how this is managed.

Tensions and patterns of divergence between national and subnational level institutions are an important factor, driven by resource considerations, ideology and more basic issues of control. Varying levels of state capacity mean that more open forms of governance may emerge in authoritarian regimes at the local level, while the possibility of authoritarian enclaves in nominally democratic states may result from proximity and the desire for control. At the local level, mechanisms of control and the flow of information are more immediate, enabling dissenters to be punished or marginalised with limited central oversight (Barraca, 2007). This possibility has led Behrend and Whitehead (2016: 156) to argue that:

> it is imperative to track the global advance (or retreat) of democracy not merely by counting how many countries are national-level democratic polities, but also by measuring and tracing subnational variations.

The relative strength of subnational elites is important for more than simply the affected population, as mobilisation of support at this level can be important in shaping decisions made at the national level in systems where the central state lacks capacity (Barraca, 2007). In democratising or weakly democratic states localised, subnational interests may rely on persistent authoritarian structures to constrain the extent and impact of reforms to protect established private interests. Considering patterns of authoritarian governance therefore requires examination of patterns all the way down, drilling down from the national level to uncover areas of authoritarian (or democratic) resilience.

While the relationship between national and subnational regimes with different characters may be seen as antagonistic, leading to an expectation that democratic regimes would want to root out internal authoritarian elements, the reality is more complicated. Incentives generated by the desire to hold power mean that accommodations may be reached as each level seeks to safeguard its interests. Agustina Giraudy in *Democrats and Autocrats:*

Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity within Democratic Countries points to the degree of patrimonialism and fiscal autonomy as the key features when examining factors that shape the nature of the relationship. In those situations 'where patrimonial state structures prevail, autocrats stand in a strong position to centralize authority and thus maintain political control over their domains.' (45-6) Control of resources enables the local autocrat to deprive opponents of fiscal resources and also access to non-fiscal tools, such as media and links to central state authorities. The second characteristic, in the guise of fiscal autonomy, shapes the degree of direct influence the central state can exercise in how resources are deployed and who has responsibility. Together, these factors can increase or decrease the ability of opposition actors to force subnational undemocratic regimes to democratise and open up to competition.

Examining the situation in Argentina and Mexico, Giraudy argues that the relationship between the levels of government within the state is more complex than the two core factors would suggest. To exert leverage and force change in the subnational regime, the President must be able to subjugate the subnational autocrat and in turn the autocrat's ability to resist must be minimal (75). While these conditions are necessary, they are not sufficient in themselves to lead to change. The uncertainty of the democratic process (particularly in weakly democratised states) means that there may be benefits to be derived from having subnational autocrats under the control of the central authorities, as these can be used to shore up support in troubled or marginal regions. In both Argentina and Mexico, histories of authoritarianism have shaped the expectations of what governance entails. This is apparent in the fact that 5 of 24 provinces in Argentina and 15 of 32 provinces in Mexico are classified as undemocratic (42). The challenge is to determine how these regimes have been able to sustain themselves within states that are nominally democratic.

A central point identified in Giraudy's analysis is that the presence of subnational undemocratic units does not in itself hamper governance by the central state. Subnational autocrats have an interest in perpetuating their rule to ensure continued access to the rewards of office and potentially to avoid punishment for past actions. In such a situation, subnational autocrats may be willing to work within the agenda of the central government where it does not negatively affect these core interests, something that has deeper

implications for democratisation. As noted above, hybrid or semi-authoritarian regimes have proliferated in recent times at the national level, making the possibility of identifying and challenging less visible subnational regimes even less likely, especially where this may threaten the stability of the state. Examining historical patterns of democratisation in Latin America, Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñàn (2013) argue that elite policy preferences and the regional environment are key in determining whether democratisation will be initiated at the national level. In the case of subnational undemocratic regimes, the introduction of democratic mechanisms at the national level may in fact limit chances of democratic consolidation, as elite policy preferences focus on stability and electoral competitiveness.

Coping with Authoritarianism

The three books considered each shed light on forms and features of authoritarian governance. Unpacking these themes and examining them in relation to patterns and trends in the broader field of authoritarian governance is an important task. Four themes are apparent from the review, relating to the role of ideology, the varied character of authoritarian governance, multi-level operation of such regimes, and their adaptability. Taking these features seriously is a necessary task in moving to a situation in which authoritarian governances is understood as real and not dissimilar to democratic governance in many ways. Giving due attention and recognition can provide opportunities and mechanisms for managing relations with such regimes.

The first theme to consider when assessing authoritarian governance is the role of pragmatism versus ideology. Backes and Kailitz present a compelling examination of ideocratic regimes that shaped history through the twentieth century. Ideology was central in providing a justification for the incumbent regime and in generating some form of legitimacy. The historic nature of many of the regimes considered raises questions regarding their relevance to the contemporary era, where technology and pressures for good governance have squeezed the space in which states operate. Bader's analysis of China suggests the result may be a shift to a more pragmatic position (also noted by Deng (2011)), as regime survival in the face of external pressure requires more nuanced approaches. The extent to which such a transition is requires consideration, as moving away from an established ideological foundation risks destabilisation. An expansion of the analysis to

include regimes in the Middle East (Iran) or Africa (Libya under Gaddafi) may have strengthened the argument for the continued relevance of the concept of ideocracy. Iran and Libya continued to operate along ideocratic lines while increasingly adopting more pragmatic stances in their dealings with the international community. They avoided becoming more democratic; maintaining the importance of the key features of their ideological legitimation strategies, while becoming less objectionable (within limits) to the international community.

A second, related theme is the breadth of the spectrum of authoritarian regime types. Analysts were previously able to point to authoritarian regimes with relatively clearly defined characteristics, something which is made more difficult with the emergence of new forms of semi-authoritarian regimes. In this vein, Levitsky and Way (2010) have identified a particular form of competitive authoritarian regime type that adopts some of the tools of democracy in an attempt to appear less autocratic. As authoritarianism is changing, it could be argued that faith in democracy has been challenged in states that are considered democratic (Rosanvallon, 2008). Giraudy analyses the weaknesses at the subnational level in Argentina and Mexico in detail, suggesting that surface appearances must not be taken for granted and the democratic label must be tested and interrogated. The apparent failure of democratic governance to deliver on promises may lead to greater interest in, if not acceptance of, authoritarian practices. Bader in particular notes the challenge faced by Mongolia due to rampant corruption, but lesser ills can also shake a population's faith in democratic systems (see Chou et al, 2016). When considering contemporary forms of authoritarian governance, the lesson is that it is not a zero-sum game; autocratic and democratic regimes exist on a spectrum where grey areas persist.

The third theme is that the varied nature of authoritarian governance is also represented in the way it operates across multiple levels. Although this is a relatively uncontroversial idea, it does require greater consideration to emphasise the interconnectedness character of contemporary political systems. The influence of black knights such as China and Russia on the behaviour of targeted states appears to be relatively limited in the post-Cold War world. However, the challenges faced by democratic states and a possible loosening of democratic norms in the face of domestic populism may provide an opportunity for greater influence. In

their 'claim to represent the rightful source of legitimate power' (Canovan, 2004: 242) populist claims potentially undermine established political institutions during periods of crisis or uncertainty, creating space for authoritarian practices and solutions to emerge. As Bader notes in the case of Mongolia, crises can increase the receptiveness to alternative solutions, including those advanced by external (authoritarian) actors. O'Brien (2015: 338) has recently argued that weakly institutionalised democracies are vulnerable to such threats, as '[u]ncertainty over the role and function of the state coupled with the rise of extreme ideologies… [can lead] to a search for scapegoats and targets'. In this context, disguised authoritarian regimes can appear more efficient and attractive. Success of authoritarian enclaves at the subnational level may lead to emulation by other subnational units and may gain influence at the national level if able to provide an impression of stability.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates that regime forms are not static and constantly evolve over time. For much of the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was assumed that democracy would prevail as the Third Wave of democracy continued to cover the globe. However, history has shown that past democratic waves have been followed by an authoritarian regression as the enthusiasm and momentum associated with democratisation wane (Brooker, 2014). Diamond (2015) has argued that rather than dictatorships continuing to decline, since 2006 their numbers have stabilised and there has instead been the beginning of a democratic recession. The four trends Diamond (2015: 144) points to in driving the recession are accelerated rate of democratic breakdown, declining quality of democracy, deepening of authoritarianism in strategically important countries and a waning of interest in democracy promotion by established democratic states such as the United States. The experience of regimes in the former Soviet and Middle East and North African regions following the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring has also demonstrated the difficulty in establishing new democratic regimes (see Aras and Falk, 2015; Finkel and Brudney, 2012). In addition, authoritarian regimes are becoming increasingly adept at operating in a globalised world, using a variety of mechanisms to secure their interests. History suggests that democratic regimes that struggle to manage expectations and rising populist challenges are potentially vulnerable to de-democratisation (on the Weimar Republic, see Berman (1997)). Therefore, in considering authoritarian regimes we must be

conscious of the ways in which they evolve to meet international norms and expectations as such changes may render them more attractive in an era of democratic crisis.

Conclusion

The books considered in this essay explore the workings of authoritarian regimes, particularly issues of motivation and capacity. The collection from Backes and Kailitz emphasises the importance of ideology in providing legitimacy and purpose for particular regimes. However, they also illustrate the ways that successful regimes have evolved over time to appear less offensive to outside observers, adopting practices deemed legitimate by the international community. Questions of appearance are also important in Bader's study of China's role as black knight. Broadly operating within the guidelines of international engagement, China has been able to develop authoritarian allies internationally as a way of supporting its own ideological and material base. Finally, at the domestic level, Giraudy illustrates the way in which subnational authoritarian regimes are able to manipulate the desire of the central state for stability to perpetuate their existence. Together, they demonstrate the ability of authoritarian regimes to adapt and take on forms of governance that ensure a degree of legitimacy and stability.

Authoritarian regimes present an ongoing challenge in the contemporary era and will continue to do so as democratic systems face periodic crises and challenges. The aim of this essay was to identify common themes in the governance of authoritarian regimes and how these have changed and evolved in relation to the external environment. The increased diversity of authoritarian political systems, represented in the sophisticated use of democratic institutions and practices by hybrid authoritarian regimes, results in an apparent reduction in distance from their democratic counterparts. Pressures on established democracies associated with populism and anti-politics mean that assessments of the strength of democracy need to be more attuned to shifts in patterns of governance that may suggest periods of de-democratisation. Moving beyond simple binary classifications of authoritarian and democratic regimes is an important step in generating a more nuanced understanding of their operation and in unearthing hidden practices. The themes identified in this essay point to the resilience of authoritarian regimes as individual entities, as well as highlighting their role in influencing the wider international context. When combined with

an environment where support for democratic norms appears to be softening it is clear that giving greater attention to the way in which authoritarian regimes are governed is necessary.

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