

ABSTRACT

The Soviet system of centralized control and order has collapsed, yet what remains is centralized rule itself. Authority narrowly and more often illegitimately exercised remains a steady feature of the political landscape against the background of unprecedented levels of globalization, economic and financial interdependence the world has ever witnessed. Indeed it is puzzling why, given the present era of democratization and globalization, authoritarian rule is proving its resilience and persistence. To a large extent, political science field has not been able to fully explain, let alone anticipate, why it is so.

The central research questions of the present analysis are: why authoritarianism in Russia remains resilient in the age of democratization? How is being an authoritarian regime impacts on its international behavior and international system as a whole?

My hypotheses are: a.) Russia is by and large a stable authoritarian regime, b.) Authoritarian regime stability in Russia is brought about by the prevalence of both domestic and external factors and c.) Domestic political setting under the Putin regime strongly influences foreign policy aims and capabilities of Russia.

The research conducted has largely relied on qualitative research method, based as it is on theories and findings in the relevant literature and involves a case-study on Russia. Understanding the essence of authoritarian rule is crucial in order to comprehend regime dynamics, causes, consequences and possibilities of change, if any, towards democracy. Assessing the more recent political regime dynamics in Russia in detail is necessitated in order to shed more light on the widespread scholarly speculation about the role and influence of leading authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes such as Russia on the international politics.

A number of branches of literature were taken into account in addressing the issue of authoritarian politics, namely scholarship on current democratization trends and on contemporary authoritarian regimes, and role of regime type in international politics. The study highlighted sources of resilience of authoritarian type of rule, stressing both domestic and international variables. We have seen how under certain conditions authoritarian regimes can last – they are not merely diminished forms of democracy – mutating into a new form of authoritarian rule that combines formal democratic institutions with autocratic practices.

The most distinctive features of contemporary authoritarians are that they adopt basic institutional forms of democracy, allow some degree of political pluralism, yet systematically

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violate basic democratic standards, primarily by manipulating electoral outcomes in order to sustain their rule.

On the domestic level, authoritarianism is primarily protracted by the ruling elite's capacity to maintaining elite cohesion by the means of policy concessions, distribution of patronage and privileges, manipulation of political institutions such as legislature and parties to maintain elite unity, and the effectiveness of state coercive capacity.

At the same time it was argued that *international factors* are quite significant in sustaining and prolonging authoritarian rule as well, amongst the most decisive are the undermined legitimacy of international democracy promotion campaign, level of linkage with the West, and the ruling elite's active campaign of barring external forces that strengthen and sustain regime opposition.

At the same time the discussion on the phenomenon of authoritarianism is taken to the international level of analysis and an equally important question has been posed relating to authoritarian states' international behavior in relation to their internal dynamics. In particular, considerable attention has been paid to the notion of a plausible 'authoritarian backlash' against democracy promotion at the international level.

The case-study on Russia has supported generally the major theoretical claims of the present analysis and has sought to unravel how and which internal and external factors influence the political situation in the country and at the same time examine further how Russia's political system influences its foreign policy course.

The centralized power vested in the Putin regime holds together a quite cohesive state apparatus, a firm grip on the economy, while at the same time paying much attention to disguising authoritarian personalized rule as democracy to the Russian public.

Russia's foreign policy was and remains 'domestic' in a sense that it is substantially subordinated to the goals of domestic agenda of consolidating the state and undertaking economic reforms. The intellectual disposition to portray Russia as a great power is an ever-present ambition among the ruling elite. However, Russia's lingering problems such as population health, demographic dynamics, and point to its internal weakness that stands to impede significantly on the ruling elite's aspiration to remain one of the major global powers.