



## On Authoritarian power sharing

Conceptual and empirical debates in the study of authoritarian rulers sharing  
power

3<sup>rd</sup> term workshop

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17-18 May 2018, Theatre - Badia Fiesolana

10 Credits

**Organizers:** Adrián del Río and Gerrit Krol

**Sponsor:** Stefano Bartolini

**External Speakers:** Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter

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## Abstract

Even in dictatorships, nobody rules alone. Very few ‘dictators’ control enough resources to prevent threats from the masses or (violent) coups by themselves. They typically rule with support from a number of allies and elite groups who obtain spoils from the top leadership in exchange for loyalty and cooperation. Coalition building aims at the enhancement of the population’s compliance with the status quo. According to the recent literature, the ‘power-sharing deal’ generates a ‘win-win’ situation for both rulers and their allies. However, dictatorships inherently lack independent authority with the power to enforce this agreement between members of the ruling coalition. Leaders can renege on their ‘power-sharing’ promises and use repressive means. Because of this, coalition members have an incentive to conspire against the leader, using those resources distributed to them in the attempt of generating support. As the literature shows, many authoritarian leaders lose power as a result of plot within their inner circle. Scholars argue that authoritarian leaders build political parties, establish parliaments and hold elections for the purpose of rendering their power-sharing promise credible, arguably because these institutional and organisational features make the rulers’ actions visible and predictable to coalition members in an unaccountable system. Recent scholarship lacks, however, the conceptual underpinnings and the empirical evidence to explain how the sharing of power among rulers and coalition members works.

The workshop aims at addressing this gap through three related questions. First, if the distribution of spoils from joint rule is ultimately at the leadership’s discretion, how and why do the key elite groups bargain with authoritarian rulers? Moreover, if institutions can be made and unmade by rulers at any point, how can these institutions provide credible commitments for power elites? Secondly, the literature suggests that elites participate in power-sharing bargains in order to obtain regime spoils, but it remains unclear which benefits they receive from cooperation and through which channels they reap such spoils, given that they cooperate under highly constrained institutions. Finally, although quasi-democratic ‘power sharing’ institutions are supposedly mutually beneficial for leaders and coalition members, dissent within rulers’ inner circle is one of the primary causes of regime breakdown. Hence, under what circumstances and mechanisms do coalition members cease to coalesce with the rulers? If rulers cannot be held accountable for their decisions in authoritarian systems, how can coalition members’ pose a credible threat to the regime stability?

This set of questions allows participants to engage in a more detailed discussion of how rulers exploit power sharing bargains under non-democratic rule and what the implications are for the organizational relations between rulers and their coalition allies. The workshop concentrates on discussions about theoretical and methodological puzzles in state-of-the-art literature. Discussion is organized around a number of presentations by leading experts in the field and by researchers whose research revolves around these questions.

## Goals

- Critical assessment of the ‘state-of-the-art’ literature on when and how authoritarian rulers share power with the elite groups;
- To learn why the key elites enter and stay in power sharing bargains;
- To learn about the co-optative strategies towards the opposition into an authoritarian ruling coalition;
- To explore who are the key elites whom the rulers coalesce with and what are the implications for distributive conflicts between them;
- To understand what motivates elite defection and why the key elites defect from an authoritarian leadership?

## Guest Speakers:

Jennifer Gandhi (Emory University)

Ora John Reuter (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)

## Credits

In order to obtain credits, it is necessary to attend both days of the workshop and actively participate in the discussion. Participation requires critical in-depth reading of the prescribed literature. In addition, we ask students to read one of the working papers and provide some feedback to the author during the discussion of the paper. Communicate to Adrián del Río ([Adrian.DelRioRodriguez@EUI.eu](mailto:Adrian.DelRioRodriguez@EUI.eu)) which paper to discuss before May 14th.

## Schedule

### Day 1 – 17 May

9:30 – 11:30	<b>Welcome: Introduction to the workshop</b>
10:30 – 11:30	<b>First Session:</b> Concepts and Theory on Power-sharing under authoritarian rule: A critical examination of the literature
11:30 – 11:45	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:45 – 13:00	<b>Second Session: Presentation of working papers</b> Why do key elites enter and stay in power sharing bargains with the ruler?
11:45 – 13:00	Tatiana Tkacheva. European University at Saint Petersburg <i>Gubernatorial Tenures in Russia: First-Come, Long-Served Basis?</i>
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00 – 17:00	<b>Third Session: Presentation of working papers</b> What are the benefits of cooperation for key elites and how do they obtain them?
14:00 – 14:50	Gerrit Krol. European University Institute <i>Between compliance and concession Institutional power and legislative activity of authoritarian parliaments in Eurasia.</i>
14:50 – 15:40	Michaela Collord. University of Oxford <i>A theory of legislative power in Africa: elite contestation and legislative strengthening in dominant party regimes</i>
15:40 – 16:10	<i>Coffee break</i>
16:10 – 17:00	Georges Fahmi. Robert Schuman Centre for Advances Studies (EUI) <i>Al-Azhar and the Egyptian state after the 2011 popular uprising</i>

## Day 2 – 18 May

	<b>Fourth Session: Presentation of working papers</b>
10:00 – 12:50	Why do members of the ruling coalition defect from power sharing bargains with the ruler?
10:00 – 11:00	Ora John Reuter. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (co-author David Szakonyi). <i>Elite defection under autocracy: evidence from Russia</i>
11:00 – 11:50	Adrián del Río. European University Institute <i>Myths and realities about elite defections from authoritarian ruling coalitions. A descriptive analysis of defections under electoral autocracies.</i>
11:50 – 12:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
12:00 – 12:50	Allison K. Cuttner. Emory University <i>Who to target? Strategic elite elimination in the contest for power</i>
12:50 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
	<b>Fifth Session: Presentation of working papers</b>
14:00 – 17:00	If quasi-democratic institutions in autocracies cannot hold the ruling coalition accountable, how do citizens contribute to the defeat of autocratic incumbents?
14:00 – 15:00	Jennifer Gandhi. Emory University (co-author Elvin Ong) <i>Committed or conditional democrats? Opposition dynamics in electoral autocracies</i>
15:00 – 15:50	Margarita Zavadskaya. European University at Saint Petersburg <i>When the party's over: priming effects in political blame attribution under electoral authoritarian regime</i>
15:50 – 16:30	<b>Conclusion:</b> Prospects in the authoritarian power sharing literature.

## Compulsory readings

Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2006). Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships. *Economics and Politics*, 18(1), 1–26.

Boix, C., & Svolik, M. W. (2013). The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships. *The Journal of Politics*, 75(2), 300–316.

Reuter, Ora John, and Jennifer Gandhi. 2011. Economic Performance and Elite Defection from Hegemonic Parties. *British Journal of Political Science* 41(1): 83–110.

Reuter, Ora John. 2017. The Origins of Dominant Parties. Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Chap 1 and 2.

## Working Papers

### 1. Tatiana Tkacheva. European University at Saint Petersburg

#### *Gubernatorial Tenures in Russia: First-Come, Long-Served Basis?*

Nowadays, Russian political regime is widely considered as electoral or competitive authoritarianism, and the political structure with the top-down command principle called ‘power vertical’ had been successfully established. At the same time, subnational regimes in Russia still give an illustration of different political development trajectories. This becomes intriguing in the given national institutional context. This research is supposed to reveal the factors which determine the heterogeneity in subnational political systems through the prism of regional executive power. Particularly, in this paper, I analyze the differences in Russia’s gubernatorial tenures’ longevity of the post-2012 period in Russia. The research demonstrates that the most important factors for the governor’s political survival are still the clientelist relations with the Kremlin and the region’s business elites. Additionally, some social bases of political machines also do matter for gubernatorial longevity. However, prior gubernatorial tenure has a negative effect, meaning the change in the Kremlin’s strategy towards keeping of long-living players under the new institutional conditions.

### 2. Gerrit Krol. European University Institute

#### *Between compliance and concession Institutional power and legislative activity of authoritarian parliaments in Eurasia.*

Institutionalist literature on authoritarian rule views legislatures as a ruler’s credible commitment to power sharing with his allies. Providing allies with the institutional tools to topple the leadership, autocrats, anticipating this reaction, invest more resources in policy concessions, rendering the regime more durable. This paper argues, however, that in most circumstances authoritarian rule does not permit institutional constraints on leadership and demonstrates that institutional power sharing depends on the structural challenges facing the regime. Legislative actors in an authoritarian regime can only put conditions (e.g. legislative concessions) in place for their support when internal divisions and/or challenges by the opposition render their (implicit or explicit) threat to withdraw parliamentary support for the government a credible threat to government durability. In the absence of a structure of government-opposition relations that is favorable to credible defection, compliance and support for an autocrat is unconditional. The analysis of legislative initiative and amendment in a comparative study of four post-Soviet legislatures (Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan) shows that the bargaining position of legislative actors strongly affects the quantity and scope of legislative activity. Internal divisions cause legislative concessions to the parliament regardless of the opposition’s strength. External challenges, by contrast, affect the quantity and scope of parliamentary legislation mostly in combination with internal dispute.

**3. Michaela Collord. University of Oxford.**

*A theory of legislative power in Africa: elite contestation and legislative strengthening in dominant party regimes*

This paper introduces a novel political economy theory of legislative institutional strengthening under single and dominant party rule, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on material from my doctoral thesis, the paper outlines how contrasting institutional outcomes result from differences in the distribution of power across economic elites, which are themselves the product of differing state-led development strategies. Where governments' economic management allows for the emergence of an enlarged class of private accumulators, this undermines authoritarian party cohesion and turns the legislature into an arena for intra-elite bargaining. Elites then invest in legislative strengthening to entrench their political and economic advantage. While this is primarily a theory-building paper, it also introduces my case selection and methods, which combine both within- and cross-case comparison of Tanzania and Uganda. I conclude by offering a sample of my empirical analysis, presenting a brief discussion of the politics underlying recent legislative reforms in Tanzania.

**4. Georges Fahmi. Robert Schuman Centre for Advances Studies (EUI)**

*Al-Azhar and the Egyptian state after the 2011 popular uprising*

This paper discusses the relation between Egypt's oldest Islamic institution, al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Egyptian state since the 25 January 2011 popular uprising. The paper will look at how al-Azhar has managed its relation with the different political regimes since 2011 starting by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the current political regime. While often referred to as merely a mouthpiece of the political regime, al-Azhar's relation with these different political regimes have seen moments of cooperation, but also conflicts. In order to understand these changing dynamics, I will follow New Institutionalism arguing that while al-Azhar's material and ideational interests remain the same, the changing institutional rules governing the political sphere in Egypt have led al-Azhar to adopt different attitudes to achieve its interests.

**5. Ora John Reuter (co-author David Szakonyi). University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

*Elite Defection under Autocracy: Evidence from Russia*

Elite cohesion is a fundamental pillar of authoritarian stability. High-level defections can signal weakness, embolden the opposition and, sometimes, lead to regime collapse. Using a dataset of 4,313 ruling party candidates in Russia, this paper develops and tests hypotheses about the integrity of elite coalitions under autocracy. Our theory predicts that elites defect when there is greater uncertainty about the willingness and/or ability of the regime to provide benefits and career advancement. Regimes that share power with the opposition, limit access to spoils, and lack formal institutions see more defections. Co-opting the opposition assuages outside threats, but leaves regime insiders disgruntled and prone to defect. Those with personal followings and business connections defect first, since they can pursue their political goals independently of the regime. Taken together, our results highlight important tradeoffs among authoritarian survival strategies. Many of the steps autocrats take to repel challenges simultaneously heighten the risk of defections.

**6. Adrián del Río. European University Institute**

*Myths and realities about elite defections from authoritarian ruling coalitions. A descriptive analysis of defections under electoral autocracies.*

In dictatorships, withdrawals of key political actors from the ruling coalition are often associated with periods of political and economic instability, at times leading the regime to collapse. Nevertheless, theories on the causes and far-reaching consequences of these elite defections in regime change offer a partial picture of this phenomenon. The reason is that previous conceptualizations and evidence does not acknowledge that ‘elite defection’ has a multifaceted character. As such, this paper offers new analytical dimensions around the concept of elite defection in terms of its magnitude, actors involved, timing and the manner in which political elites withdraw from their support to the ruler. This theoretical contribution is illustrated through a novel dataset on the political careers of legislative deputies and executive ministers in 12 Electoral Autocracies until 2016. Findings contribute to the debate on authoritarian politics and democratization by introducing new theoretical dimensions and corresponding data to study the causes and consequence of ‘elite defection’ from the authoritarian ruling coalition.



**7. Allison K. Cuttner. Emory University**

*Who to Target? Strategic Elite Elimination in the Contest for Power*

When initiating a conflict with multiple potential opponents, who should the aggressor target: the weaker party that can be easily defeated but offers little reward, or the powerful opponent that is difficult, but lucrative, to take down? This question has severe consequences within the ruling coalitions of authoritarian regimes, where dictators frequently target potential rivals with demotions, expulsions, exile, imprisonment, or execution. By introducing heterogeneity into the elite members of the ruling coalition, I formalize the dictator's attempt to demote and seize power from a regime insider with a novel adaptation of a classical flexible contest framework. I show that balance of power among a ruling coalition determines if the dictator will target an "ally" for conflict, who will be targeted, and the conditions under which elite coalitions can effectively prevent such intra-regime conflict. The conclusions I derive have broad implications for the study of elite-dictator relations as well as political, economic, and military conflict generally.

**8. Jennifer Gandhi (co-author Elvin Ong). Emory University**

*Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies*

In electoral autocracies, opposition coalition formation offers the best hope of getting to democracy. Yet forming electoral coalitions also entails convincing opposition voters to ignore compromises and engage in the cross-party voting necessary for opposition victory. To what extent are voters committed to defeating the autocratic incumbent even if it would result in dislikeable outcomes? A survey experiment in Malaysia finds that opposition voters overwhelmingly express pre-treatment support for the current opposition coalition. But when exposed to a treatment vignette about which member party might lead the next government, many voters retract their support. Specifically, voters' support for the coalition declines when their least preferred member is expected to control the government and when they can vote for a closer ideological alternative outside of the coalition. While voters are committed to opposition unity and democratic transition, that commitment is sensitive to the anticipated distributional consequences of an opposition victory.

9. Margarita Zavadsкая. European University at Saint Petersburg

*When the party's over: priming effects in political blame attribution under electoral authoritarian regime*

What happens to the political support when severe economic crisis coincides with the geopolitical victories and patriotic uprising? Do citizens assess the state of national economy through the prism of 'the rally around the flag' more indulgently or economic troubles throw some cold water on the national revival? These questions are of particular relevance in electoral authoritarian regimes where incumbents have more of a leeway in manipulating the national economy and mass media to affect public opinion and to alter the blame attribution. This study explores the variance in political support in Russia after the annexation of Crimea in the context of economic crisis and sanctions by means of a survey experiment carried out in August 2016. We analyzed the survey data by estimating average treatment effects (ATEs) and regression coefficients. The main findings suggest that respondents' evaluations prove to be sensitive to the priming questions: when the issue of economy emerges, the rally 'round effect' increases the support for the president and somewhat decreases the support of the Russian parliament - the State Duma. Although, when the Crimea priming does not boost political support. Thus, perceptions of economy, which we expected would provoke critical evaluation of the authorities, under patriotic consolidation do not produce hangover effects, but rather facilitates further consolidation around the president. The State Duma does not benefit from the rally around the flag and even is punished. The respondents praise the president and the government for successful foreign policy and punish the government and the State Duma for failures in economy.