

## CONFERENCE WITHIN THE CONFERENCE (CWC) AT SPSA 2020

### **BEHAVIORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS**

Although most of the human being have historically and geographically lived under authoritarian rule, majority of the studies in political science have focused on politics in democratic countries. This conference-within-the-conference tries to fill this hole in political science. Why have some authoritarian regimes been resilient (like China so far)? What makes authoritarian governments stay in power? How do institutions help the regime to sustain authoritarian rule, if at all? How do authoritarian regimes face the challenges from popular protests and democratization movements? 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? And do authoritarian states behave differently in international relations?

To answer these questions, the papers in the panels draw empirical evidence from politics in China, the Middle East, and other authoritarian countries. Panel 1 focuses on how rulers manage public opinion and popular participation to maintain the authoritarian regime, Panel 2 discusses political behavior regarding ideology and refugees in the authoritarian context, and Panel 3 explores authoritarian institutional politics in the context of elite politics, international relations, and state-society relations.

#### **PANEL 1: INFORMATION, PARTICIPATION, AND REGIME RESILIENCE**

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

##### **Authoritarian Resilience and the Chinese State: Thou Doth Protest Too Much**

Carrie Liu Currier (Texas Christian University: c.currier@tcu.edu)

The persistence of authoritarian regimes, in light of increasing democratization movements and color revolutions around the globe, is puzzling. The greater interconnectedness facilitated by the internet and social media have made it difficult for all states, but especially China, to filter information and keep protests from challenging the regime's legitimacy. The question is how long can the state withstand the tests of civil society, and can it be done without the use of force? In this paper I examine various protest movements in China, to determine how the state responds and what types of movements it considers most threatening. Moreover, I offer analysis of what this means for the future as China faces increasing external pressures as it deals with some of the more high-profile movements involving its Uyghur population or the more recent democracy protests in Hong Kong.

## **Information, Concessions and Reneging in Authoritarian Regimes**

Sasha de Vogel (University of Michigan: sldv@umich.edu)

When do autocratic governments make concessions to participants in protest campaigns? While concessions to national political campaigns are rare, on the regional level, concessions are often promised to policy-oriented campaigns. I argue that when protests are not national or regime-challenging, concessions are used more frequently than repression because they do not carry the risk of aggravating further protest. In cases where the government lacks information about the motivating grievance, protests convey valuable new information, and concessions are used as a long-term adaptation strategy, to eliminate grievances and prevent citizens from becoming regime opponents. In many cases, however, the government has information that policies it desires to pursue are unpopular and will produce protest. Here, concessions are used as a short-term demobilization strategy, to disrupt a campaign's capacity to mobilize. Once demobilization occurs, the government reneges, or deliberately fails to implement the promised concession and pursues its desired policies unchanged. Using Protest Campaigns of Moscow dataset of campaigns held in Moscow, Russia, from 2013–2018, I find support for this theory and find that when the government deliberately avoided acquiring public opinion information about its policies, promised concessions are not delivered in 60% of cases.

## **Internal Journalism and the Building of an Information State in the People's Republic of China in Comparative Perspective**

Martin K. Dimitrov (Tulane University: mdimitro@tulane.edu)

A unique feature of the Chinese political system is the extraordinary importance that internal journalism has traditionally played as a source of information for the leadership. Having originated in the pre-revolutionary period, from 1949 onwards internal journalistic reporting assumed functions of monitoring public discontent that were executed by the intelligence services in other communist regimes. Therefore, internal journalism has been integral to the building of an information state in the PRC. However, internal journalism is more than an artifact of a bygone historical era. This paper argues that internal journalism has survived to the current day by adapting itself to the new task of monitoring online public opinion. Internal journalism today provides both the central leadership and grassroots cadres with timely reporting that is essential for assessing and managing online and offline public sentiment. In sum, internal reporting in contemporary China has been transformed into an essential component of the stability maintenance system, which is indispensable to regime survival.

## **Protest and Crisis of Democracy: A Comparative Study in Latin America**

Yuko Sato (University of Missouri: ysato@mail.missouri.edu)

A widespread popular contention has emerged all over the world in the post-Cold War period. What political consequences did this new global protest cycle bring about within democratic

countries with unrest? Although protest activities are often interpreted as a manifestation of democratic freedom, the escalation of protest within a democracy is hardly a sign of satisfaction with the political system. Recent studies highlight that the democratic backslidings are followed by the electoral success of populist leaders which emerged from the radicalized right or left-populist movements. Against assessments where protests are considered symptomatic of poor government performance and having a limited impact over electoral dynamics, I contend that protests have a direct effect on the electoral success of radical populists. Specifically, I argue that massive protest events would promote negative sentiment against the government party among voters and create an opportunity for a radical populist to grow. To test this, I conduct an individual-level analysis using surveys conducted in Latin America between 2006 and 2016, and demonstrate that the exposure to protest events increases voters' support on radical populist leaders.

## **PANEL 2: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE AUTHORITARIAN CONTEXT**

Chair/Discussant: Ning Leng (Georgetown University: Ning.Leng@georgetown.edu)

### **Rebuilding LEVIATHAN: The Quantitative Analysis of the Ordinary People and the Internally Displaced Persons in Syria**

Shingo Hamanaka (Ryukoku University, Japan: oshiro@law.ryukoku.ac.jp)

Eight years passed since the Syrian Arab Spring began. Many Syrian people lost their home, asset, and human relationship. They faced unparalleled the greatest tragedy in life, but today, the major war was over in Syrian territory without Idlib governorate. For Syrians, their work comes into the rehabilitation of society and rebuilding the Syria Arab Republic. In other words, the people must get a social contract again with the brutal and repressive authoritarian regime after the civil war. My research interest is as follows; How much patience do Syrian IDPs have in living with the political order rebuilt by the Assad Administration and ally nations? Despite calling "civil war," the Syrian conflict has been internationalized by two camps. Therefore, we try to find evidence to recognize the difference of attitudes toward the Assad allies camp and the enemies between the IDPs and the Syrian citizens to inquire the psychological difficulties of persons with severe experiences to accept Damascus's authoritarian rule again.

### **Political Regimes and Refugee Entries: Motivations behind Politicians and Refugees**

Masaaki Higashijima (Tohoku University, Japan: isonomia11@gmail.com)

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What determines entries of refugees? We argue that refugee movements are the result of an interaction between preferences of refugees and leaders of receiving countries, and that their preferences are formulated by political regimes in receiving countries. Our theory expects an inverted U-shaped relationship between political regimes and refugee stock: when a host country is highly autocratic, refugee stock becomes small, because refugees are less willing to enter those countries due to uncertainty over post-entry treatment, although autocratic leaders are indifferent

in accepting refugees who would lower labor costs. Conversely, when a host country is highly democratic, refugees decrease again, because politicians care about public opinion, although refugees are willing to reach democracies. Consequently, host countries receive the larger size of refugees under mixed regimes, where politicians' disincentive to accept refugees is relatively weak and refugees' incentive to flow into is relatively strong.

Using global data of refugees, statistical analyses with a matching method demonstrate that refugee stock reaches a peak under mixed regimes. Further, our additional quantitative analysis and a case study explicitly test the preferences of politicians and refugees: (1) Setting the number of refugee applications and acceptance as other dependent variables, we show that refugees tend to apply for democracies, but democratic leaders are less likely to accept them. (2) Exploiting the death of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old refugee, as a natural experiment that exogenously changed refugee policy of democratic Europe, we process-trace the manners in which refugees fled into democracies and those countries closed the door thereafter due to their concerns of public opinion backlash.

## **How Chinese Citizens Order Their Political Mind: Modern Ideology in China**

Andrew MacDonald

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This paper argues that citizens in China, rather than being left-right ideologically aligned as in democracies, order their beliefs about politics along an axis of opinions on government performance. The research for this paper proceeds in three steps. The first step investigates whether Chinese citizens have the same underlying political-psychological attitude foundation as do Western respondents. Jost (2003) (system justifying) and Altemeyer (1998) (right-wing authoritarianism) have both presented scales that can be used to measure a citizen's basic orientation towards politics. These orientations serve as a type of psychological building block on which other scholars have connected citizens' more refined views of ideology. However, to the author's knowledge, it has never been established whether these scales have any meaning or consistency in an authoritarian context. This paper, using a large N survey and several experiment questions, establishes that Chinese citizens do share the same level of coherence on these indices as do Western respondents.

In the second step, this project examines whether these orientations translate into consistent views on left-right redistribution questions and conservative-progressive social questions. Contrary to a recent finding by Pan and Xu (2017), citizens in China do not hold consistent views. The literature on whether citizens in Western countries hold consistent ideological positions is decidedly mixed. To the extent that citizens are hypothesized to hold consistent views, the main mechanism through which they develop these views is through partisanship and exposure to media and political elites. Partisanship is notably absent in most authoritarian contexts, so it is perhaps not surprising that this paper finds that citizens in China do not hold consistent views on either of the major axes of standard political ideology. However, a recent finding by Pan and Xu suggests otherwise (2017); the results presented in this paper therefore suggest that their finding is spurious and the result of bad data.

The third step suggests an alternative axis of political contention, which is views on government performance. In China, to the extent that political debate is permitted, it usually takes the form of views on whether the government is trustworthy, effective, and a good steward of the people's tax dollars. Using the results of the same large N survey, this paper finds that this debate, while not providing the same level of ideological structuring as partisanship in Western societies, does help order citizens' political beliefs in China. Moreover, this modest ideological structure is predictive of citizens' views on other political questions, suggesting that this ordering has analytical value for scholars of non-democratic regimes. The results presented in this paper are novel and suggest that there are alternative pathways to ideological formation, particularly in non-democratic settings.

### **Engaging Citizens in Maintaining Stability in China: The Role of Ideology, Patriotism, and Political Fear in an Authoritarian Regime**

Daniela Stockmann (Hertie School of Governance, Germany: [stockmann@hertie-school.org](mailto:stockmann@hertie-school.org))

Pro-regime citizen participation in authoritarian states is often assumed to result purely from political fear. In contrast, this paper analyzes survey data from the 2017 Beijing Area Study (N = 2,522) to examine the associations between two components of ideology—patriotism and social and economic policy preferences—and pro-regime citizen participation in a neighborhood watch program. We find that patriotism is positively associated with higher participation, and that this effect occurs independently of political fear. Conversely, interaction effects between economic and social policy preferences and political fear were found. Individuals who did not endorse an out-of-favor pro-market ideology had higher participation when political fear was high, which we see as evidence of a signaling effect. Conversely, individuals who strongly endorsed the out-of-favor pro-market ideology had negligible participation even when political fear was high, which we explain with reference to a “hunkering down” effect in the current climate of uncertainty.

### **PANEL 3: DOMESTIC POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Chair/Discussant: Martin K. Dimitrov (Tulane University: [mdimitro@tulane.edu](mailto:mdimitro@tulane.edu))

#### **Egypt and the Changing Power Relations in the Nile River Basin and Horn of Africa**

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Egypt, with a combination of material, ideational, and diplomatic resources, and in pursuit of its own goals, used to contain and influence the behaviors of its southern riparian neighbors, particularly over issues pertaining to the utilization of the Nile River waters, on which Egypt's stability, prosperity and very existence depended. However, regional and domestic transformations in the Middle East and Horn of Africa, particularly the changing geopolitical landscape since 2011, have undermined Egypt's influence and created new hydro political landscapes that positioned Sudan and Ethiopia as influential actors in the Nile basin and allowed them to assume important roles in new regional alignments in the Middle East. This paper

examines the factors that have shaped Egypt's relations with its southern neighbors with a focus on geopolitical alignments since the Arab uprisings of 2011. I discuss water insecurity and its impact on authoritarian stability and argue that Egypt's influence on Nile River riparian states has waned because of (1) Egypt's diminished influence in the Middle East; (2) its increasing dependency on assertive regional powers in the region, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, for its internal security and stability; and (3) its loss of hydro hegemony as the regional order of the Nile basin came to be based on power relations between upstream and downstream countries.

### **NIMBY? Only to Improve State-Business Relations: State-Business Collusion in Environmental Protests in China**

Ning Leng (Georgetown University: [Ning.Leng@georgetown.edu](mailto:Ning.Leng@georgetown.edu))

In the literature of contentious politics, the focus is usually on the relation between the state and society. Seldom discussed is the role of firms as political agents of the state against the mass society. In the literature of political economy, state-business collusion is also usually strictly discussed as a dichotomous relation where issues such as profit exchanges and labor politics are the focus. This paper provides a new approach to examine the triangular relation between the state, business and the mass society through the lens of NIMBY movement against waste incineration plants in China. I reveal how firms serve as political agents of the state in the face of protests, and how different ownership types give firms different roles in the process. Utilizing qualitative and quantitative evidence, I unveil the little-understood roles of firms as state agents in environmental protests, and provide a new perspective to understand what firm ownership means in an authoritarian context.

### **The Rise and Decline of Collective Leadership in China: An Institutional Approach**

Jaehwan Lim (Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan: [tianan2@gmail.com](mailto:tianan2@gmail.com))

Drawing on theoretical insights from the growing literature on comparative authoritarianism, this paper aims to explain the institutional evolution of the Chinese collective leadership system (*Jituan lingdao tizhi*) and offer a fresh, alternative assessment of the current state of Chinese leadership politics. By doing so, this paper also seeks to shed a new light on the extant discussion regarding the conditions under which collective rule arises and endures in authoritarian politics.

Previous studies of collective leadership in China have mainly focused either on the preference and strategy of individual leaders or on structural shifts in the composition and attributes of the political elite. While attempting to synthesize the earlier explanations, this paper seeks to identify the institutional foundation of collective leadership in China and explore how it has evolved over time under the influence of both leaders' strategic choices and the gradual yet broad transformation in the composition of the political elite.

In summary, this paper argues that the collective leadership system in China, bolstered both by the political will to avoid a personal dictatorship and constant institutional reforms in the cadre

management system, has managed to endogenously generate a self-sustaining mechanism for its operation. Understanding the institutional development of the collective leadership system in China will provide a nuanced perspective into the role of institutions in shaping the political order of authoritarian regimes.

### **Internationalists Meet Reformists: Domestic Politics of Free Trade Agreements**

Hiroki Takeuchi (Southern Methodist University: [htakeuch@smu.edu](mailto:htakeuch@smu.edu))

This paper shows how internationalists and reformists make coalitions to confront the coalitions of anti-reformists (conservatives) and nationalists (hardliners). For example, Julien Gewirtz (2017) argues that the origin of China's current prosperity is not nationalism but internationalism. A coalition of Chinese reformers and Western economists was what made it possible for the post-Mao economic reform to emerge in the 1980s. The reformists indeed have a strong incentive to use the free trade agreements (FTAs) that stipulate domestic regulations as external pressure to advance structural reforms: they see intra-industry trade, enhanced by global value chains (GVCs), as a means to achieve sustainable economic growth. This paper breaks down the broader claim that FTAs regulating GVCs based intra-industry trade are connected to regional security in two steps: first, FTAs empower the reformist-internationalist coalition against the conservative-hardliner coalition; and second the empowered reformist-internationalists make the nation's behavior more cooperative in the international sphere.