

## Terms and Ideas

- Authoritarian resilience
- Rentier state
- Resource curse
- Repression effect
- Patronage
- State-dependent middle class
- Problem of succession
- Totalitarian legacies

## Questions

### **Q: How do natural resources strengthen authoritarian regimes?**

**A:** Ross argues that natural resources support authoritarian regimes through three separate causal mechanisms: (1) the rentier effect reduces the pressure for representation because governments can substitute resource rents for taxation and can spend more on patronage; (2) the repression effect channels resource revenues to internal security forces that can block democratic movements; (3) the modernization effect prevents social transformations such as occupational specialization, urbanization, and education, which would usually come with broad-based economic growth.

### **Q: What is Rosenfeld's argument about the middle class and democracy?**

**A:** Rosenfeld questions the widespread assumption that a growing middle class necessarily drives democratization. She finds that when middle-class expansion occurs through the state sector as opposed to private enterprises, the middle class becomes a stakeholder in the autocratic system. Those whose careers are tied to the state become politically conservative because democracy threatens the status, benefits, and informal rents of their jobs through increased competition and transparency. These findings complicate modernization theory in that the composition of the middle class and its autonomy from the state matter in addition to its size; the role of the state in society matters.

### **Q: What other forces explain authoritarian resilience?**

**A:** There are several other factors that explain authoritarian persistence; these variables are often tied to specific countries and regions, and we encountered them across the readings on China and the Middle East. Among them are the cohesion of security apparatuses and coercive institutions, the degree of fragmentation among elites, and the distribution of patronage to sustain broad coalitions. External support can furthermore serve to insulate regimes from domestic and foreign pressures, and surveillance technologies and ideological propaganda can also prevent collective action.

### **Q: What is Bellin's argument on authoritarian resilience?**

**A:** Bellin argues that autocratic regime survival in the Middle East depends both on the capacity and the will of the coercive apparatus to repress. Regimes persist when rulers can afford to repress and are able to legitimize their actions. Access to rents from oil and foreign aid insulates the state from fiscal pressures, while the support from patrons shield it from external isolation. At the same time, elite cohesion in the security forces ensures a willingness to suppress the opposition.

## Takeaways

Whereas the previous two weeks focused on the emergence of democracies, this week focused on the endurance of authoritarian regimes. One of the central tensions encountered in the readings is between forces of structural change (related to modernization theory) and the tools available to authoritarian rulers. Economic growth alone does not ensure that regime change occurs; economic wealth derived from natural resources can strengthen patronage networks and fund repression, and state-led development strategies can create an autocratic middle class. Institutions and elites also continued to be important factors in our readings.

After discussing economic development and regimes until now, next week we will turn to the next broad topic in the course when we consider social revolutions. Some more questions to keep in mind until then:

- To what extent is the expansion of the middle class through the state or dependence on natural resources sustainable for autocrats?
- Does digital surveillance represent a new phase of totalitarian control?
- How do the case studies from this week (China and the Middle East) point to similar or diverging variables to explain autocratic persistence?