

September 15, 2020 12:58 PM
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Eemil XXXXXXXXXX Mitikka

Brief summary of the research plan

What makes people take political action in modern autocracies, where especially anti-government activity is often risky? Could the fluctuations in political participation explain why we have witnessed autocratization in many post-Soviet countries after the collapse of the USSR and more recently? These are timely questions because political participation not only offers citizens means to communicate their views to the establishment and challenge the political elite, but it also legitimizes the power of both autocratic and democratic regimes.

Yet, research on political participation often deals with established democracies, where premises for participation differ largely from autocracies. At the same time, political participation in autocratic settings has remained a relatively understudied field. To fill parts of this knowledge gap, I will investigate the dynamics and mechanisms of political participation in contemporary Russia and post-Soviet autocracies.

The overarching research question of my PhD research is: can political participation and non-participation together with certain system-level factors explain the political equilibrium of the modern autocratic regimes? In my research, contemporary Russia and other post-Soviet autocracies exemplify these regimes. Moreover, I strive to answer the following sub-questions:

- What traceable individual and system-level factors are there behind political participation in Russia and autocratic post-Soviet countries?
- Which patterns of political participation in Russia and post-Soviet autocracies are typical to these countries and which are part of global participation trends?
- Are there significant differences in participation between post-Soviet and other modern autocracies?

Large-N and representative cross-national social surveys serve as the main data for my research. Quantitative methods such as various regression models are employed as the primary analytical method to investigate the research questions.

Research plan contains mathematical special characters or chemical formulas

No

The background and aims of the research project

Motivation for conducting doctoral research

I am interested in doing PhD research on the topic because I have dealt long with social sciences and Russian and Eurasian studies:

- Both my bachelor and master's theses dealt with Russian and Eurasian studies related topics,
- I was in student exchange in Russia in 2016,
- I have professional working proficiency in Russian language (exchange period and over 100 ECTS of language studies),
- I have topic relevant research and academic work experience (for details, see "CV" section)

Given my long-term academic interest in Russian and Eurasian politics and my social scientist background, PhD research would not only be a logical next step in my career but also a good way of deepening my professional expertise. Since I have work experience from academia, I am also well aware of demands and principles of the research work. I am also interested in teaching and giving lectures in the future. Moreover, I was shortlisted in the last year's application round for salaried PhD positions, and the selection board strongly encouraged me to apply again this year.

I chose to apply for the right to conduct salaried PhD research in the PSRC framework because the Aleksanteri Institute operates in that program. As one of the world's prominent centers of Russian studies, the Institute would offer an excellent research environment for my PhD research. Moreover, I maintain that the topic of my PhD research deals particularly with the themes of political, social and regional changes.

Since I am using mainly quantitative research methods in my doctoral research, I will also participate University of Helsinki Centre for Social and Data Science (CSDS) research unit's PhD seminar and methodology courses alongside the courses of my PSRC program. Together, my supervision arrangements and participation in CSDS seminar and studies ensure that I will get relevant and first-grade theoretical and methodological guidance for my PhD research.

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Rationale for the research project

While studies on political participation are extensive, research on the phenomenon in autocracies has remained a relatively understudied field (for exceptions, see Lussier, 2011, 2016; Tsai and Xu, 2018). However, premises for political participation in autocracies differ remarkably from democracies because autocratic regimes complicate political and civic activities e.g. by electoral malpractice and by posing deterrents to anti-governmental action. Thus, my research focuses on political participation in modern autocracies, which Russia and post-Soviet autocracies exemplify.

Previous research holds that the legacy of mobilized participation of the Soviet era, and the lack of civil society engagement and political efficacy and trust largely explain political participation in Russia (Howard, 2003; Lussier, 2011, 2016; White and Mcallister, 2004). Drawing on previous research and longitudinal data, I examine the extent to which political participation, together with specific system-level factors, explains the autocratic regime dynamics in Russia and post-Soviet autocracies.

Studying political participation and regime dynamics in Russia is relevant because Russia represents a modern autocracy where the overall economic and human development (e.g. high education levels, socio-economic development) are at odds with the political development (low levels of political participation and growing autocratization). Moreover, existing research indicates that the life values of the Russian population have become increasingly individualistic over time (Magun and Rudnev, 2010). This non-connection between economic, human and value development and political development in Russia is puzzling, and contradicts many democratization and modernization theories (Bunce, 2000; Fish and Wittenberg, 2009; Inglehart, 1997). Hence, the relationship between political participation and autocracy requires a more detailed investigation and is the main rationale for my research project.

Objectives of the research and scientific impact of research results

The main objective and research question of my study are to examine if political participation together with certain system-level factors could explain the stability of modern autocratic regimes. Russia serves as the main research subject because it is a modern autocracy where traditional development theories fail to explain the country's political development. To give my research a comparative perspective, I compare Russia to other post-Soviet autocracies.

The main sub-questions of my research are:

- Which individual and system-level factors are related to different forms of political participation in Russia and post-Soviet autocracies?
- Are the same factors relevant for participation Russia and post-soviet autocracies as in Western democracies?
- Are the ways of political participation in Russia and post-Soviet autocracies characteristic to other autocracies too?

Previous studies maintain that Russians have preferred individualistic political participation to collective participation (Lussier, 2011, 2016). Drawing on existing research and data, I assume that citizens of post-Soviet autocracies are inclined to prefer individualistic and mobilized participation to collective and elite constraining political action, which, in turn, is a significant explanator of the political equilibrium in Russia and post-Soviet autocratic regimes. I also expect that there are common system-level denominators (e.g. structure of the economy, corruption) in autocratic post-Soviet countries that affect participation and explain the stability of these regimes. Thus, I hypothesize that the ways political participation and certain area-specific system-level factors give more leeway for the autocratic politics and leaders because they lack the incentives for democratic reforms.

The topic of my research is timely because modern autocratic systems share many political features. Thus, my models and hypotheses could be applied to analyze autocratic regimes beyond my set of countries too.

Research methods and material

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Research methods and materials to be used and its significance for the research project

Since social surveys offer the most viable way to measure and compare political activity in different societies, I will draw my data mainly from cross-country surveys. The data of the World Values Survey (WVS) will most likely serve as the primary data since the newest wave of this survey has been conducted recently (in 2017–2021). Besides, the WVS includes suitable question items and many post-Soviet autocracies have participated in the survey in at least two consecutive waves.

I intend to use Russia as a primary subject for my research because it represents a modern autocracy, and there are numerous high-quality surveys from the early 1990s to date. Quantitative methods, such as logistic and multilevel regression models, serve as the main analytical tools for analyzing political participation in post-Soviet autocracies.

Political participation is the dependent variable of my research. Here, it is understood as a wide range of institutionalized and non-institutionalized activities. Institutionalized participation includes formal political activities (e.g. voting, contacting public officials) which are controlled by the authorities and aimed at formal political decision makers. Non-institutionalized participation, in turn, denotes action where citizens express their broadly defined political preferences through bottom-up activities (e.g. striking, petitioning, online activism). (Bäck and Christensen, 2020.) In line with the previous research, I analyze voting, institutionalized, and non-institutionalized participation as separate participation categories (see e.g. Hooghe and Marien, 2013; Lussier, 2016).

Based on previous research, I anticipate that political trust, associational activity, and political efficacy are significant predictors of political participation (Hooghe and Marien, 2013; Lussier, 2016). Thus, they serve as the main independent variables of my research. Previous studies have also found that economic and political performance of political institutions are significant predictors of political trust in post-Soviet countries (Mishler and Rose, 2001). Since political trust is an important indicator of the average political support, I will examine how citizen perceptions of economic and political performance are associated with political participation in my set of countries. Furthermore, I will include various control variables (e.g. socioeconomic status, domicile, religious practice) to assess how social background relates to political participation in the examined countries. To analyze the nexus of political participation and autocracy, I intend to use Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data.

To take into account the system-level factors that affect political participation, I will assess how, for instance, economic growth, governance, corruption and reliance on natural resources relates to political participation. I intend to use the data of international organizations like the World Bank, OECD, the UN, and Transparency International for these purposes.

One concern that has been raised regarding survey data on autocracies is the issue of reliability. Survey respondents are sometimes thought to misrepresent their true preferences and give socially desirable answers in surveys (see e.g. Kuran, 1997; Rogov, 2017). To address these concerns, I will compare the WVS data on political participation to similar data from other representative cross-national and national surveys.

Preliminary plan on the collection, usage and storage of the research material.

Large-N cross-national social surveys, such as the World Values Survey (WVS), serve as the primary data of my PhD research. The advantage of this kind of data is that they already exist and are usually either completely open access by nature or available upon request for research purposes. The most recent WVS wave has been conducted in 2017–2020, and the full dataset including all the participatory countries will be publicly available in July 2021.

I will perform my analyses using free and widely used programming languages, such as R and Python. I will also upload the R/Python scripts used in my analyses to my GitHub profile, where anyone can read and study critically the scripts of my analytical models. The use of free programming languages and publishing of the analytical models ensures the reproducibility of my research and follows the principles of open knowledge and open science.

If the conditions of use of the WVS/other survey data allow me, I will also publish the actual datasets used in my analyses on “Etsin” research data finder portal. I have also created WordPress website for my PhD research, where I can report about the progress of my research.

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Ethical issues

The advantage of the use of survey data is that they do not identify interviewed individuals or families. Moreover, all the information obtained from such surveys will be used only in the aggregated form. Therefore, users of these data – including me – or the people who read the analyses of my research cannot identify a single participant of the surveys.

In my research, I will comply with the principles of integrity, accuracy, confidentiality, and with the scientific principles of the University of Helsinki and research ethics as defined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. The conducting of my doctoral research should not require a research permit or a permit from the ethical board.

Does the research project require animal testing?

No

???en:doctoral.extraAIQuestions.noAIQuestions???

Works cited

The most important literature references for the research plan

Bäck, M., Christensen, H.S., 2020. Minkälaisia poliittisia osallistujia suomalaiset ovat kansainvälisessä vertailussa?, in: Borg, S., Kestilä-Kekkonen, E., Wass, H. (Eds.), *Politiikan Ilmastonmuutos: Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2019, Oikeusministeriön Julkaisuja. Selvityksiä Ja Ohjeita 5/2020*. Oikeusministeriö, Helsinki.

Bunce, V., 2000. Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 33(6–7), 703–734.

Fish, M.S., Wittenberg, J., 2009. Failed democratization, in: Haerpfer, C., Bernhagen, P., Inglehart, R., Welzel, C. (Eds.), *Democratization*. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 249–265.

Hooghe, M., Marien, S., 2013. A Comparative Analysis of the Relation Between Political Trust and Forms of Political Participation in Europe. *Eur. Soc.* 15, 131–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2012.692807>

Howard, M.M., 2003. *The weakness of civil society in post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge University Press, New York; Cambridge.

Inglehart, R., 1997. *Modernization and postmodernization: cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton University Press.

Lussier, D.N., 2016. *Constraining elites in Russia and Indonesia: political participation and regime survival*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY.

Lussier, D.N., 2011. Contacting and Complaining: Political Participation and the Failure of Democracy in Russia. *Post-Sov. Aff.* 27, 289–325. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.27.3.289>

Magun, V., Rudnev, M., 2010. The Life Values of the Russian Population. *Russ. Soc. Sci. Rev.* 51, 19–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611428.2010.11065411>

Mishler, W., Rose, R., 2001. What Are the Origins of Political Trust?: Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-communist Societies. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 34, 30–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034001002>

Tsai, L.L., Xu, Y., 2018. Outspoken Insiders: Political Connections and Citizen Participation in Authoritarian China. *Polit. Behav.* 40, 629–657. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9416-6>

White, S., Mcallister, I., 2004. Dimensions of disengagement in post-communist Russia. *J. Communist Stud. Transit. Polit.* 20, 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270410001687118>

Implementation: schedule and funding plan

Form of the dissertation

Article-based dissertation

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Publication plan and timetable for the articles or a preliminary outline of the monograph

1st article: "Is Political Participation Relevant in Autocracies and Can We Measure it Reliably?"

- Drafting the article in 2021 and finalizing it in the beginning of 2022

2nd article: "The Relationship Between Political Participation and Regime Dynamics in Autocratic Settings – A Case Study of Contemporary Russia"

- Building of the analytical models and drafting the article in 2021, actual writing process to be done in 2022

3rd article: "Political Participation and Regime Dynamics in post-Soviet autocracies: A Cross-Country Perspective"

- I will outline the analytical models for the article in the late 2021 and write the article in 2022–2023

4th article: "The post-Soviet Factor: Does Communist Legacy Explain Differences in the Patterns of Political Participation in Modern Autocracies?"

- Writing process for this article takes place in 2023–2024

Possible journals: Idäntutkimus, Demokratizatsiya, Post-Soviet Affairs, Journal of Civic Society, Political Studies

Preliminary timetable for your research

Year 2021

- participation in University of Helsinki's Centre for Social and Data Science PhD seminar and survey methodology courses
- participation in International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES) conference in Montreal on 3th of August →→(my paper is already accepted and I have travel grant for the trip)
- familiarization with relevant research literature and theories
- drafting the first article of my dissertation on meanings of political participation in autocracies and how to measure political participation in autocracies
- preliminary analytical models for measuring the relationship between political participation and autocracy in Russia
- search of possible publishers of my first article

Year 2022

- finalizing the first article of my dissertation
- participation in discipline-specific (Russian and Eurasian studies) courses
- participation in Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis (in UK)
- drafting and writing the second article of my dissertation on political participation in Russia and searching possible publishers of this article
- participation in the 21th annual Aleksanteri-Conference at the University of Helsinki
- teaching individual classes or running courses for undergraduate students

Year 2023

- drafting and writing the third and fourth articles of my dissertation, which are multilevel and cross-country analyses of political participation in post-Soviet and other autocracies
- participation in relevant seminars and conferences, e.g. in Finnish National Defence University's Russia seminar, Aleksanteri Conference and Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies' (ASEEES) annual convention

Year 2024

- finalizing the articles and wrapping up the dissertation
- writing the introduction and conclusion chapters for my dissertation

Planned funding for the research project including received and applied notable funding thus far

Received funding

- Travel grant for Doctoral Candidates in 2020, Doctoral School in Humanities and Social Sciences (HYMY) 1400€– this grant will be used to cover travel expenses of the ICCEES conference in 2021

Planned funding

- Suomalainen strategisen tutkimuksen ja seurannan tukisäätiö's Working Grant for PhD researchers 9165€– since transatlantic flights are expensive, this grant could be used e.g. to cover travel expenses of the ASEEES annual convention participation

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Estimate of thesis work completed to date (0–100%)

5

Estimated year of graduation

2024

Supervision arrangements

Department or other unit, in which dissertation research will be carried out

[REDACTED]

Name of the main supervisor (Last name, First name)

[REDACTED]

Academic title or degree

[REDACTED]

E-mail address

[REDACTED]

Affiliation (an academic unit at the University of Helsinki and/or another organisation outside of the University where the person is employed)

[REDACTED]

Possible other supervisors

[REDACTED]

Name (Last name, First name)

[REDACTED]

Academic title or degree

[REDACTED]

Email address

[REDACTED]

Affiliation (an academic unit at the University of Helsinki and/or another organisation outside of the University where the person is employed)

[REDACTED]

Potential third supervisor

[REDACTED]

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???en:no.statement.authors.needed???

Previously acquired knowledge supporting the dissertation project and the study plan (CV)

Previously acquired research knowledge

Research Assistant, Tampere University of Applied Sciences (current position)

- Research assistant in “Cultural Statecraft in Russia” project led by Dr. Tuomas Forsberg

Report Author, Finnish Ministry of Defence in 2019–2020

- Designing and conducting a survey for the Finnish Russia experts on the topic of “Venäjä ja turvallisuus – tutkimus- ja asiantuntijatarjonta Suomessa”
- Writing a report based on survey results and other relevant data. The report will be used as a guideline in developing the co-operation of Finnish Russia experts and government officials dealing with Russia

Research Assistant, Aleksanteri Institute / University of Helsinki in 2018–2019

- assisting Dr. Pynnöniemi in her research projects
- co-authoring an article in Dr. Pynnöniemi’s book “Nexus of Patriotism and Militarism in Russia”

Report Co-Author, Finnish Ministry of Defence in 2018–2019

- co-authoring the “Voiman Venäjä” (“Russia of Power) report’s chapter on Russia’s internal development

Intern, Aleksanteri Institute / University of Helsinki in 2018

- Internship at the Aleksanteri Institute’s Master’s school “ExpREES”

Intern, Finland-Russia Society (“Suomi-Venäjä-Seura”) in 2017

- Translating project proposals on cultural co-operation between Russian and Finnish cultural organizations

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Possible previous publications and conference presentations

- Mitikka, E., Zavadskaya, M. (send to publisher after review process, to be published in 2020). "A Growing Militarism? Changing Meanings of Russian Patriotism in 2011–2017", in Pynnoniemi, K. (Ed.), Nexus of patriotism and militarism in Russia: too much, too late? pp. TBC. Helsinki University Press, Helsinki.
- Mitikka, E., 2020. "Should we trust Russian surveys?". Expert article 2668, Baltic Rim Economies. University of Turku, Turku.
- Mitikka, E., 2019. "The relation between political trust and forms of political participation in contemporary Russia – evidence from the WVS round 7". Working paper presented at St. Petersburg Higher School of Economics Laboratory for Comparative Social Research's International Workshop 'Social Inequality and Value Polarization: A Cross-Country Perspective'.
- Nazarenko, S., Aitamurto, K., Heusala, A., Korhonen, V., Koski, S., Laine, V., Lassila, J., Mitikka, E., 2019. "Russia's internal development", in Ylitalo, T. (Ed.), Russia of Power, pp. 103–150. Puolustusministerio, Helsinki.

Possible international experience and other work experience relevant to your doctoral research

- Presenting the "Voiman Venäjä" ("Russia of Power") report (in 2019)
- Helsinki House of the Estates (Säätytalo)
- Presenting the English translation of the publication at the NATO headquarters and Permanent Representation of Finland to EU
- Presenting my working paper entitled "The relation between political trust and forms of political participation in contemporary Russia – evidence from the WVS round 7" (in 2019)
- Higher School of Economics' workshop "Social Inequality and Value Polarization: A Cross-Country Perspective", St. Petersburg, Russia
- Exchange period in St. Petersburg, Russia (in 2016)
- Autumn semester at the St. Petersburg State University
- Russian language studies
- passing the TORFL-I (The Test of Russian as a Foreign Language) language test, which entitles its holder to study in Russian universities and institutes of higher education in courses held in Russian language

Possible career breaks

Preliminary study plan

Discipline-specific studies (30 ECTS)

- PYAM-950 Personal study plan (0 ECTS)
- PYAM-9161 Research Seminar in Russian and Eurasian studies I (5 ECTS)
- PYAM-9162 Research Seminar in Russian and Eurasian studies II (5 ECTS)
- PYAM-9231 Theoretical Literature in Russian and Eurasian studies I (5 ECTS)
- PYAM-9232 Theoretical Literature in Russian and Eurasian studies II (5 ECTS)
- PYAM-9321 Methodological Studies in Political Science (5 ECTS)
- PYAM-941 International Conference I (1-2 ECTS)
- PYAM-942 International Conference II (1-2 ECTS)
- PYAM-943 Summer/winter schools, or other international activity (2-5 ECTS)
- PYAM-960 Research Ethics in Social Sciences (1-5 ECTS)

Transferable skills (10 ECTS)

- HYMY-902 Scientific Writing (1-5 ECTS)
- HYMY-903 Academic Pitching (1-3 ECTS)
- HYMY-904 Grant Writing I (1 ECTS)
- PED512 YP 2 Opetuksen suunnittelu, toteutus ja arviointi (10 ECTS)
- HYMY-910 Science in Society (2-5 ECTS)
- HYMY-914 Conference Organizing (1-2 ECTS)
- COS-D415 Survey Methodology
- COS-D418 Exploratory Methods of Multivariate Data Analysis
- COS-D416 Survey Sampling