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Social services to claim legitimacy: comparing autocracies' performance

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ABSTRACT

Autocrats cannot rule by repression and co-optation alone, and need to instil some sense of legitimacy in the populace. Lacking democratic legitimacy, and being in shortage of other identity-based sources of diffuse support, legitimation claims in post-Cold War autocracies increasingly rests on rulers' ability to achieve concrete outcomes, including the improvement of citizen living conditions. However, autocracies differ from each other, and different institutional arrangements could influence a leader's ability to deliver social services, and chase performance-based legitimation. Accordingly, this article compares the social service performance of different post-Cold War authoritarian regimes. The analysis demonstrates that so-called electoral autocracies outperform single-party and military regimes, although they show a capacity to provide for their citizens that is similar to hereditary regimes. These findings suggest that the legitimacy returns of introducing semi-competitive and participatory institutions could grow exponentially. Besides procedural legitimacy, these institutions could help rulers pursue legitimation through social services.

KEYWORDS

Electoral authoritarianism; legitimation; regime performance; social services

Introduction

Between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, a wave of democratisation overwhelmed the developing world. The wave did not eradicate despotism, though. Authoritarianism has survived in several regions, and has proved able to adapt to the mutated conditions of the post-Cold War international environment, and to resist the programmes of external promotion of democracy that the US and several international organisations have launched (Carothers, 2007). Even signs of an authoritarian resurgence have been recently recorded (Walker, 2015).

The unexpected resilience of authoritarianism has drawn scholars' attention to the survival strategies that rulers of contemporary non-democratic regimes have implemented during the past two decades. Besides intra- and inter-elite conflicts, the importance of the relationship between rulers and the ruled has been highlighted. Any political leader that differs from Olson's 'roving bandit' (1993) should be concerned about whether and

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why people believe her/his authority is legitimate or not. Autocrats need popular support, and invest considerable efforts and resources to this end. Compared to democracies, however, contemporary autocracies 'are structurally disadvantaged […] in providing legitimacy' (Croissant & Wurster, 2013, p. 7). Personal charisma, tradition, and ideology – that is, the main factors to which autocrats have historically appealed to claim legitimacy – appear weak and scarce instruments to gain support from the masses, in the post-Cold War era. Autocrats' legitimation strategies increasingly rest on pragmatic claims, most notably the fulfilment of people's will and material needs. Holding multiparty elections that opposition cannot (or should not) win can provide non-democratic rulers with a certain degree of procedural legitimacy, although the concrete returns of this legitimation strategy remain uncertain and contingent upon specific conditions. Social welfare, in turn, represents a *quid pro quo* that autocrats could give citizens in exchange for specific support, or at least passive acquiescence. Whether authoritarian rulers are able to improve effectively citizen living conditions is an open question, though.

The article examines autocrats' ability to deliver social services from a comparative authoritarianism perspective. One important tenet of this approach is that the implications of the institutional heterogeneity characterising the authoritarian universe should be taken seriously. Bridging research on authoritarian legitimation and on the socioeconomic consequences of regime change, the article argues that the introduction of semi-competitive and participatory institutions can do more than providing procedural legitimacy. These institutions can compensate for the information and communication deficits that typically affect non-democratic regimes, and enhance autocrats' ability to deliver social services, in particular. Accordingly, the analysis compares electoral autocracies' performance in the education and health sectors with the performance of various other specific forms of authoritarianism. The analysis demonstrates that electoral autocracies achieve better health and education outcomes than military and one-party regimes, although they do not outperform hereditary monarchies. Electoral autocracies' superior performance remains evident even if we look at competitive and hegemonic systems separately, moreover. These findings suggest that the legitimacy returns of partial political liberalisation could grow exponentially. Hence, introducing semi-competitive and participatory institutions and delivering social services should not be thought of as alternative options in the menu of authoritarian legitimation. Besides procedural legitimacy, these institutions could help autocrats pursue performance-based legitimation through social services. The new emerging hypothesis tells of an electoral authoritarianism's legitimacy advantage, which future research should address.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section introduces the problem of legitimation under authoritarian rule, and highlights the importance of regime performance. Section 2 focuses on the incentives and difficulties of using social services as a performance-based legitimation strategy under non-democratic rule. In a comparative analysis of different subtypes of authoritarianism, the discussion highlights the mechanisms that link the presence of semi-competitive and participatory institutions with the delivery of social services. The discussion leads to three new hypotheses that compare electoral autocracies' performance in the health and education sectors with the performance of contemporary military, single-party and hereditary regimes. The third section is devoted to the empirical analysis, which is conducted through time-series cross-section regressions, using indicators of school enrolment and child mortality as dependent variables, and working on

a sample of non-Western countries observed from 1990. The final section discusses the findings' relevance to the study of authoritarian legitimation. Specifically, attention is called to the mechanisms that could translate the delivery of social services in legitimacy under electoral authoritarianism, and to the pitfalls of socioeconomic performance as a legitimation strategy – that is, the so-called 'performance dilemma'.

Authoritarian legitimation and the importance of regime performance

The surprising resilience of authoritarianism to the impetus of the so-called 'third wave of democratisation' (Huntington, 1991) has resulted in a renewed attention towards authoritarian politics and autocrats' survival strategies. An authoritarian regime, or autocracy, is a system in which political power is not assigned through a competitive and inclusive electoral process that is conducted under conditions of freedom and fairness (Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2014, p. 317). Students of comparative authoritarianism have identified elite factions, opposition groups and ordinary citizens as the main challengers to authoritarian stability (Gerschewski, 2013), and horizontal power-sharing and vertical control as the main problems shaping politics in non-democratic regimes (Svolik, 2012). Co-optation helps autocrats deal with the threats coming from elite factions and opposition groups. The control of the masses, in turn, largely rests on autocrats' ability to instil some sense of legitimacy in the population, given the rising costs of repression, especially in terms of international reputation. Democracies remain 'unique in the degree to which their stability depends on the consent of a majority of those governed' (Diamond, Linz, & Lipset, 1989, p. 9), but 'the lack of popular support is the original sin of dictatorships' (Svolik, 2012, p. 10).[1]

Drawing on Weber, legitimacy refers to 'what both the members of the elite and the ordinary people believe about the ruler's right to rule' (Kailitz, 2013, p. 41), although the concept also applies to international relations. Accordingly, legitimation is the process through which a political leader claims her/his legitimate entitlement to rule. While some scholars focus on intra-elite endogenous legitimation (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2015), the almost universal contemporary acceptance of the principle of popular sovereignty implies that 'whatever the precise form of political system, […], political legitimation has to be mass legitimation' (Beetham, 1991, p. 94). Legitimation is here defined as 'the process of gaining support', be it 'active consent, compliance […], passive obedience, or mere toleration *within the population*' (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 18, emphasis added), in particular.[2] Hence, a political regime is legitimate when people support it (see also Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, on the emancipation of the concept of legitimacy from its normative dimension). Popular support, in turn, rests on a shared belief that the rules and institutions defining a political regime are 'valid' (Beetham, 1991, p. 17). To the extent that the legitimacy belief refers to what the regime is, support is said to be 'diffuse' (Easton, 1975). If the validity belief is circumscribed to what the regime delivers, support is said to be 'specific' (Easton, 1975).

In principle, legitimacy could be elicited from the masses appealing to a plurality of factors. In practice, the legitimation strategies available to contemporary authoritarian rulers are limited. Charisma, for instance, remains largely contingent on a leader's personality. Differently from the past, moreover, contemporary autocracies can hardly gain diffuse support based on ideology and tradition, which Kailitz (2013) includes among

the strongest claims to legitimacy. While the collapse of the Soviet Union did not represent the 'end of history', it did demonstrate that power cannot be justified only by an utopian vision of how society should be. Only a handful of regimes still make explicit (but often only nominal) reference to an infallible ideology, and most of them cluster in Eastern Asia – namely, China, Vietnam and North Korea – with the exception of Cuba. On the contrary, regimes in which leaders officially govern in the name of a 'God-given, natural or at least established historical right to rule because of [their] descent' (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2015, p. 7) are still prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa region. The 'sanctity of immemorial traditions' (Weber, 1978, p. 215) remains a rather strong unifying factor for elite members (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2015). However, legitimation claims based on tradition represents a relatively weak source of support from below, since they often imply a hierarchical structure of society and the existence of an aristocracy.

Contemporary autocrats seeking legitimacy cannot count on 'identity-based' (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017) sources of diffuse support alone. In the post-Cold War era, authoritarian legitimation increasingly rests on more pragmatic claims, most notably the fulfilment of people's will and material needs. A growing number of authoritarian regimes hold semi- or pseudo-competitive executive elections, dreaming 'to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty' (Schedler, 2002, p. 37). However, the concrete returns of this legitimation strategy are unclear. Under democracy, power is legitimate because the periodicity, inclusiveness, freedom, and fairness of elections enable citizens to select and control their rulers. Democratic rule is legitimate because citizens are the ultimate arbiters of what the public good is. By definition, authoritarian regimes score low on democratic 'input' legitimacy, though. A systematic 'disjuncture between formal rules and actual behaviours' (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 27) – including the frequent resort to electoral fraud and manipulation to prevent opposition's victories, and the sometimes severe limitations to political and civil freedoms – makes authoritarian elections dubious instruments of people empowerment and channels of democratic-like legitimacy. However, non-democratic elections can have a mobilising effect (Beetham, 1991). Citizens' electoral participation, for instance, implicitly validates the system, especially when rulers achieve high voter turnouts (Morgenbesser, 2016). Compliance with the rules of the game, such as the regularisation of elections and the rotation between candidates of the ruling party when a term-limit is met in presidential systems, could provide the incumbent elite with some procedural legitimacy, moreover. However, this strategy also entails the risk of losing office, as elections periodically open a window of opportunity for political change and the reiteration of electoral practices can progressively improve opposition's performance at the polls (Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; Lindberg, 2009; cf. Schedler, 2013).

Given the difficulties of securing a durable 'reservoir of favourable attitudes or good will' (Easton, 1975, p. 444) from citizens, that is, diffuse support, contemporary authoritarian leaders should also aim at eliciting more specific forms of popular support. Specific support derives from 'the satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived output and performance of the political authorities' (Easton, 1975, p. 437). In other words, contemporary autocrats need to justify their rule by the claim of acting in the interest of the community. Some authors (Beetham, 1991) do not acknowledge performance as an outright source of legitimacy. To be sure, claims to legitimacy that are based on regime performance are weaker than legitimation claims based on identity or

people empowerment. However, performance influences the stability and survival of any regime, including democracies (Diamond et al., 1989, p. 10). Successful performance can integrate the legitimacy stock of a leader, and compensate for deficits in other legitimation sources. At the same time, a persistently poor performance may erode a regime's legitimacy in the long run. Given the weakness of the extant identity-based legitimation claims, and given the uncertainties that pursuing legitimacy through semi-competitive elections entails, regime performance represents a crucial component of contemporary autocrats' broader strategies to justify the status quo. It represents the *quid pro quo* of a social contract between the ruler and the ruled.

Social services to claim legitimacy under non-democratic rule: a delivery problem

In shortage of resources to elicit diffuse support, legitimation in contemporary authoritarian regimes increasingly rests on the ability to achieve specific policy outcomes.[3] Performance-based legitimation could be pursued through the accomplishment of a plurality of socially desirable goals, from international security to domestic order, from economic growth to welfare. The delivery of social services is of primary importance, given its direct implications for the lives of ordinary citizens, in particular. Masses of citizens that live in deprivation are unlikely to support their rulers.

The relevance of social welfare as a performance-based authoritarian legitimation strategy – and the idea that equating authoritarianism with cleptocracy is an oversimplification of reality, relatedly – is not new. In Chapter XIX of *The Prince*, Machiavelli highlights the importance of keeping the people satisfied. Olson's (1993) 'stationary bandit' theory points out that authoritarian politics is rarely a zero-sum game. In a similar vein, the 'selectorate' theory suggests that delivering public services could be a strategy of political survival more cost-effective than the selective distribution of private goods, especially when rulers (including autocrats) have to secure the loyalty of relatively large constituencies (Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 2003). On the other hand, there are several examples that confirm the importance that authoritarian leaders have historically assigned to social welfare as a way to gain support from the masses. High government expenditure is a defining feature of the so-called 'rentier state' (Luciani, 1987). Free and universal education and health was a pillar in communist states of Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia (Aslund, 2001). More generally, welfare state scholars notice that, both in Europe and outside the West, social programmes were initially adopted by non-democratic governments, and were mostly motivated to prevent demands of political rights (Mares & Carnes, 2009, p. 97). Likewise, in the post-Cold War era, with the triumph of liberal principles (recently, a contested primacy, though), better living conditions could reduce the costs of tolerating the lack of freedom that citizens face.

While contemporary autocracies need to pursue performance-based legitimation, and while social welfare has historically represented a key component of non-democratic leaders' legitimation claims, a question remains concerning autocrats' actual ability to improve citizen living conditions. The old myth that authoritarianism represents an antidote to underdevelopment and could be a driver for prosperity (Halperin, Siegle, & Weinstein, 2005; cf. Huntington, 1968) has been challenged by the economic failure of many dictatorships in Latin America and Africa, during the 1970s and the 1980s. Similarly, the

communist welfare state was particularly generous, but living standards in those regimes lagged far behind Western standards (Orenstein, 2008). Even the socioeconomic performance of those states that derive wealth from natural resource rents is poorer than one might expect (Ross, 2012).

More often than not, authoritarian rule has failed to deliver. Autocracies' poor social service performance is often explained by an information deficit (Wintrobe, 2007) that results in rulers' poor knowledge of the society. Even when authoritarianism has spurred economic growth (e.g. Chile, Republic of Korea and more recently China, although these cases remain the exception; see also Evans, 1989 on the so-called 'developmental state'), an efficient redistribution of wealth through public services requires communication with society and information about citizens' preferences and needs. These factors are typically associated with democratic politics (Sen, 1999). Autocracies, however, 'differ from each other as much as they differ from democracy' (Geddes, 2003, p. 48). The comparative analysis of the heterogeneous non-democratic universe has origin in Linz (1975, but see his 2000 book), and has recently gained new impetus, with a markedly neo-institutional approach (Pepinsky, 2013) that highlights the differences between, for instance, subtypes of authoritarianism. These institutional differences have proved to be powerful predictors of the various courses that authoritarian politics can take. These differences could also affect autocrats' ability to deliver social services. In this regard, contemporary autocracies that have partially liberalised the political arena seem to suffer from the information deficit typically associated with authoritarianism less than other autocracies that remain politically closed.

While single-party and military regimes are compatible with the presence of a viable bureaucracy (Charron & Lapuente, 2011; O'Donnell, 1973), which represents another key factor to deliver public services, institutionalised channels of communication between rulers and society in these regimes either lack or are underdeveloped. Military regimes have sometimes established cooperative agreements with selected societal groups, such as the industrial bourgeoisie. However, military intervention in politics is generally accompanied by the suppression of political pluralism (Brooker, 2014). On the other hand, single-party regimes frequently hold non-competitive elections at least for the legislative, and establish other institutions to infiltrate society that could provide raw information about citizens' satisfaction with the current state of affairs (Malesky & Schuler, 2011). However, the political arena remains monopolised by the ruling party (Brooker, 2014). Even when multipartyism is tolerated, opposition groups are in a condition of marginalised outsiders, unless they accept a status of satellites of the ruling party (Sartori, 1976).

Electoral autocracies differ from these politically closed dictatorships (Diamond, 2002) because they regularly hold inclusive elections for both the executive and legislative in which 'opposition is allowed, multiple parties are legal, and more than one candidate is allowed on the ballot' (Hyde & Marinov, 2011, p. 195). These elections neither meet minimum democratic standards of freedom and fairness, given frequent episodes of electoral fraud and manipulation, nor do they effectively empower citizens, given persistent limitations to political and civil rights (Ottaway, 2003; Schedler, 2002, 2013). However, semi-competitive and participatory institutions could help rulers overcome the information deficit and the problem of communication with the society that typically affect authoritarian politics, thus enhancing autocrats' ability to deliver social services.

Multiparty elections do not only provide information about popular overall satisfaction with the government's performance, but also about citizens' actual preferences. Even in the presence of electoral manipulation, opposition vote represents a credible source of information about the level of popular dissatisfaction, given the risk of being punished that citizens face (Miller, 2015a, p. 697; cf. Brancati, 2014, pp. 316–317). Moreover, inter-party competition within fragmented opposition fronts favours a diversification of the political supply and programme-sensitive voting behaviours (Miller, 2015a, p. 700), which refine the quality of the information that is conveyed by opposition vote. Beyond elections, partially opening the political arena to opposition parties, civil society groups, and even to direct popular engagement could be an even more efficient way to gather information about policy priorities, since opposition campaigns, protests and strikes often target governments' socioeconomic performance and the quality and accessibility of social services. Multiparty legislatures, moreover, provide a forum in which government and opposition parties can share information and bargain policy concessions (Gandhi, 2008).

The higher level of political openness deriving from the presence of semi-competitive and participatory institutions could make electoral autocracies better able than military and single-party regimes to communicate with society and gather useful information to deliver social services efficiently. Partial liberalisation, however, has also occurred is some contemporary monarchies (Brumberg, 2002), such as Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, and more recently Bahrain. These regimes have introduced multiparty elections and legislatures that in some cases can even designate the Cabinet (Herb, 2004). Like other monarchies that have maintained an absolutist-like asset, these regimes are politically closed, since executive power ultimately rests in the hands of the royal family and is assigned according to dynastic succession. However, these institutional transformations could influence policy-making in a way similar to electoral autocracies. For instance, elections in these regimes represent significant arenas of confrontation and contest over policy concession, even if patronage distribution often prevails (Lust-Okar, 2006). Even according to Olson, dynastic succession 'can be socially desirable' (1993, p. 572). The author notes that monarchs typically face a time horizon that is significantly longer than the time horizon faced by other autocrats. The difference could have significant implications for a political leader's attention towards the wellbeing and long-term productivity of the society.

To conclude, the institutional features that differentiate contemporary authoritarian regimes can have significant implications for leaders' efforts to legitimise themselves through regime performance and the improvement of citizens' living conditions. Consistently with recent research findings on the socioeconomic consequences of regime change short of democratisation (Cassani & Carbone, 2016; see also Blaydes & Kayser, 2011), the discussion suggests that semi-liberalisation can make a difference, and that electoral autocracies should be able to deliver social services in a more efficient way than politically closed regimes. Differently from other recent studies on electoral autocracies' social service performance (Miller, 2015b), however, the analysis stresses the importance of going beyond closed authoritarianism as a single and homogeneous regime category, and of considering how the institutional differences between these regimes can influence the delivery of social services. For instance, partial liberalisation has also occurred in some hereditary regimes, which are also unique in the length of the time horizon faced by their leaders. Three new comparative hypotheses could be drawn, accordingly:

Hp.1 Electoral autocracies provide better social services than military regimes.

Hp.2 Electoral autocracies provide better social services than single-party regimes.

Hp.3 Electoral autocracies and hereditary regimes provide similar levels of social services.

Re-examining the regime–social service performance nexus

In shortage of identity-based sources of diffuse support, such as tradition, ideology, and personal charisma, and given the costs of mass repression, improving citizens' living conditions represents an increasingly salient component of autocrats' efforts to legitimise their power, in the post-Cold War era. However, institutions matter, even under authoritarian rule, and could shape leaders' capacity to deliver social services. Semi-competitive and participatory institutions could improve autocrats' social service performance, by helping them overcome the delivery problems that typically affect authoritarian politics, in particular.

Having highlighted in the previous section how contemporary forms of authoritarian rule differ from each other in their capacity to deliver social services, this section illustrates the analysis that has been conducted to test the three hypotheses comparing the social service performance of electoral autocracies with the performance of military, single-party and hereditary regimes. The analysis is large-N and the sample includes 140 non-Western countries with more than 500,000 inhabitants, observed from 1990 to 2013, consistently with the focus of this research on the post-Cold War period.

Variables

Objective indicators of policy outcomes in the sectors of education and healthcare have been selected as dependent variables. A good record in these sectors arguably represents an effective performance-based legitimation strategy, since education and health services can benefit large number of citizens and have visible effects that can be easily attributed to the government. World Bank data on child mortality rate (per thousand) and secondary school enrolment ratio (per cent) are used, in particular. Secondary school enrolment represents a more sensitive indicator than primary school enrolment and literacy rates, when one wishes to capture cross-country differences in education accessibility. Under-5 mortality, in turn, is seen as a reliable indicator of the quality and availability of several health services, including clean water, sanitation facilities and immunisations, and is often used as a proxy of poverty (Zweifel & Navia, 2000).[4]

The main independent variable is regime type. The analysis focuses on authoritarian regimes, so it is important to establish a clear-cut distinction between democracy and non-democracy. From a mainly procedural perspective, democracy is defined as a regime in which political power is assigned through inclusive and multiparty elections that fulfil the commonly acknowledged standards of freedom and fairness (Diamond, 2002; cf. Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000). The freedom and fairness of the electoral process is measured using Polity IV disaggregated data, as suggested by Bogaards (2012). Specifically, a country is democratic when it scores 8 in the 'Executive recruitment' concept-variable – that is, when electoral outcomes are neither significantly influenced by the incumbent or non-elected officials nor the result of predetermined

agreements, when major opposition parties participate vigorously in the electoral process, and when elections take place in an environment free from systematic repression (Marshall, Jaggers, & Gurr, 2013, p. 60).[5]

Concerning non-democratic countries, four mutually exclusive regime categories are identified, namely, electoral autocracies, military regimes, single-party regimes, and hereditary monarchies. Following Wahman, Teorell and Hadenius, military regimes are ruled either directly or indirectly by a junta, whereas in hereditary monarchies a person of royal descent has inherited the position of effective chief executive in accordance with an accepted practice (2013, pp. 25–26). The single-party regime category encompasses pure forms of one-party regime but also cases in which minor alternatives exist but cannot compete in antagonistic terms. Mixed regimes are classified according to the authors' guidelines. Priority has been given to the military or hereditary character of the regime (2013, p. 28), in particular. Finally, a country is classified electoral authoritarian in the presence of multiparty elections for both the executive and legislative that opposition parties can run, using data from Skaaning, Gerring, and Bartusevičius (2015). This group of regimes is smaller than Wahman *et al.*'s 'multiparty autocracy' category, which encompasses every autocracy with multiparty elections for either the executive or the legislative. Regimes in which only (some) legislative seats are contested – e.g. Egypt and Tunisia during the 1990s – are classified as single-party. Observations that cannot be classified according to the above rules enter a residual category, such as theocratic Iran. The residual category also includes cases of non-independent authority (e.g. Bosnia), failed states (e.g. Somalia), and 'institutionless polities' (Kailitz, 2013, p.49) in which rulers enjoy almost unconstrained authority (e.g. Libya under Gaddafi) and that other authors would define personalist (Geddes et al., 2014).

Several control variables are considered in the analysis, paying attention to the economic, demographic, and political factors that may influence the regime-performance nexus. We should be particularly concerned with the omission of factors that can directly affect social services and predict (or be systematically associated with) the presence or establishment of nominally democratic institutions such as multi-party elections and legislatures under dictatorship, at the same time. However, also the influence of other potential explanatory factors of the dependent variable should be taken into account. The analysis controls for national income, economic growth, natural resource rents, foreign aid, demographic size, urban population, ethnic fractionalisation, domestic violence, and state duration, in particular. Unless differently stated, these data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

Wealthier societies tend to be more attentive to the quality of public services, and their governments should be better equipped to provide them (Ghobarah, Huth, & Russett, 2004). Economic growth has redistributive effects that may directly affect living standards, especially in the long run. Moreover, to reduce uncertainty, attract private investment, and foster growth, autocrats often establish nominally democratic procedures (Jensen, Malesky, & Weymouth, 2014; Wright, 2008). On the contrary, autocrats are less interested in establishing power-sharing institutions, when they can count on natural resource rents to deliver welfare (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; see also Luciani, 1987; Ross, 2012). Controlling for natural resource revenues should also eliminate some noise from the comparison between electoral authoritarian and hereditary regimes, since several contemporary monarchies are oil-rich. Foreign aid has a direct effect on the provision of schooling and health

services, but can also influence the likelihood that a non-democratic regime establishes nominally democratic institutions (Wright, 2009). Demographic size influences government effectiveness to provide education and health services. Similarly, it should be easier to deliver social services in urban areas than in sparse and small rural communities. Ethnic fractionalisation can result in the political exclusion of minorities and in unequal access to social services (data from Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003). Domestic violence can obstruct the delivery of public services (data from the Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset). Finally, an indicator of state duration is included in the regression model that records the age (in years) of a state since its international recognition (data from the Correlates of War Project). State duration could be thought of as a proxy of state capacity, which influences a government's effectiveness to provide social services (Hanson, 2015).[6]

Analysis

The analysis is conducted using Time-Series Cross-Section (TSCS) regression and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimation on a simplified version of the Error Correction Model (ECM). Specifically, the change in the dependent variable (ΔY) is regressed on its lagged level and on lagged levels of the independent and control variables illustrated above. Lags and changes are measured using a 3-year interval. Given the focus of the analysis, and in light of the diagnostic analyses performed, ECM offers several advantages (Beck & Katz, 2011; de Boef & Keele, 2008). First, the lagged dependent variable addresses problems of serial correlation. Second, regressors in lagged-level form break the symmetry of the model, partially addressing concerns of reverse causality. Third, ΔY helps overcome problems related to the near non-stationarity of development indicators, whose time series tend to reflect progressive improvements, rather than reverting to the mean value. Looking at changes in the dependent variable is also consistent with theory, which points to regimes' different ability to improve citizen living conditions, rather than to different levels of human development as such.[7] Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered by panel are computed.

To test the three hypotheses, mutually exclusive binary variables for regime type are included in the regression model. Each hypothesis compares electoral autocracies with a specific subtype of closed authoritarianism. Hence, depending on the hypothesis under examination, either the military (Hp.1), single-party (Hp.2), or hereditary (Hp.3) regime dummy is omitted from the regression model, and used as reference category. Accordingly, the sign, absolute value, and statistical significance of the coefficients estimated for the electoral authoritarian regime dummy should be interpreted as the performance difference between electoral autocracies and the omitted regime type. To avoid losing meaningful information, democracies are always included in the analyses as a separate regime category. On the contrary, observations that belong to the residual category are dropped from the analysis.

A few robustness checks are performed. The analysis is replicated computing panel-corrected standard errors (Beck & Katz, 1995). Moreover, lags and changes in the dependent and independent variables have been computed based on a shorter (1-year) interval, to assess the results' sensitiveness to arbitrary measurement choices. From a more substantive viewpoint, two additional robustness tests are conducted. Some scholars separate a

competitive form of electoral authoritarianism (Brownlee, 2009; Diamond, 2002; Howard & Roessler, 2006; Levitsky & Way, 2010) from hegemonic-party systems (Magaloni, 2006; Sartori, 1976). The difference rests on opposition strength, that is, the actual ability of opposition groups to challenge the incumbent party (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The distinction could have significant implications for the analysis of the first two hypotheses, which compare electoral autocracies with military and single-party regimes, respectively. It challenges the idea that communication with society and information about citizens' preferences and needs are of the same quality across electoral authoritarian regimes characterised by different levels of competitiveness and political openness. Accordingly, the analyses of hypotheses 1 and 2 are replicated disaggregating the electoral authoritarian regime category in a competitive and a hegemonic binary variable. Following Brownlee (2009), competitive autocracies are distinguished from hegemonic-party autocracies using the Database of Political Institutions. Only electoral autocracies that score 7 in either the Legislative or the Executive Index of Electoral Competitiveness (LIEC and EIEC, respectively) are classified as competitive.

On the other hand, the discussion of the third hypothesis, which compares electoral autocracies with hereditary regimes, highlights the heterogeneity that characterises the latter regime category. The process of partial liberalisation that some contemporary monarchies have experienced is one of the main reasons to expect electoral autocracies and hereditary regimes to have a similar social service performance, in particular. Hence, the analysis of hypothesis 3 is replicated separating liberalised from non-liberalised hereditary monarchies, using data from Skaaning and colleagues (2015) to gather information about the institutionalisation of multiparty legislative elections in these regimes.

Findings

Table 1 summarises the analysis' main findings. Tables 2–4 present the regression outputs. Each table refers to a specific hypothesis. For each dependent variable, Tables 2 and 3 report the analyses conducted either using electoral autocracy as a single category or distinguishing competitive and hegemonic-party electoral autocracies. Table 4, which refers to the comparison between electoral autocracies and hereditary regimes, reports the analyses conducted either using hereditary regime as a single reference category or distinguishing liberalised from non-liberalised hereditary regimes, the former being included in the regression model and the latter being used as reference category, respectively. Tables 5–10 in the Appendix report the other robustness checks that have been conducted.

Table 1. Summary of findings.

		Child mortality	2ary school enrolment
Hp. 1	Electoral autocracies vs. Military regimes	>	>
	Competitive electoral autocracies vs. Military regimes	>	>
	Hegemonic electoral autocracies vs. Military regimes	>	>
Hp. 2	Electoral autocracies vs. Single-party regimes	>	>
	Competitive electoral autocracies vs. Single-party regimes	>	>
	Hegemonic electoral autocracies vs. Single-party regimes	>	>
Hp. 3	Electoral autocracies vs. Hereditary regimes	≈	≈
	Electoral autocracies vs. Non-liberalised hereditary regimes	≈	>

Table 2. Electoral autocracies and military regimes compared (Hp.1).

	Child mortality		2ary enrolment	
Lagged dep. var.	−0.089	−0.089	−0.109	−0.109
	(0.009)****	(0.009)****	(0.013)****	(0.013)****
Electoral aut.	−3.441		2.593	
	(1.098)***		(0.676)****	
Competitive elect. aut.		−4.174		2.299
		(1.176)****		(0.741)***
Hegemonic elect. aut.		−2.551		3.027
		(1.193)**		(0.795)****
Single-party aut.	1.312	1.290	1.476	1.467
	(1.347)	(1.349)	(0.859)*	(0.859)*
Hereditary aut.	−6.556	−6.604	2.486	2.483
	(1.355)****	(1.357)****	(1.063)**	(1.063)**
Democracy	−4.803	−4.931	3.619	3.578
	(1.129)****	(1.139)****	(0.768)****	(0.770)****
GDP pc (log)	4.661	4.724	1.845	1.878
	(0.448)****	(0.455)****	(0.394)****	(0.392)****
GDP growth	−0.199	−0.198	0.246	0.248
	(0.075)***	(0.075)***	(0.054)****	(0.054)****
Foreign aid pc	−0.001	−0.001	0.002	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Natural resource rents	−0.081	−0.083	0.011	0.012
	(0.021)****	(0.021)****	(0.025)	(0.025)
Population total (log)	−0.551	−0.573	0.250	0.244
	(0.166)****	(0.166)****	(0.199)	(0.200)
Population urban	−0.096	−0.099	−0.021	−0.023
	(0.022)****	(0.023)****	(0.020)	(0.020)
Ethnic fractionalisation	1.215	1.198	−3.900	−3.932
	(1.661)	(1.662)	(1.062)****	(1.062)****
Duration	−0.027	−0.025	0.011	0.012
	(0.005)****	(0.006)****	(0.006)*	(0.007)*
Domestic violence	0.291	0.296	0.040	0.043
	(0.187)	(0.187)	(0.123)	(0.123)
_cons	−17.833	−17.832	−7.292	−7.369
	(4.297)****	(4.292)****	(4.205)*	(4.200)*
R^2	0.34	0.34	0.14	0.14
N	2013	2013	1090	1090

Note: OLS estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All the independent variables are lagged (3-year interval). The dependent variable is in Δ form (3-year interval). The reference category, omitted from the model is Military autocracy.
*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; ****$p < 0.001$.

The analysis confirms that delivering social services is a complex task, and that a number of factors influence the outcome. Economic growth and state duration are associated with higher school enrolment rates and lower child mortality. Urbanisation eases the delivery of better health services, whereas ethnic fractionalisation can hamper the access to education. The negative coefficient that natural resource wealth displays in the analysis of child mortality corroborates some of the postulates of the 'rentier state' theory. Foreign aid and domestic violence appear less significant predictors. The interpretation of national income is admittedly challenging. While the estimated effect is positive on school enrolment, it is puzzling to observe that higher levels of wealth are associated with higher levels of under-5 mortality. Finally, democracy invariably displays a positive and statistically significant effect on both the examined social policy outcomes, consistently with a consolidating strand of comparative democratisation studies (Gerring, Thacker, & Alfaro, 2012).

Most importantly, the analysis confirms the importance of regime type. Even when we focus on non-democratic regimes, political institutions can make a difference. Concerning

Table 3. Electoral autocracies and single-party regimes compared (Hp.2).

	Child mortality		2ary enrolment	
Lagged dep. var.	−0.088	−0.088	−0.108	−0.108
	(0.009)****	(0.009)****	(0.013)****	(0.013)****
Electoral aut.	−4.066		1.691	
	(0.824)****		(0.692)**	
Competitive elect. aut.		−4.786		1.401
		(0.878)****		(0.752)*
Hegemonic elect. aut.		−3.150		2.137
		(1.002)***		(0.813)***
Military aut.	−0.162	−0.142	−0.628	−0.619
	(1.498)	(1.499)	(0.820)	(0.820)
Hereditary aut.	−7.151	−7.181	1.618	1.624
	(1.200)****	(1.200)****	(1.039)	(1.039)
Democracy	−5.436	−5.547	2.705	2.671
	(0.730)****	(0.736)****	(0.771)****	(0.773)****
GDP pc (log)	4.653	4.717	1.828	1.861
	(0.448)****	(0.455)****	(0.394)****	(0.392)****
GDP growth	−0.196	−0.195	0.246	0.248
	(0.076)***	(0.076)***	(0.054)****	(0.054)****
Foreign aid pc	−0.001	−0.001	0.003	0.003
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Natural resource rents	−0.084	−0.086	0.009	0.010
	(0.021)****	(0.021)****	(0.025)	(0.025)
Population total (log)	−0.525	−0.547	0.280	0.274
	(0.168)***	(0.169)***	(0.196)	(0.197)
Population urban	−0.096	−0.099	−0.021	−0.023
	(0.022)****	(0.022)****	(0.020)	(0.020)
Ethnic fractionalisation	1.029	1.011	−4.024	−4.056
	(1.712)	(1.713)	(1.063)****	(1.063)****
Duration	−0.027	−0.025	0.011	0.012
	(0.006)****	(0.006)****	(0.007)*	(0.007)*
Domestic violence	0.253	0.259	0.015	0.019
	(0.184)	(0.184)	(0.121)	(0.122)
_cons	−17.462	−17.475	−6.726	−6.810
	(4.310)****	(4.307)****	(4.213)	(4.208)
R^2	0.34	0.34	0.14	0.14
N	2013	2013	1090	1090

Note: OLS estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All the independent variables are lagged (3-year interval). The dependent variable is in Δ form (3-year interval). The reference category, omitted from the model is Single-party autocracy.

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; ****$p < 0.001$.

the first and second hypotheses, electoral authoritarian regimes deliver better education and health services than military and single-party regimes, as demonstrated by larger improvements (that is, positive changes) in secondary school enrolment rates and larger decreases (that is, negative changes) in under-five mortality rates. These results are robust to the counter-analyses performed. Interestingly, these results hold even when we analyse competitive and hegemonic electoral autocracies separately. Both these forms of electoral authoritarianism outperform military and single party regimes. However, it should be noted that post-estimation Wald t-tests show a statistically significant difference between the coefficients of the two regime subcategories, suggesting that competitive electoral autocracies deliver better health services than hegemonic ones. The difference is not significant when secondary school enrolment is the dependent variable, though.

Overall, these results are consistent with previous research findings that show a performance gap between electoral and closed autocracies (Cassani & Carbone, 2016;

Table 4. Electoral autocracies and hereditary regimes compared (Hp.3).

	Child mortality		2ary enrolment	
Lagged dep. var.	−0.091	−0.087	−0.109	−0.114
	(0.009)****	(0.009)****	(0.013)****	(0.012)****
Electoral aut.	0.726	1.629	1.040	2.136
	(1.034)	(1.171)	(0.792)	(1.054)**
Single-party aut.	6.515	6.319	−0.019	−0.461
	(1.124)****	(1.334)****	(0.959)	(1.217)
Military aut.	4.964	5.326	−1.270	−0.913
	(1.547)***	(1.703)***	(0.951)	(1.144)
Liberal. hereditary aut.		−0.692		0.491
		(1.376)		(1.597)
Democracy	−1.029	0.280	2.058	3.080
	(0.921)	(1.137)	(0.851)**	(1.086)***
GDP pc (log)	4.841	4.467	1.973	1.620
	(0.446)****	(0.468)****	(0.392)****	(0.412)****
GDP growth	−0.212	−0.220	0.246	0.234
	(0.077)***	(0.077)***	(0.054)****	(0.053)****
Foreign aid pc	−0.001	−0.002	0.004	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Natural resource rents	−0.061	−0.075	0.015	0.002
	(0.021)***	(0.021)****	(0.025)	(0.027)
Population total (log)	−0.824	−0.618	0.267	0.299
	(0.148)****	(0.170)****	(0.198)	(0.195)
Population urban	−0.132	−0.092	−0.021	0.000
	(0.019)****	(0.022)****	(0.020)	(0.019)
Ethnic fractionalisation	1.256	1.152	−3.852	−3.442
	(1.723)	(1.736)	(1.064)****	(1.063)***
Duration	−0.064	−0.024	0.010	0.083
	(0.016)****	(0.006)****	(0.006)	(0.017)****
Domestic violence	0.456	0.368	0.028	−0.060
	(0.190)**	(0.194)*	(0.123)	(0.122)
_cons	−18.065	−20.980	−6.926	−7.060
	(4.459)****	(4.611)****	(4.245)	(4.221)*
R^2	0.34	0.34	0.13	0.15
N	2013	2013	1090	1090

Note: OLS estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses. All the independent variables are lagged (3-year interval). The dependent variable is in Δ form (3-year interval). The reference category, omitted from the model is Hereditary autocracy, for column 1 and 3, and Non-liberalised hereditary autocracy, for column 2 and 4.
*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; ****$p < 0.001$.

Miller, 2015b). Crucially, however, the analysis demonstrates the importance of going beyond closed authoritarianism as a single category, and of considering the implications of the institutional differences that exist across contemporary cases. The analysis of the third hypothesis indicates that electoral autocracies and hereditary regimes do not display systematic differences in their ability to deliver health and education services, in particular. Importantly, these results are robust to the inclusion in the regression model of control variables for potentially relevant factors that are frequently associated with hereditary regimes, such as natural resource wealth and state duration. When liberalised and non-liberalised monarchies are distinguished, electoral autocracies surpass non-liberalised monarchies in the education sector, consistently with the discussion of hypothesis 3 in the previous section. Yet these results are robust only to some of the counter-analyses that have been performed. Hereditary regimes' social service performance calls for further research. In this regard, Olson's (1993) emphasis on the longer time horizon that monarchs typically face, and the implications that this could have in terms of rulers' attention to the long-term productivity of the country's human capital, may provide some guidance.

Conclusion: social service performance and the electoral authoritarianism's legitimacy advantage hypothesis

This research adds to our understanding of how authoritarianism can survive 'in an age of democratisation' (Brownlee, 2007). Specifically, it represents one of the first attempts to bridge the recent scholarship on authoritarian legitimation with another relatively novel stream of research that investigates the socioeconomic consequences of regime change (Carbone, 2009), even when it stops short of democratisation – that is, the institutionalisation of electoral authoritarian regimes. Lacking democratic legitimacy, and given the shortage of other 'identity-based' sources of diffuse support, such as ideology, tradition and personal charisma, legitimation claims and political survival in contemporary autocracies increasingly rest on rulers' ability to achieve concrete outcomes, including the improvement of citizens' living conditions. Accordingly, this article compares autocracies with each other, and their ability to deliver social services in the post-Cold War period, paying special attention to the consequences of introducing semi-competitive and participatory institutions. The analysis confirms the relevance of the differences that exist across authoritarian regimes, and of the transformations that some of them have recently experienced. Specifically, semi-competitive and participatory institutions ease the delivery of education and health services, by helping rulers overcome the information and communication deficits that typically affect authoritarian politics and societies. These findings could have significant implications for the study of authoritarian politics, and of autocrats' attempt to legitimise.

Previous research shows that nominally democratic institutions under dictatorship facilitate the management of intra- and inter-elite relationships. Elections and legislatures, for instance, promote power sharing and co-optation, fragment opposition fronts, and reduce the extent to which repression is necessary (Blaydes, 2011; Boix & Svolik, 2013; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor, 2014; Gandhi, 2008; Magaloni, 2008, among others). Concerning the relationship between rulers and the ruled, and autocrats' efforts to claim legitimacy and gain support from the public, elections and compliance with at least the most basic rules of the game provide autocrats with procedural legitimacy. Semi-competitive and participatory institutions can do even more than this, though. Demonstrating that electoral autocracies deliver better social services than other dictators do, this paper contributes the debate with new evidence on how semi-competitive and participatory institutions could also enhance autocrats' ability to pursue performance-based legitimation. The analysis indicates that so-called electoral autocracies, notably, both the competitive and hegemonic variants of this regime type, outperform single-party and military regimes, in particular. Therefore, introducing semi-competitive and participatory institutions in contemporary military and single-party regimes could improve a government's social service performance, and help leaders of these regimes gain legitimacy, based on the claim that the government provides for citizens. Hereditary regimes are the exception. The statistically non-significant results that the comparison between electoral and hereditary autocracies has produced call for further research. However, the exceptionalism of hereditary regimes is not new, and is already manifest in their surprising resilience and ability to counteract recent challenges to their stability (Stepan, Linz, & Minoves, 2014; Yom & Gause III, 2012).[8]

A new hypothesis emerges from this research. It submits that the legitimacy returns of introducing semi-competitive and participatory institutions under dictatorship could grow exponentially. Besides procedural legitimacy, these institutions could help rulers pursue performance-based legitimation through the delivery of social services, which is increasingly salient for the legitimation of leaders that are not democratically elected, and for their political survival.

The electoral authoritarianism's legitimacy advantage hypothesis ushers in a brand new research agenda that includes the analysis of the mechanisms that translate social welfare in legitimacy, in these regimes. Several African case-studies, including Uganda since the mid-1990s (Stasavage, 2005), and Tanzania under Benjamin Mkapa (Kjær & Therkildsen, 2012) indicate that 'pursuing policies with appeal to many voters [is] a serious attempt to gain legitimacy' (Kjær & Therkildsen, 2012, p. 595). The analysis of voting intentions in African electoral regimes (both democratic and non-democratic ones) confirms the relevance of socioeconomic issues (Bratton, Bhavnani, & Chen, 2012). Together with the findings of this research, evidence from these countries points to an interactive, mutually reinforcing electoral mechanism.

Holding semi-competitive elections – the partial liberalisation of the political arena, more generally – is an increasingly popular but risky way to claim legitimacy. Each election opens a window of opportunity for political change, catalysing seemingly dormant political dynamics (Schedler, 2013). Moreover, opposition's performance at the polls can progressively ameliorate, when elections are reiterated (Bunce & Wolchik, 2010; Lindberg, 2009). Despite manipulation, authoritarian multiparty elections can be lost (Hyde & Marinov, 2011). By delivering efficient and universalistic health and education services, the ruling party could elicit 'genuine' popular support, and weaken the effectiveness of opposition parties' campaigns against the government. In other words, delivering better education and health services could improve the ruling party's performance at the polls, and help incumbents in electoral autocracies win elections and large majorities without the need to engage in massive electoral manipulation and fraud, which would enfeeble their claims to comply with the rules of the game. On the other hand, this research shows that elections and other nominally democratic institutions can improve the social service performance of an autocracy. Elections and social service performance could thus interact as mutually reinforcing drivers of authoritarian legitimation. Semi-competitive and participatory institutions assist autocrats in delivering social services, which in turn help autocrats win elections.

A related and similarly crucial issue that future research should address refers to the effectiveness of regime performance as a long-term legitimation strategy. While legitimacy and legitimation are difficult concepts to measure, they ultimately relate to political survival and stability. In this regard, evidence concerning the durability of contemporary electoral autocracies is mixed (Brownlee, 2009; Hadenius & Teorell, 2007; Knutsen & Nygard, 2015; Lindberg, 2009). Likewise, whether improving citizens' living conditions and promoting human development actually pays off, in terms of authoritarian survival, remains an open question. On one hand, the recent episode of electoral turnover in Nigeria suggests that the hegemonic ruling party can be defeated, when a government is unpopular and fails to address citizens' needs

(even following a phase of economic growth). Regime performance is therefore part of a broader constellation of factors that may either strengthen or weaken, in the Nigerian case, a leader's hold on power (Carbone & Cassani, 2016).

On the other hand, authoritarian regimes face a performance dilemma (Huntington, 1991), and 'do not derive from successful performance […] enduring benefits for their legitimacy' (Diamond et al., 1989, p. 14). Socioeconomic progress tends to refocus popular aspirations towards political demands, and gives civil society more bargaining power. Hence, the electoral authoritarianism's legitimacy advantage could ultimately prove ephemeral. Leaders of contemporary electoral autocracies risk finding themselves in a 'catch-22' situation. To comfortably win elections, and to secure short-term political survival, they need to deliver. However, human development could delegitimise and destabilise these regimes in the medium/long-run, and force leaders to concede democracy.

Notes

1. The focus of the discussion on legitimation does not imply that legitimacy is sufficient to authoritarian stability and survival, which rest on various combinations of a plurality of factors, including repression and co-optation (Gerschewski, 2013).
2. Beetham (1991) offers a narrower definition of support, which should be expressed through positive, explicit, and public actions.
3. But see the other contributions to this special issue on other legitimation strategies.
4. The analysis of policy outcomes sheds light on governments' actual ability to deliver social services, which is consistent with the focus of the discussion in the second section. Measures of government welfare expenditure are not used. Social spending can capture a government's commitment to improve citizens' lives, but tells little about how resources are actually invested. Moreover, Gandhi (2008) has already analysed government spending across authoritarian subtypes. While differences in military spending exist, the author does not find significant differences in terms of welfare spending. Gandhi's findings are thus consistent with the idea of this paper that leaders of different authoritarian regimes are similarly concerned about delivering social services to gain legitimacy (although their need of performance-based legitimation could have different origins), and that the difference, if any, rests on their ability to achieve this goal.
5. Ninety-seven percent of the observations identified using these coding rules are 'electoral democracies', according to Freedom House, which tends to be more generous, since only seventy percent of Freedom House's electoral democracies would be classified as democratic according to the above rules.
6. State duration is an admittedly raw indicator of state capacity, which is a multidimensional concept whose measurement remains challenging, especially in a research that covers a large number of countries (Hanson, 2015). State capacity is not a defining attribute of political regime, but some dimensions of state capacity tend to be systematically correlated with some regime types (Hendrix, 2010; Charron & Lapuente, 2011).
7. ECM also allows investigating the presence of short-term dynamics. To do this, we should include in the regression model the independent variables in delta form. Yet theory points to a medium/long-run regime effect, associated with the functioning of the institutions that define it, rather than to a transition effect.
8. Moreover, in the analysis of dictators' legitimation efforts, introducing semi-competitive and participatory democratic institutions seems to be a more workable strategy for the leader of a single-party or military regime than self-proclaiming a monarch, although someone did try in the past (e.g. Jean-Bédel Bokassa in Central African Republic, from 1976 to 1979).

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