This paper attempts to clarify why authoritarian regimes design social policies to promote the welfare of citizens. Social welfare policies are coordinated outcomes that link together the political and economic realms. Despite a rich literature on this topic in industrialized democracies, little research has investigated the mechanisms in authoritarian regimes. I argue that the limited focus on welfare provision in democracies stems from several flawed assumptions about the ability of modern autocracies to create similar programs and the mechanisms that would encourage it. Although autocrats are more autonomous than democratic leaders in terms of decision-making, they rarely rule alone. As such, social policies in authoritarian regimes are driven by the autocrats’ need to create stable ruling coalitions. The level and type of welfare provided in authoritarian regimes should therefore differ depending on the groups on which the autocrat depends for support. The ability to effectively decommodify welfare and provide assistance should also vary based on regime characteristics and resource availability. I examine this using data on authoritarian regimes and social policies in the global scope from 1946 to 2010.

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I expect the results show authoritarian welfare provision depends on which the ruling coalition autocrats need.

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