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The international politics of authoritarian rule, by Oisín Tansey

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BOOK REVIEWS

The international politics of authoritarian rule, by Oisín Tansey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 240 pp., £55 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0199683628

The recent waves of mass dissent that crossed country borders with ease and challenged the world of authoritarian rule triggered a shift in contemporary autocracy research. Following the colour revolutions (2000s) and the Arab Spring (2011), scholarship turned from domestic factors to the international dimension, and studies connecting external influences to the survival of autocrats have become both popular and numerous. Despite valuable insights from recent analyses, the field remains largely fragmented and lacks conceptual and theoretical clarity. This is the starting point for Oisín Tansey's book. *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule* aims to order recent findings (Chapter 1), provide a concise typology of external influences (Chapter 2), and offer an analytical framework for international influences on authoritarian persistence (Chapter 3), exemplified in three empirical chapters (Chapters 4–6). The question guiding this ambitious monograph is how the actions of external state governments affect “the practice of authoritarian politics at the domestic level” (18).

In a rich, well-structured review of recent autocracy research, Tansey recaps domestic factors that remain of undisputed relevance for authoritarian persistence, and current findings on international influences, which promise high explanatory capacity but lack clear theoretical concepts and cohesive frameworks. Against this backdrop, Tansey presents his own typology of external influences, which differentiates between passive and active influences (33ff). In the remainder of the book, Tansey focuses on those *active* influences with the intention to bolster authoritarian rulers, which he calls “autocratic sponsorship” (34). Tansey stresses that autocratic sponsorship today is rarely based on ideological motivations as it was in the age of communist and fascist internationalism and presents plausible arguments why sponsors of contemporary autocrats rather engage in interest-driven “democracy resistance” than ideologically motivated “autocracy promotion” (49ff).

An approach that places so much importance on intention and ideology will quite naturally be hard pressed for empirical evidence. The analytical framework developed in Chapter 3 thus focusses on “spikes” of (domestic) authoritarian practices – electoral manipulation, repression, and coups – that are most likely to exhibit visible external sponsorship (57ff). It follows, as the author notes, that “some forms of long-term international sponsorship receive little attention” (59). Chapter 3 discusses external actors' *motivations*, the *tools* international sponsors use to support authoritarian incumbents, and possible *effects* of autocratic sponsorship.

Tansey employs this framework in three empirical chapters, each looking at the mechanisms of international politics in support of one authoritarian practice; electoral manipulation in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2008 (Chapter 4), protest repression in Bahrain and Syria in 2011 (Chapter 5), and coups in Fiji in 2006 and Egypt in 2013 (Chapter 6). Sadly, the book provides little discussion of the reasons for case selection, which limits the generalization of the results. Nevertheless, the chapters provide


comprehensive examples for the analysis of international sponsorship of domestic authoritarian strategies, and Tansey's insightful account of the mechanisms at hand evinces great familiarity with the cases. The book concludes with a concise summary of the theoretical achievements, not without pointing the reader to various avenues open to future research on the international dimension of authoritarian rule.

The book's few shortcomings, namely the narrow theoretical focus on three authoritarian practices and the selection of empirical cases, should not distract from the immense contribution of this commendable monograph. Tansey's clear conceptual distinction between different forms of external influences, especially interest-driven support (democracy resistance) and ideologically motivated sponsorship (autocracy promotion), is a viable tool for future analyses of the true nature of external support to authoritarian rulers. With regard to the increasing number of studies conjuring an image of "autocracy rising" and putative promotion of authoritarian rule, this distinction brings much-needed sobriety to the field. Tansey skilfully dovetails recent studies on international influences with his own typology of external sponsorship (39ff). Here, the author demonstrates the sound theoretical foundations of his arguments and provides readers with a great pool of relevant literature. The analytical framework offers a solid background to further explorations of the mechanisms behind autocratic sponsorship, its motivation, tools, and results.

The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule is a valuable, much needed contribution with the ambitious aim to bring order and conceptual clarity to the emerging scholarship of international autocracy research. The author's rich knowledge of the field and convincing combination of theoretical arguments make this book a worthwhile read for both new readers and experienced scholars of authoritarianism. The latter will greatly enjoy Tansey's fresh approach to organize recent findings in a systematic framework. Readers wishing to be acquainted with the field of autocracy research will find a comprehensive, rich account of established findings and new insights.

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Recycling dictators in Latin American elections: legacies of military rule by

Brett J. Kyle, Boulder & London, First Forum Press, 2016, 266 pp., index, bibliography, appendix, \$37.50 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-62637-437-9

In the book *Recycling Dictators in Latin American Elections*, Brett J. Kyle is analysing the phenomenon whereby ex-members of military regimes resurface as candidates in democratic presidential elections. While others have written on the appearance of political outsiders, this is, to my knowledge, the first volume dedicated exclusively to examining those candidates that had either an affiliation with the prior dictatorship, or who were members of the military institution. The book investigates why ex-dictators run