

Leendert Krol
European University Institute

Between compliance and concession. Institutional power and legislative activity of authoritarian parliaments in Eurasia

Institutionalist literature on authoritarian rule views legislatures as a ruler's credible commitment to power sharing with his allies. Providing allies with the institutional tools to topple the leadership, autocrats, anticipating this reaction, invest more resources in policy concessions, rendering the regime more durable. This paper argues, however, that in most circumstances authoritarian rule does not permit institutional constraints on leadership and demonstrates that institutional power sharing depends on the structural challenges facing the regime. Legislative actors in an authoritarian regime can only put conditions (e.g. legislative concessions) in place for their support when internal divisions and/or challenges by the opposition render their (implicit or explicit) threat to withdraw parliamentary support for the government a credible threat to government durability. In the absence of a structure of government-opposition relations that is favorable to credible defection, compliance and support for an autocrat is unconditional. The analysis of legislative initiative and amendment in a comparative study of four post-Soviet legislatures (Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan) shows that the bargaining position of legislative actors strongly affects the quantity and scope of legislative activity. Internal divisions cause legislative concessions to the parliament regardless of the opposition's strength. External challenges, by contrast, affect the quantity and scope of parliamentary legislation mostly in combination with internal dispute.