

Authoritarian Power Sharing: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Strategies

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July 27, 2021

Abstract

Power sharing is a central concept in studies of authoritarian regimes. No dictator is inherently secure in office. Leaders must appease actors who threaten their rule, and can use a wide array of formal and informal channels to distribute spoils and make policy concessions. Typically, scholars have studied distinct modes of power sharing separately. This review article surveys and reorganizes the literature to provide a general strategic framework for understanding authoritarian power sharing. First, we define power sharing as any mode of cooptation that constrains the range of actions a ruler can take. We link empirical research on authoritarian institutions, post-conflict settlements, cabinet appointments, and military integration to this conceptualization by discussing how these formal and informal channels can tie the hands of leaders. Second, we highlight two core mechanisms that, collectively, generate a fundamental dilemma of power sharing. On the one hand, sharing more power enables rulers to better *commit* to deals with other members of society. However, sharing more power also increases the *capabilities* of societal actors to overthrow the ruler. Third, we provide a theory that explains which mechanism dominates in various substantive settings, which is critical for understanding when rulers adopt power-sharing strategies and whether they promote authoritarian survival.

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