THE MANY WORLDS OF AUTOCRACIES
Re-examining institutional configurations in persistent authoritarian regimes
by looking into the case of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article analyses autocratic stabilisation processes by looking at the different reinforcement mechanisms within and between the institutions of repression, co-optation and legitimation as the three fundamental principles of autocratic rule. Thereby, I particularly refer to Gerschewski's (2013) framework of the three pillars of autocratic stability which is rooted in the theories of neo-institutionalism. One accomplishment of this rather general model is the re-integration of legitimation as a crucial factor of autocratic stability. Notwithstanding the theoretical merits of conceptualising the framework of the three pillars by recollecting legitimation, this article takes a critical stance over Gerschewski's theory on the 'two worlds of autocracies' (2013:30). By implying two institutional configurations for stable and resistant autocratic regimes, Gerschewski introduces the concepts of over-politicisation and de-politicisation. Yet, my empirical explorations show that autocratic stabilisation processes are much more dynamic than indicated by these two configurations. Thus, it is my aim to demonstrate that Gerschewski's dichotomous explanation has a limited scope. Furthermore, based on insights from historical as well as discursive institutionalism, I suggest an alternative framework which allows for a more dynamic perspective on authoritarian stabilisation processes. To illustrate my theoretical arguments, I track down the major institutional configurations of repression, co-optation and legitimation in present Uzbekistan. Hence, I offer empirical evidence from a persistent autocratic regime in Central Asia and argue that some types of autocracies reveal neither exclusively the over-politicisation nor the de-politicisation configuration but rather blurred combinations – yet, prove to be stable over long periods of time.