Codebook for Can't Coalesce, Can't Constrain: Redefining elite influence in non-democracies

Introduction

This document summarizes the indicators and coding used for my measure of elite influence. I treat elite influence as the result of two things: how much power the dictator shares with the elite (elite power), and the number of politically powerful elites (elite cohesion). Sharing a set amount of power with a few political actors has different implications from sharing it with many. I argue that the power of dictators is counterbalanced only when they share power with relatively few actors. By contrast, a dictator who shares power with numerous actors is better insulated simply because a larger group is likely to have difficulty coordinating, due to conflicting interests. Elite collective action is most likely when elite power and cohesion are high.

$$Elite\ influence = Elite\ power + Elite\ Cohesion * Elite\ Power$$

List of indicators

Elite power

Military involvement in government (milgov)

Question: Does the military exercise direct or indirect influence over the sitting dictator?

Coding: 1 if Svolik categorizes the influence of the military as either personal, indirect or corporate, 0 otherwise.

Justification: Militaries have the organization required to check dictators' power through the threat of force. Militaries that already hold some influence over government signal their willingness to intervene in politics. Militaries can then hold considerable influence in policy-making as well as the administration of coercion and controlling access to the state.

Source: (Svolik 2012)

Selection by a collective (execselection)

Question: Was the dictator selected by a collective?

Coding: 1 if the dictator was selected by a collective or elected body as coded by Svolik, 0 otherwise.

Justification: Some dictators do not get to power through their own means. Instead, they are selected by a collective, such as a *junta* or a hegemonic party than later postulates them as a unique candidate. These collective thus have the power over the access to key state positions.

Source: (Svolik 2012)

Single party (hegemonparty)

Question: Are politics dominated by a single political party?

Coding: 1 if the country has a single party, discounting government-aligned minor parties (satellite parties).

Justification: A political party gives fundamental support to dictators because they channel political conflict even when elections are not in play. While some autocrats create these parties to their own benefit, most of these parties eventually co-opt but also empower the more important political interests (Gandhi 2008; Shirk 1993). The organization of the party gives these interests an infrastructure to coordinate to obtain policy-making influence. Many dominant parties are also the only vehicle for accessing the head of the state.

Source: (Svolik 2012)

Hegemonic party (hegemonparty)

Question: Has the single party been a historically domiant force ?

Coding: 1 if the party holds national executive power for at least 20 years through at least nominally contested elections.

Justification: Some single parties are instruments created by dictators. Hegemonic parties, in contrast, have an independent power base and should serve as a more genuine counterbalance.

Source: (Templeman 2014).

Presence of a legislature (legisopp)

Question: Does the regime has a legislative body?

Coding: 1 if the regime has a legislative body for the given regime-year.

Justification: Legislatures in authoritarian countries give elites access to state resources and some protection against regime violence. Thus, even when the legisletrue is a rubber-stamping institution, it still provides elites clear benefits. In some cases, however, membership to this legislatures also comes with policy-making power.

Source Beck et al. 2001

Autonomous legislature (legisopp)

Question: Is there a chamber that hold genuine policy-making powers?

Coding: 1 if VDEM (v2lgqstexp) codes the legislatures as effective, or if v2lgqstexp is missing and Svolik codes the legislature as not dependent on the autocrat, 0 otherwise.

Justification: Some legislatures in autocracies are better described as rubber-stamping institutions. However, it is not uncommon for some of them to hold influence over policy and even be able to challenge dictators on occasion. The VDEM variable helps identify autonomous legislatures. For cases where this variable is missing, Svolik's account of whether a legislature is appointed by the dictator can also be used as an alternative indicator.

Source: (Svolik 2012)

Stable legislature (dissolvedrecent)

Question: Has the dictator not dissolved the legislature recently?

Coding: 0 if Svolik registers a lack of legislature in the current year or in the past year during of the same regime, 1 otherwise.

Justification: Legislatures that have not been dissolved give elites added confidence that their power is stable. Additionally, long-running legislatures allow its members to develop connections and accumulate wealth, which they can use to advance their own interests.

Source:(Svolik 2012)

Cabinet changes (cabinetrecent)

Question: Has the dictator in turn not made any major cabinet changes in the current or past year?

Coding: 0 if Banks codes at least one instance of a major cabinet change in the current or previous year, 1 otherwise.

Justification: Cabinet changes suggest that regime insiders are unable to hold on to key positions of power. Instead, dictators have strong control over who can access state power, and can use it to undermine potential challengers or reward loyal members of the ruling coalition.

Source: (Banks and Wilson 2017)

Strong local governments (localgov)

Question: Do the local governments have some autonomy from the dictator?

Coding: 1 if the local government has autonomy over taxing, spending, or legislative activity (AUTHOR variable in the Database of Political Institutions=1), 0 otherwise or if the local government is appointed by the executive.

Justification: Autonomous states give the political elites that control them independent sources of revenue and political leverage to oppose dictators. Local leaders can withhold resources from the dictator or make political control through coercion or policy more difficult. Local politicians that are elected indicate that they have some organizational capacity independent from the dictator, while those who are appointed do not need to develop that capacity.

Source: (Beck et al. 2001)

Elite cohesion

Unified military (milfrag)

Question: Is the military fragmented or has had its spaces for coordination reduced?

Coding: 0 in cases where military fragmentation has increased by more than two standard deviations in the same regime or if military academies have reduced, 1 otherwise.

Justification: Dictators often create diverse coercive forces to counteract the influence of any given military group (i.e. "counterbalancing"). This fragmentation creates diverse interests and drive elite cohesion down. Research by Sudduth (2017) also suggests that coup-proofing occurs when elite cohesion is already low. Similarly, Böhmelt and collegues show that military academies give coercieve forces spaces for unification, and can breed coups. Dictators that reduce militaries or induce fragemention make collective aciton more difficult.

Source: (Böhmelt, Escribà-Folch, and Pilster 2018; Sudduth 2017)

Bicameralism (bicameralism)

Question: Does the legislative branch has more than one chamber?

Coding: 0 if there is two or more chambers in the legislative as recorded by VDEM (v2lgbicam), 1 otherwise.

Justification: Bicameralism can dilute the power of members of the lower house by introducing new interests and potential institutional controls while not necessarily stripping away substantial additional power from the dictator.

Source: (Lindberg et al. 2014)

Unified legislative voting (legisfrag)

Question: Do members of the main party vote as a unity or are they divided in factions?

Coding: 1 if VDEM (v2lgqstexp) codes members of the party as "mostly" or "always" voting together.

Justification: Members of the legislature will have more difficulty coordinating when there are a variety of interests than when there is a common leadership, such as an hegemonic party. Similarly, nonpartisan legislatures do not have the structure of a party to generate consensus and facilitate coordination.

Source:(Lindberg et al. 2014)

No independent judiciary (judindep)

Question: When the high court in the judicial system is ruling in cases that are salient to the government, how often do they reflect their sincere view of the legal record instead of the interest of the regime?

Coding: 0 if the higher court acts independently at least half of the time as recorded by VDEM (v2juhcind_ord), 1 otherwise.

Justification: Dictators often start their efforts to monopolize power by assaulting judicial independence. Not all of them succeed, and others deliberatively allow for independent courts that effectively constrain dictatorial power. In such contexts, independent courts can open the doors of the state to political opponents, curtail the legislative ambitions of autocrats, and make coercion more costly (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008).

Source: (Lindberg et al. 2014)

Ethnic homogeneity (efindex)

Question: Is the country ethnically homogenous?

Coding: 0 if ethnic fractionalization is above average (.42), 1 otherwise.

Justification: The literature shows that ethnic tensions can create divergent interests within the ruling coalitions (Collins 2004; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018). These differences are especially salient as there are often rooted in long-lived conflicts. I opt for a cutoff of 0.42 because that's an above average level of fractionalization.

Source (Drazanova 2020)

No Interest group consultation (igconsult)

Question: When important policy changes are being considered, how wide is the range of consultation at elite levels?

Coding: 0 if V-DEM (v2dlconslt) identifies that policymaking occurs in consultation with actors outside of the state (v2dlconslt<3), 1 otherwise.

Justification: Power can be shared with those outside of the state, like business interests, religious organizations, or organized labor. These actors have their own interests and can make coordination difficult as they may actively push certain agendas on regime insiders, such as party officials. The threshold of 3 excludes countries where interests outside of the regime hold substantive influence over policy as identified by VDEM.

Source: (Lindberg et al. 2014)

State-owned media (mediaindep)

Question: Is the media independent from the government?

Coding: 0 if VDEM (v2mebias) reports that the print and broadcast media cover only the official party or candidates.

Justification: An independent media can be a powerful political actor and gain leverage over regime insiders. As the media gains influence, elites may be forced to enter conflict with each other to secure positive coverage and resources. In contrast, when the media is owned by the state, elites maintain a good degree of what can be published. This facilitates bargaining among the elites as no external actors hold influence over them.

Source: (Lindberg et al. 2014)

Enforced term limits (resplim)

Question: Did the current dictator respect his or her upcoming term limits?

Coding: 1 if Baturo reports that a country has effective term limits (formal term limits that are not subsequently broken), 0 otherwise (no term limits, or term limits are broken or bypassed).

Justification: Term limits in dictators serve to redistribute power between the ruling coalition and avoid defection from regime insiders. Many dictators in presidential systems face term limits, but only about 40% of them respect them according to Baturo. Dictators that do respect term limits likely do so because a coordinated elite makes reneging costly. Enforced term limits suggest that regime insiders have the capacity to punish dictators seeking to delay the redistribution of power.

Source: (Baturo 2014)

Source: World Bank

No internal conflict (armedopp):

Question: Is the country currently involved in a conflict with a domestic armed group?

Coding: 0 if the country has any incidences of violent domestic conflict, 1 otherwise.

Justification: Elites share a common interest in the protection of the regime. Conflict that puts the continuity of the political system in peril shows that regime members are unable to act cohesively to prevent challenges to their power. Additionally, violent conflicts often start after groups of the autocratic elite splinter and challenge their former allies. A lack of internal conflict shows an elite that has the necessary cohesion to prevent it from emerging and perduring.

Source:(Banks and Wilson 2017)

Smaller geographic size (geosize)

Question: Is the country large enough to require widespread delegation of power?

Coding: 0 if the country is bigger than $1,000,000 \text{km}^2$, 1 otherwise.

Justification: In smaller countries, power can be shared among a relatively few locally powerful actors so the number of regime insiders can be kept low. It is less likely that the influence of a few actors will be enough to cover the entirety of the state in bigger countries. Political regimes in larger countries will need to extend its membership in order to cover the state. This introduces new interests and potential new divisions among regime-insiders and can make coordination more difficult. The threshold of $1,000,000$ km^2 is somewhat arbitrary but it has the advantage of including about 20% of the countries in the sample, which helps keep a large number of observations at both values of the variable while maintaining item-discriminability.

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