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Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Authoritarian Public Sphere: Legitimation and Autocratic Power in North Korea, Burma, and China by Alexander Dukalskis

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Source: *The Review of Politics*, WINTER 2018, Vol. 80, No. 1 (WINTER 2018), pp. 189-192

Published by: Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26564745>

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insiders may resent such an emphasis—Bernard Nussbaum, Clinton’s first White House counsel, describes the entire notion of Clinton scandals as “phony” (308)—but Clinton’s cultural reputation today hinges on the role scandals played or at least were perceived to play before, during, and after his presidency. Similarly, the fact that Clinton was only the second American president ever to be impeached makes it a central component of his legacy.

A related criticism is the relative absence of key subjects. It is not surprising that quotations from Monica Lewinsky herself do not appear, but neither do any from Hillary Clinton or Al Gore, even though each merits their own section of the book. In addition, two of Clinton’s chiefs of staff—Erskine Bowles and John Podesta—are missing from the book. Similarly, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, Attorney General Janet Reno, and EPA administrator Carol Browner do not appear, even though each of them served the entire duration of the Clinton administration. Neither do higher-profile political advisors such as James Carville, George Stephanopoulos, and Dick Morris, each of whom served a comparatively short stint under Clinton but had an outsize personality in the media. Readers interested in hearing about the perspective of these bold-faced names from the Clinton years will need to look elsewhere.

Despite these criticisms, there is still nothing else like *Inside the Clinton White House* available for those seeking to learn about the nation’s 42nd president from sources who participated directly in Bill Clinton’s presidency. The frankness of the text combined with Riley’s gift for narrative and structure make this book a vital contribution to the literature not only on William Jefferson Clinton, but also on presidential politics and oral history, as well.

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Alexander Dukalskis: *The Authoritarian Public Sphere: Legitimation and Autocratic Power in North Korea, Burma, and China*. (London: Routledge, 2017. x, 188.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670517000894

Less than half of the world’s countries can be considered democracies today by any popular definition or measure. The remaining half can be placed along the autocratic continuum. While some of these states have slid into autocracy only recently, many others have been entrenched authoritarian regimes for some time. Much ink has been spilled in recent years to explain

the durability of authoritarian governments. Despite the diversity of views on the sources of authoritarian persistence, most scholars agree that neither repression nor economic stability or cooptation are sufficient underpinnings of nondemocratic regimes. Both democratic and authoritarian political systems must attain a degree of legitimacy and public support to ensure their persistence. Alexander Dukalskis's *The Authoritarian Public Sphere* is a timely contribution to this line of argument.

According to Dukalskis, authoritarian regimes that dominate, manipulate, and control the public and private space where political discussion takes place entrench their power by influencing the ways in which their citizens think and talk about politics (2–4). The authoritarian public sphere is crammed with the legitimating messages crafted by authoritarian governments. Authoritarian state infrastructure—media, schools, political parties, legislation, and online control—is used to diffuse the authoritarian content. State repression plays a role in policing the boundaries of the authoritarian public sphere but a regime's legitimating claims can reify authoritarian power even if people do not fully believe in their content and even if punishment is not assured for deviation (26–29).

To enable the comparison of authoritarian legitimation across contexts and cases, Dukalskis proposes a framework of six elements of authoritarian legitimating messages. These elements are: (1) *concealment* of undesirable information from public discussion; (2) *framing* of issues and events so that they appear consistent with the regime's ideology; (3) *blaming* others for all wrongs; (4) *inevitability* of a ruling power to stay strong and unified; (5) *mythologizing* the regime in events and figures of the past; and (6) *promised land* elements directing the population toward a better future (15–16 and chap. 3). This framework is assessed on empirical materials—extensive interview data, field research, and secondary sources—from three case studies: North Korea, Burma, and China (chap. 4), and probed on secondary evidence from South Korea (1961–1979), Cuba after the Cold War, and contemporary Iran (chap. 6).

While the proposed framework is unquestionably useful for comparative analysis of authoritarian legitimation, it falls short as a theory explaining the persistence of authoritarian regimes. It assists in addressing questions about the content and strategies of authoritarian legitimation, but not about what makes some authoritarian governments more successful in generating a belief in their legitimacy, and *why* some authoritarian regimes are more effective in the use of legitimating strategies for entrenching their rule. The difference between the content and strategies of legitimation and their impact follows from a crucial distinction between legitimation claims, or what an authoritarian government says about its right to rule, and legitimacy itself, or the capacity of the regime to instill a belief that it is the “right” rule for the people (14). The book recognizes this distinction and accepts that all governments make claims to legitimation but not every government succeeds in generating the legitimacy belief. However, it does not connect legitimating

messages to authoritarian legitimacy in a comprehensive manner or suggest ways in which different elements of the legitimating messages amplify or weaken the authoritarian government's effort to legitimate its rule. The framework developed in the book offers a good starting point for beginning to think theoretically about a number of important questions concerning the impact of authoritarian legitimation: What bearing do complementarities and contradictions in legitimating messages have on the authoritarian regime's ability to exercise control over the authoritarian public sphere? What is more important for the durability of an authoritarian government: to forestall the emergence of critiques of the regime or to secure the public's consent and zealous belief? How do the discourses and strategies of legitimation interact with other elements of the authoritarian public sphere, including repressive policies and the authoritarian state infrastructure?

It should be acknowledged, however, that the book's primary goal is to show how authoritarian regimes legitimate their power and marginalize critical voices. Dukalskis is careful not to draw causal linkages between legitimating messages and durability of the examined authoritarian cases. Yet the book's narrative is sprinkled with statements about the ways in which the authoritarian public sphere augments and contributes to the resilience of authoritarian regimes (see, e.g., 141). This suggests that the author, too, is deeply interested in advancing our understanding of the ways in which authoritarian legitimation assists in the durability of authoritarian regimes. To be fair to Dukalskis, many scholars of authoritarian studies have grappled with a similar issue: attempting to connect the legitimation claims and strategies to the resilience of authoritarian governments in a comprehensive and theoretically rigorous way. Some of the challenges with establishing such a connection are methodological in nature. Discussed at length in the monograph, they have to do with the empirical difficulties of distinguishing between the influence of belief and force in an authoritarian context. The theoretical lacuna that has recently begun to be filled has to do with the disciplinary confines of comparative political theory and the lack of theoretical cross-fertilization with other disciplines that could provide important theoretical insights on the micro-processes of discursive persuasion.

Dukalskis's book is notable for yet another important observation: authoritarian public spheres are not completely immune to some form of dissent. In each case study considered in the book, there have been physical or social sites with the potential to provide space to counter the states' dominant narratives. Although less systematically examined and untheorized, these context-specific sites of potential counternarratives are considered in the monograph. They include the shadow economy in North Korea, independent journalism in Burma, and the Internet in China.

Dukalskis's *Authoritarian Public Sphere* is part of the Routledge Studies in Comparative Asian Politics series, and students of Asian politics will benefit from reading this volume. But it will be of interest to the much broader readership of anyone interested in political legitimacy and

legitimation. Although the author draws a sharp contrast between the democratic and the authoritarian public space, the framework of legitimating messages developed in the book allows for important parallels to be drawn between the strategies of democratic and authoritarian legitimation.

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Jeffrey Edward Green: *The Shadow of Unfairness: A Plebeian Theory of Liberal Democracy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xi, 252.)

Ali Aslam: *Ordinary Democracy: Sovereignty and Citizenship beyond the Neoliberal Impasse*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xi, 209.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670517000882

These two books begin with a similar and similarly disheartening assessment of the citizenship experience in contemporary democracy: this experience is deeply disappointing and frustrating, especially if citizens have expectations that their participation might make a difference or that they will be treated as free and equal. These are “false expectations” (3) according to Green and, when disappointed, lead to “devitalized agency,” says Aslam. Both authors also lay the blame for the sorry state of citizenship on unjust and unequal economic forces that set up what appear to be insurmountable barriers to equal participation and what might be called the fair value of citizenship. Thus both books are keenly aware of social injustice and inequality and both books take issue with contemporary theories of democracy for failing to see the true nature of the malaise experienced by contemporary democratic citizens. Despite these similarities these two books have nothing in common. It borders on the bizarre that two books written in the field of political theory about citizenship and contemporary democratic theory should be in such completely different universes. Between the two of them they list approximately (and conservatively) 650 separate works in their respective bibliographies, yet Green and Aslam share only six references (Connolly, Locke, Rancière, Tocqueville, Weber, Wolin). (Both also cite Foucault, Josiah Ober, and Plutarch, but not the same texts.) Perhaps this is a reflection of the state of the field of democratic theory, both that there is too much to read and that we do not read across or outside our bailiwicks. But the lack of connection is startling and leads me to abandon a comparative analysis for separate sequential discussions of these two books.