

## Conclusion

### CHINA, RUSSIA, AND THE AUTHORITARIAN EMBRACE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Russia and China are exceptional in many regards. Their size, power, and ambition on the world stage alone place them in a different category from most states. Size presents special challenges for rulers; it complicates penetration of populations, renders integration of government activity more difficult, raises problems with enforcement of laws and rules and the protection of borders, and helps to foster regionalism and separatism. All these issues are substantial in both Russia and China. Yet despite being two of the world's largest states, China and Russia are relatively strong states compared to the states run by most authoritarian regimes. Hanson and Sigman (2013) use a large number of variables to capture three dimensions of state capacity (extractive, coercive, and administrative). The global average for all states in the 2000s for 162 countries was .12, while the global average for all non-democracies in the 2000s (6 or less on the Polity scale) was -.41. Russia and China in the 2000s scored .45 and .54, respectively (Hanson and Sigman 2013).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, China and Russia are not merely large and relatively strong states. They are globally powerful states that exert influence far beyond their borders. In 2018 China accounted for 19 percent of the world's GDP—behind only the United States. Russia's economic power pales before that of China (approximately 2 percent of global GDP). But Russian military capabilities are second only to American military power.

Yet, as the authors in this volume have demonstrated, a great deal about authoritarian politics can be learned from these two exceptional and extremely powerful non-democracies. Russian and Chinese regimes face many of the same challenges in maintaining their power and control over increasingly

educated, diverse, and globally connected populations as other non-democratic regimes. However, as these chapters detail, they have managed these challenges through distinct strategies. Russia has a form of electoral authoritarianism, with its rhythms largely revolving around its managed electoral cycles. By contrast, China continues to have a non-competitive authoritarianism, with the Communist Party playing the key role of ensuring integration, control, and implementation of the leadership's directives. Its rhythms tend to revolve around moments of reform and retrenchment, as well as around unpredictable leadership succession crises. The essays in this volume provide us with a clear sense of the differences between these two forms of authoritarian rule. As the authors also show, China and Russia represent different models when it comes to the roles of institutions and personal relations as ways of binding individuals to the state. Whereas the Putin regime relies heavily on patronage and personal ties to manage state-society relations, China's communist regime relies heavily on rules and institutions. As Valerie Bunce, Karrie Koesel, and Jessica Chen Weiss put it (Chapter 1), China's regime "is committed to building rule of law as a key way to create a more predictable and therefore more stable political environment," seeking to "maximize certainty," while the Putin regime "is best described as preferring rule without law," aiming instead to "manipulate uncertainty" to its advantage.

This is a key insight into the nature of modern authoritarianism, and these divergent approaches to authoritarian rule and their limits are well exemplified in many of this volume's chapters. Maria Repnikova (Chapter 5) illustrates the very different ways in which Chinese and Russian regimes manage the media (through the certainty of law and institutions or the manipulation of uncertainty). Diana Fu and Greg Distelhorst (Chapter 3) show how China's participatory institutions continue to function to channel participation even as possibilities for contentious politics have grown more constricted under Xi. Bryn Rosenfeld (Chapter 11) elucidates how the staffing practices of Russia's bureaucracies reinforce the personalist character of the regime even at an early age, as recruitment into the civil service occurs largely on the basis of parental connections and alumni networks. And Manfred Elstrom's study of government responses to labor unrest in China (Chapter 8) reveals that the Chinese government's policies are still shaped in critical ways by its socialist legitimation—particularly its fear that worker unrest in the state sector might fundamentally challenge its rule.

The differences between Chinese and Russian approaches to authoritarian rule are rooted in their divergent histories over the last forty years—and particularly in the great divide of the 1980s. There was a time when the study of Russian politics closely resembled the study of Chinese politics—so much so that scholars of Soviet and Chinese politics spoke in identical analytical languages and referenced the same theories of totalitarianism, modernization, and bureaucratic politics to frame the phenomena that they studied. While Chinese communism and Soviet communism were on divergent paths by the

1960s, for both regimes the 1980s—the Soviet collapse and the disorders of Tiananmen—proved to be the conjuncture that continues to weigh heavily on the trajectory of politics in both states. As Aleksandar Matovski notes (Chapter 9), the Soviet collapse and the disorders that followed constitute the main reference point for Russian citizens in evaluating politics; they have functioned as a key justification for Putin’s personalist and recentralizing rule—though as Bunce, Koesel, and Weiss observe, Russia still retains elements of its experiment with democracy in the 1990s, even if in perverted form. By contrast, the example of Soviet dissolution and the disorders of Tiananmen led to a decades-long effort in China to revitalize one-party rule by creating channels for popular participation, allowing contained forms of contentious politics, and reining in corruption and abuses by local officials—even while cracking down harshly on dissident opposition.

Despite these differences, Bunce, Koesel, and Weiss emphasize the common dilemma that authoritarian rulers face in the trade-off between compliance and information. As they put it, “Getting good information can undercut popular compliance, yet maximizing compliance often means forfeiting good information.” Jeremy Wallace (Chapter 2), for instance, points to the serious problems of subterfuge that the Chinese regime encountered in relying excessively on quantitative measures of performance (the ultimate bureaucratic dream). Xi has instead reverted to less formalized modes of evaluation, but these too contain the potential for abuse through the personalism that they may inject into administrative relationships. In Russia clientelism pervades the administrative apparatus, leading to the mushrooming of venal behaviors and a fundamental unaccountability of officialdom at all levels. Not only has this severely held back efforts at economic modernization, but as Matovski details, it also presented challenges for regime legitimation, playing a key role in instigating the mobilizational waves that emerged from Russia’s middle class during the 2011–2012 electoral cycle. Ultimately, there is no definitive solution to the trade-off between information and compliance in authoritarian regimes. The cycling behaviors to which it gives rise long plagued Chinese and Soviet communism and continue to plague their contemporary heirs.

But while Russia and China represent different forms of authoritarian rule, there is another dimension to the great divide of the 1980s that has rendered Chinese and Russian authoritarianisms increasingly similar to each other: their embrace of globalization (defined here simply as intensified interactions across state borders).<sup>2</sup> Until the 1980s, Russia and China remained largely fenced off from the rest of the world, constituting some of the most isolated countries on the planet. This isolation had strongly negative effects for both Russian and Chinese economic development. Cut off from international technological change and from market pressures for greater quality, productivity, and efficiency, the largely autarkic centrally planned economies of Soviet and Chinese communism were, by the late 1970s, incapable of adapting to late twentieth-century economic and military competition. In 1985, at a time when 19 percent

of the world's GDP consisted of foreign trade, foreign trade (according to the CIA) constituted only 10 percent of Soviet GDP, and half of this was trade with countries in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Hanson 2003, 119–120). According to the World Bank, only 9 percent of China's GDP in 1985 came from foreign trade—having recovered from a low of 3 to 4 percent at the time of the Cultural Revolution. Prior to the 1980s, communist regimes discouraged citizens from all personal contact and personal relationships with the outside world. Indeed, under Stalin marrying a foreigner was considered an act of treason, and even after the annulment of this law under Khrushchev, Soviet citizens who dated or married foreigners were subject to harassment. Analogous constraints existed in China as well. The right to travel abroad was nonexistent in communist countries. A limited number of lucky Soviet citizens could vacation in Warsaw Pact countries, but in general foreign travel was impossible for most. Visits by foreigners to China were severely constricted; indeed, from 1961 to 1978 only 6,400 foreigners worked in all of China (Brady 2003, 3). Moreover, Chinese foreign travel abroad during this period was minimal. Like the Soviet Union, communist China developed a set of specialized organizations for dealing with and controlling foreigners and subjected all interactions with foreigners to high levels of surveillance. Foreign media were banned, and massive efforts were made to block infiltration of uncensored information from the outside world.

Communist polities were extreme in their attempts to control their citizens' interactions with the outside world. But they reflected a certain dimension of authoritarian politics that has been relatively poorly theorized—that is, in general non-democracies have lagged significantly behind democracies in the extent to which their economies and their citizens are connected abroad. Certainly part of this has to do with the lower level of economic development in non-democracies. But even controlling for the effect of GDP per capita on levels of globalization as measured by the KOF Index of Globalization (a composite benchmark created by the Swiss Economic Institute to gauge the economic, social, and political dimensions of globalization along twenty-three variables for 187 countries), non-democracies are significantly less globalized than democracies (Gygli, Haelg, and Strum 2018; Dreher 2008).<sup>3</sup> Thus, in a cross-national time-series regression over the 1970–2014 period that controlled for the effect of GDP per capita and for both fixed country and year effects, non-democracies score 3.5 points lower than democracies on the KOF Index of Globalization across the entire period.<sup>4</sup> But the price of isolation for non-democracies has been high, and as the democratic world globalized, so too have non-democracies. If the average score for non-democracies on the KOF Index of Globalization in 1990 was 34.0, by 2014 it had risen to 50.7. As can be seen in Figure 12.1, the late 1990s was a period of growing disparity between democracies and non-democracies in terms of global integration. However, by the 2000s the gap between democracies and non-democracies

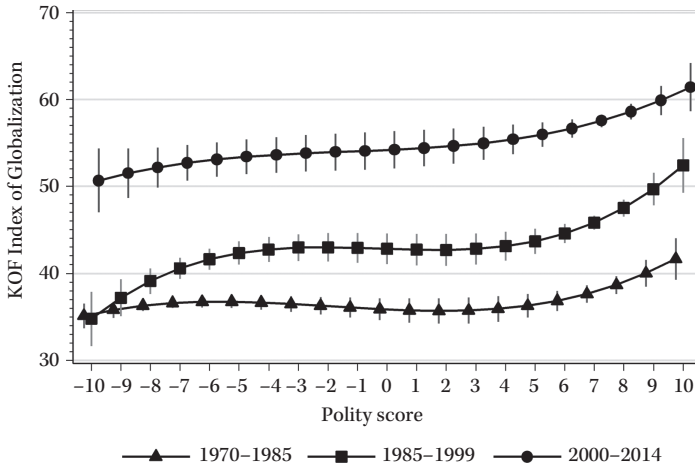


FIGURE 12.1 Globalization and Political Openness, by Time Period

had narrowed considerably—especially among more autocratic regimes like China and Russia.<sup>5</sup> This non-democratic embrace of globalization in the 2000s is an important story that has been largely ignored in conventional studies of authoritarianism—though it is increasingly evident that it can no longer be overlooked.

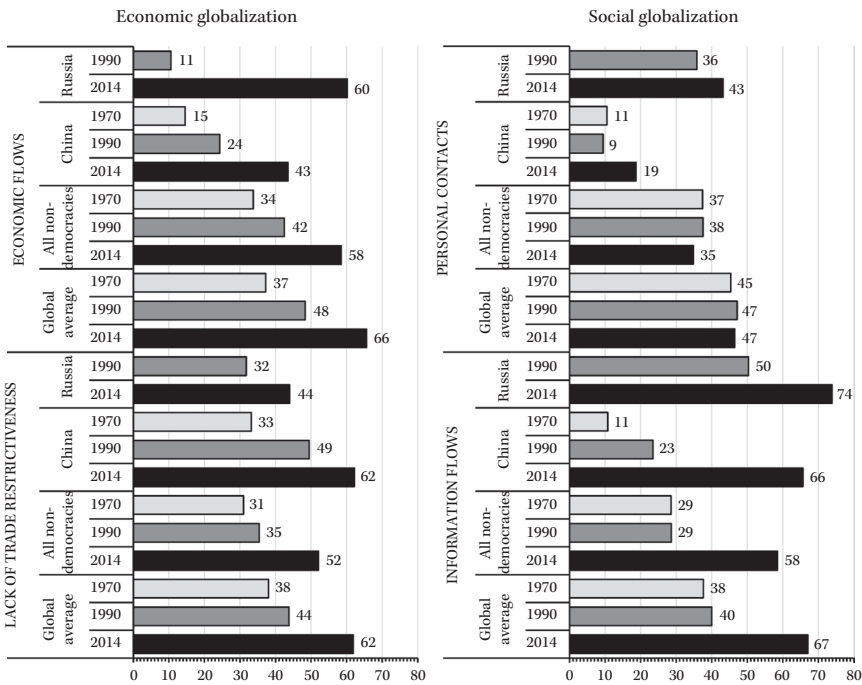
Of course, globalization has long been thought to have a fraught relationship with democracy. Critics argue that it undermines the sovereignty of political communities over key economic processes within their territories, leads to uncontrolled flows of capital across borders, constrains political choice and shifts the costs of business onto public coffers, greatly exacerbates social inequalities, and threatens cultural distinctiveness through massive migrations and the homogenization of values and ways of life.<sup>6</sup>

But what happens when non-democracies globalize? Clearly, globalization involves similar threats of elusive control over economic processes, assaults on cultural distinctiveness, and increased social inequality in non-democracies as in democracies. But for non-democracies globalization has involved additional risks. Isolated citizenries are more easily controlled. They lack opportunities for exit, have difficulty using external states as leverage to enhance voice, and are more easily influenced by propaganda aimed at ensuring their loyalty. This was why communist regimes imposed such extreme restrictions on their citizens in the first place. There are good reasons non-democracies have lagged in terms of globalization compared to democracies, since, in addition to challenging state sovereignty, globalization contains within it processes that potentially reduce the ability of regimes to dominate their citizens. This is why globalization was long thought to have promoted democratization (see, for instance, Eichengreen and Leblang 2007. For a contrary finding, see Milner and Mukherjee 2009). The political challenges of globalization for non-democracies

are precisely those that communist regimes long feared—that exposure to the outside world might infect citizens with foreign ideas, undermining regime control through increased information flows and providing citizens with opportunities to leverage their influence through connections abroad. Indeed, as a result of globalization there is no such thing anymore as a purely domestic political opposition; almost all oppositions take inspiration from foreign examples, are influenced by global events, connect with foreign NGOs or diasporas abroad, or attempt to leverage their influence through engagement with international actors (Tarrow 2005).

Russia and China are on the cutting edge of the non-democratic embrace of globalization and therefore have much to teach us about how globalization has interfaced with authoritarian rule. According to the KOF Index of Globalization, Russia and China are significantly above average compared to all other states in the extent to which they are engaged with the outside world (ranking 48th and 70th, respectively, out of 184 countries) and are among the most globalized of authoritarian states (ranking 9th and 16th among 78 non-democracies). As opposed to democratic regimes, Russia and China have created a statist version of globalization that differs qualitatively from the globalization pursued by democratic states (Harris 2009). In Russia, for instance, economic growth has been fueled by exports under the control of state-owned corporations or corporations owned by oligarchs closely connected with the Putin regime. In China state-owned banks control 60 percent of the country's cross-border investments. Large sovereign wealth funds controlled by governments in both countries cushion the impact of global economic fluctuations. China and Russia have engaged in significant protectionism to preserve the state's commanding position over the economy. State control over foreign investment opportunities has curbed the potential power of large multinational corporations to extract concessions in Russia and China, tipping the balance of power in favor of the state as opposed to business.

Figure 12.2 provides data for Russia and China from the KOF Index of Globalization for four components of the index—economic flows, trade restrictiveness, personal contacts, and information flows—for 1970, 1990, and 2014, with average scores for all states and all non-democracies. While Russia is somewhat more dependent than China on foreign trade and investment relative to its economy as a whole, China is more permissive than Russia in terms of tariffs, taxes, and restrictions on foreign accounts. The growth of economic globalization in both states has left them potentially exposed to influence from abroad in the guise of the large foreign presence on their soil and the leverage that foreign states potentially have through economic ties. One sees this, for instance, in the impact of sanctions on the Russian economy in the wake of Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea. In the 2000s Russia became deeply integrated into global supply chains in its hydrocarbon and metals industries and highly dependent on European and American capital markets. After the



<sup>a</sup>KOF Index of Globalization (Gygli, Haelg, and Sturm 2018, Dreher 2008). Trade flow scores are based on trade as a percent of GDP, foreign direct investment as a percent of GDP, portfolio investment as a percent of GDP, and income payments to foreign nationals as a percent of GDP. Trade restrictiveness scores are based on information on hidden import barriers, mean tariff rates, taxes on international trade as a percent of current revenue, and capital account restrictions. Personal contact scores are based on telephone traffic, transfers as a percent of GDP, international tourism figures, foreign population as a percent of total population, and international letters per capita. Information flows scores are based on internet users per 1000 population, televisions per 1000 population, and trade in newspapers as a percent of GDP. Data for Russia for 1970 are missing.

FIGURE 12.2 Indicators of Economic and Social Globalization, Russia and China (1970, 1990, and 2014)<sup>a</sup>

Russian invasion of Crimea, Western sanctions targeted this vulnerability and, along with a dramatic drop in oil prices, helped to foster a significant contraction of the Russian economy.

In terms of information flows with the outside world, both China and Russia significantly exceed the average for all non-democracies, with Russia in particular well above the global average. Thus, in both countries citizens are potentially exposed to foreign information in ways that were absolutely unthinkable in earlier Russian and Chinese regimes. In the late 2000s many middle-income and upper-middle-income non-democracies like Russia experienced an explosion of internet and cellphone usage that opened up new information spaces that helped to fuel waves of instability. In the Russian case, this rapid growth of social media facilitated the organization of opposition, helping to give rise to the 2011–2012 electoral protests (Lynch 2012; Beissinger 2017). Russia and China differ in the level of personal contacts that citizens

enjoy with the outside world. According to the KOF measures, the average level of personal contacts for all countries has remained relatively stable over the last fifty years (and has even slightly contracted for non-democracies). But for both Russia and China, personal contact by citizens with the outside world increased tremendously during this period. Russia approaches the global average (with a large portion of Russians traveling and working abroad for extended periods of time), while China still lags significantly below the average for non-democracies (despite the large numbers of Chinese students studying abroad and Chinese tourists visiting foreign countries). One assumes that this is in part a function of China's lower level of development and sheer size. But the Chinese state has also attempted to mediate the foreign contacts of its citizens in ways that Russia, at least until recently, has not.

A number of the essays in this volume detail the potential dangers that emerged to Chinese and Russian regimes as a result of this heightened global exposure, as well as the strategies that these regimes have adopted to counter them. Karrie Koesel and Valerie Bunce (Chapter 4), for instance, point to the steps that both Chinese and Russian regimes took to counter the threats posed by the spread of transnational waves of contention—what they call “diffusion-proofing” (i.e., “strategies that seek to discourage their citizens from modeling their behavior on the rebellious precedents set by their counterparts elsewhere”) (Koesel and Bunce 2013, 754). They show how Russia and China deployed similar strategies of “diffusion-proofing” against different transnational waves of contention by framing and manipulating information about these waves, introducing sophisticated constraints on civil society associations and political opposition in order to weaken their ability to mount challenges, and engaging in “active measures” such as creating countermovements in order to marginalize challenges and control the public sphere. In this respect, as globalization has increased threats to instability, Chinese and Russian authoritarianisms have grown increasingly repressive in similar ways through their attempts to contain the fallout.

If communist regimes monopolized means of communication and traditionally engaged in massive efforts to socialize citizens and to censor information in order to control the beliefs of citizens, globalized authoritarian regimes like contemporary Russia and China operate in a fundamentally different information environment in which information from and about the outside world is readily available to their citizens—either through the internet or through legally operating international or domestic media. Nevertheless, both regimes still spend considerable energy trying to control how citizens think and generating support within their societies, though the tools by which they do so have changed. In the wake of the enormous growth of the internet, China's censorship practices have shifted to allow criticism of the state to be expressed, using it as a way of tracking and monitoring dissent—even while blocking content aimed at mobilizing citizens in collective action (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013). Russia's response to the growth of the internet had been looser,



but beginning in 2012, in the wake of waves of internet-organized protests, it introduced a series of laws blacklisting “extremist” content. As Tomila Lankina, Kohei Watanabe, and Yulia Netesova (Chapter 6) demonstrate through the example of media coverage of the 2011–2012 protests in Russia, increasingly sophisticated framing efforts have become an important tool by which the Putin regime has sought to marginalize opponents—especially on widely watched state-run television. As they note, authoritarian rulers have come to recognize that “to keep viewers’ and readers’ attention and to discourage citizens from turning to independent media, the information projected on state television screens or in newspapers has to reflect political reality at least to some extent.” Elizabeth Plantan (Chapter 7) documents how, in the face of the growth of civil society in Russia and China and foreign democracy-promotion efforts in the 2000s, Russia and China enacted strikingly similar legislation aimed at cutting off civil society associations from external sources of support and tightening regulations on the activities of foreign NGOs. Both regimes introduced novel forms of legal regulation of the interface between civil society and the outside world in the face of the potential threat of increased connections. Wallace points to how the Xi regime has shifted away from technocratic rule in favor of more politicized and ideological strategies of control—due in part to the increased threat to political stability emerging from China’s global integration. And as Karrie Koesel shows (Chapter 10), in the face of increased connectivity and personal contacts among citizens with the outside world, both countries have reinvigorated efforts to foster political loyalty among youth through patriotic education. In their socialization efforts both states have come to emphasize nationalism and the defense of traditional values against the threat of liberal ideas and social mores imported from abroad.

Thus, while globalization has posed significant risks to Chinese and Russian authoritarianism, the statist strategies of both regimes have buffered its constraining effects while also leading to new forms of repression, pushing these regimes in surprisingly similar directions. But China and Russia have done more than simply devise innovative strategies for containing the potential impact of globalization on their regimes; they have devised novel methods for exploiting globalization to their advantage, harnessing it to undermine democratic opponents and to extend their influence around the world. Both countries, for instance, have engaged in massive investments abroad through state-controlled corporations in an effort to corner markets and resources. As China’s economy has developed, it has also become one of the world’s foremost purveyors of foreign aid and foreign investment to developing countries, multiplying its economic influence (Copper 2016). Both Chinese and Russian companies hold major investments within the United States and Europe. Chinese firms have significant holdings in American hotel, technology, appliance, food processing, newspaper, and entertainment industries (Gandel 2016). And until sanctions began to bite after Russia’s invasion of Crimea, Russian investors poured billions of dollars into American

real estate, gasoline distribution, steel, and technology companies. By 2018 the Chinese government owned \$1.18 trillion of American debt (7.2 percent of total U.S. debt) (Kenny 2018). In short, China and Russia discovered that globalization is a two-way street; their state-directed versions of globalization have been skillful in reversing the flow of influence emerging from greater connectedness, harnessing the very factors of trade, aid, foreign investment, and information that once seemed to threaten their stability and using them to challenge the sovereignty of advanced democracies.

Perhaps nowhere has this been more evident than in the information sphere, where Russia and China long envied Western “soft power.” After the color revolutions challenged Russian hegemony in the “near-abroad” in the mid-2000s, the Putin regime created a series of instruments aimed not only at undermining democratization efforts within Russia but also at undermining the entire project of liberal democracy on a global scale. Russia was able to penetrate significantly into the information spheres of advanced democracies, establishing a sophisticated international television broadcasting operation aimed at breaking the monopoly of Western news organizations (Rutland and Kazantsev 2016). It has repeatedly engaged in massive trolling and surreptitious social media campaigns in order to sow division within Western publics. And even as it has limited the activities of Western NGOs within Russia, it has created “think tanks” within Western societies aimed at influencing the media and public opinion. China has engaged in strikingly similar efforts (Shambaugh 2015). As Christopher Walker has put it:

Today, authoritarian regimes are projecting power beyond their borders. They are targeting crucial democratic institutions, including elections and the media. They use deep economic and business ties to export corrupt practices and insinuate themselves into the politics of democracies, both new and established. They are influencing international public opinion and investing heavily in their own instruments of “soft power” in order to compete with democracy in the realm of ideas. . . . Through authoritarian learning (for example, by adapting or mimicking democratic forms) and by exploiting the opportunities presented by globalization, authoritarian trendsetters have created a modern antidemocratic toolkit that in many ways serves as the mirror image of democratic soft power. (Walker 2016, 49–51)

Indeed, Putin and Xi have become models for emulation among other non-democracies in a form of authoritarian diffusion that has helped to shore up the reversal of democracy in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (see, for instance, Ambrosio 2010, 2012; Weyland 2017; Bader 2014).

In sum, the essays in this volume provide a rich understanding of the forces that have shaped the evolution of non-democracy over the past four decades. As a result of the great divide of the 1980s, Russian and Chinese authoritarianism assumed divergent form—one an electoral authoritarianism relying

on personalism and clientelism to bind individuals to the regime, the other a single-party dictatorship deploying rules and institutions to ensure coherence. Many of the challenges that Russian and Chinese regimes face are in significant part the product of these different modes by which authoritarian rule is structured, shaping the strengths and vulnerabilities, openings and closings, and constraints and possibilities of each. But the differences emerging out of the choice between electoral authoritarianism and its alternatives are constrained by the commonalities these regimes share in the ways in which they have managed their shared embrace of globalization. Both have established similar statist versions of globalization that seek to contain the impact of external influences and global fluctuations even while integrating into the global economic system. And both have engaged in strikingly similar efforts to regulate their civil societies, cut them off from external sources of support, inoculate their citizens against foreign ideas, and utilize globalization to their advantage in countering and undermining the project of democracy abroad. In the long run, in their congruent handling of globalization and the challenges and opportunities it poses, Chinese and Russian authoritarianism may in fact be converging toward common forms of domination that render the institutional differences between competitive and non-competitive forms of authoritarianism moot.

## Notes

1. The measure roughly ranges between -3 (absent state capacity) and 3 (extremely high state capacity), with an approximate mean of zero. For comparison, the global average for all democracies in the 2000s (greater than 6 on the Polity scale) was .78, while the average score for the United States was 1.98.
2. Anthony Giddens defined globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1991, 64).
3. Non-democracy is defined here at 6 or lower on the Polity scale.
4. The results were statistically significant at the .001 level, with robust standard errors.
5. The results in Figure 12.1 are based on a cross-national time-series regression, controlling for the effects of GDP per capita and for fixed country effects.
6. For a sampling of some of the voluminous literature on the subject, see Hardt and Negri 2001; Stiglitz 2002; Held, Barnett, and Henderson 2005; Rodrik 2011.

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