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Legislators and Parties in Authoritarian Systems*:* Rubber Stamps or Loyal Powerhouses?

Analysis of Policy Influence in the Russian State Duma

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Legislators and Parties in Authoritarian Systems*:* Rubber Stamps or Loyal Powerhouses? *Analysis of Policy Influence in the Russian State Duma*

Although by far the largest number of historically recorded political systems has been authoritarian, comparative political science literature displays a disproportional interest in democratic politics (Haber 2008). Indeed, partly due to the unparalleled personalization of Europe's totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, early literature on authoritarian politics assumed that institutions and organizations in authoritarian systems are merely epiphenomena that lack independent functions beyond reflecting a leader's will (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956; Germino 1959; Friedrich 1970). However, following the footsteps of new institutionalist arguments about the ability of institutions to shape political behavior by adjusting the incentive structure in which political actors are embedded (North 1990; Shepsle 2006), recent literature on authoritarian politics takes formal institutions more seriously (Brancati 2014; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). More specifically, institutions adjust the incentives that actors face in a political environment which is normally characterized by a lack of transparency, a weak rule of law and frequent conspiracy by standardizing collective decision-making procedures and appointments (Svolik 2012). Interestingly, scholars have concluded that institutions such as parties and legislatures enhance the stability and longevity of authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007).

In spite of recent achievements in the study of authoritarianism, however, a number of ambiguities remain unaddressed. For instance, as Schuler and Malesky (2014) suggest, in order for an institutionalized and durable ruling coalition to become an effective and self-sustaining mechanism that reduces incentives among elites to conspire against a leader (Magaloni 2008; Boix and Svolik 2013; Brownlee 2007), institutions must genuinely serve the interests of those who might become potential enemies. Literature on authoritarianism generally views the *raison d'être* of institutions from the perspective of a "dictator's dilemma's" (Wintrobe 1998), but insufficiently emphasizes the incentives and gains of those political actors who are targeted by institutional structures. This paper, therefore, contributes to this literature by addressing the question to what extent legislators have influence on policy-making in authoritarian regimes. It does so by first reviewing scholarly literature on the mechanisms behind the distribution of policy-influence between executives, legislatures and legislators in democracies. Following recent developments in the study of authoritarianism, the institutional structures that shape collective outcomes in democratic

legislatures are introduced as a way to understand authoritarian politics. The expectation that parliamentary party groups enforce an authoritarian leader's ruling coalition by providing mechanisms for collective action to individual legislators is tested empirically with a number of hypotheses, using data from the Russian State Duma. The argument of this paper is that, contrary to conventional and much scholarly wisdom, parliaments and parliamentary party groups in authoritarian systems are important institutions that empower individual legislators in the policy-making process.

Executive-Legislative Relations and Parliamentary Institutions

Although policy-making is among the primary functions of legislatures (Kreppel 2014), comparative literature by no means takes the influence by legislatures and individual legislators on policy for granted. Indeed, scholars conclude that there is significant cross-national variation in the relative strength of legislatures *vis-à-vis* the executive branch (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979, 197-198; Polsby 1975; Blondel 1973; Mezey 1979). Although the bulk this comparative literature focuses on the US Congress and legislatures in other industrialized Western democracies (Kiewiet *et al.* 2002, 3-5), there is an increase in scholarly interest in the extent to which legislatures and individual legislators are autonomous from governments and political parties to shape policy in new democracies (Remington and Smith 1995; Pettai and Madise 2007; Kopecký 2001; Kopecký and Spirova 2008; Fish 2006). Legislatures in non-democratic regimes are, however, generally viewed as powerless when compared to the power of the government (Polsby 1975, 268; Mezey 1979, 47). Scholars on authoritarianism emphasize the over-dominant position that authoritarian executives occupy in relation to 'rubber stamp' parliaments in the policy-making process (Fish 2006; White and Kryshtanovskaya 2011; Remington 2006; Case 2006; Ottaway 2003).

The emphasis that comparative literature puts on the macro-level of executive-legislative relations has many advantages – one being that it places the influence of parliamentary actors in a broader perspective. It diverts attention away, however, from questions about *how* the behavior of *individual* legislators in both democracies and authoritarian regimes is shaped as either subservient to exogenous institutions (including governments and parties) or autonomous to organize collective action (Cox and McCubbins 2007; Krehbiel 1993; Kreppel 2014). In order to fully understand how and why individual legislators vote loyally in favor of government policies or, conversely, how they mobilize majorities among colleagues in favor of their own legislative proposals, it seems reasonable to

suggest that a shift in focus towards the mechanisms behind collective action of legislators is necessary.

David Olson argues that it is of crucial importance to examine not only the *external* structures in which legislatures are embedded, but also the *internal* organization, rules and procedures of legislatures to obtain a full picture of how behavior within parliaments is structured (Olson 1994, 132). Legislators in democracies and authoritarian systems are generally organized in political party groups and parliamentary committees (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979). Theories of new institutionalism have provided numerous arguments about how the collective behavior of individuals is affected by institutions such as committees and parties (Müller 2000; Shepsle 2006; Laver and Shepsle 1990; Aldrich 2011; Rohde 1991; Krehbiel 1993; Cox and McCubbins 2007; Saalfeld and Strøm 2014). For instance, institutions facilitate collective decision making by defining procedures in a way that empowers certain individuals over others (*e.g.* 'veto-players' (Tsebelis 2002) or agenda-setters (Cox and McCubbins 2007)). The transaction costs of decision making are rendered much lower when legislators follow standard procedures that are hierarchically structured, than when each and every decision entails a new bargaining process (North 1990). By embedding legislators in parties and committees that shape the career perspectives of legislators, veto-players and agenda-setters within these institutions speed up the process of decision-making. It is because of this that scholars usually regard political parties as organizations that *reduce* the influence of individual legislators (Müller 2000; Damgaard 1995) .

There is, however, a growing literature which argues that legislators with 'rank-and-file status' in party groups are not as powerless as scholars usually suggest (Bowler *et al.* 1999; Giannetti and Benoit 2009; Kitschelt 2000). John Aldrich argues, for instance, that, in order to remain authoritative and attractive, institutions must not incentivize individuals to detach themselves (Aldrich 2011). Although political parties and parliamentary committees distribute power asymmetrically among individual legislators, Saalfeld and Strøm (2014, 389) hold that institutionally privileged actors need to attract the commitment of MPs by offering support for their political goals (Cox and McCubbins 2007, 115-123). Indeed, submitting oneself to the authority of a political party can only be rational if individual members can reasonably expect that their own political goals can be achieved through the party (Aldrich 2011). There is a large body of empirical scholarship on parliamentary parties as 'long coalitions' in which cabinet ministers and party leaders retain the loyalty from back benchers through policy bargains (Aldrich 2011; Andeweg 1992; Kitschelt 2000). This mechanism

suggests that, in order for 'less powerful' legislators to remain incentivized to be subservient to institutionally powerful actors, the powerful must not ignore the individual goals of these underprivileged (Laver and Shepsle 1999).

Authoritarianism, Institutions and Parliamentary Parties

Conventional wisdom suggests that the weakness of authoritarian legislatures and the subservience of individual legislators to an authoritarian leader is merely due to the dictator's repression. Similarly, in line with the classical literature on legislatures by Polsby (1975), Mezey (1979) and Blondel (1973), early scholars on authoritarian politics have deemed legislatures as powerless rubber stamps that obediently and fearfully follow the leader's will (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956). Imprisonment of opposition leaders, crushing of demonstrations and staffing parliaments with loyal political parties seem to suggest, indeed, that there is no room for pluralism beyond the will of the authoritarian leadership. There is, however, a burgeoning literature on the logic of authoritarian government which suggests that authoritarian leaders cannot simply rely on repression of political elites and the population in order to stay in office (Magaloni 2008; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Brancati 2014). For the purpose of enhancing regime durability and survival in office, scholars consider it rational for a leader to create an incentive structure that renders loyalty and cooperation self-enforcing and durable by investing his supporters with self-interest in the survival of the regime.

The inability of an authoritarian leader to rule alone produces a principal-agent problem – due to its own indispensability, a loyal political elite can use its leverage to become the leader's own most serious competition (Magaloni 2008; Boix and Svolik 2013). In addition, because every supporter is induced to display loyalty, a leader is unable to measure latent dissent among his supporters (Wintrobe 1998). In an untransparent political environment in which conspiracy of powerful allies always looms, it is vital for a leader not to create the incentives for his allies to detach themselves from the leader (Magaloni 2008). Indeed, sustaining subservience through repression *reduces* the incentives for elites to genuinely support the leadership. For this reason, the leadership must not only repress, but set-up an incentive structure that co-opts potential oppositional forces into a 'long winning coalition' by investing them with a stake in the survival of the regime (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003). Scholars suggest that access to spoils and policy-making are mechanisms through which authoritarian leaders generate a self-interest in regime longevity among supporters (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1280). Providing access to spoils and policy-making are

different types of incentives, the former assuming that political actors are mostly office-seeking, whereas the latter suggests that actors have policy-seeking incentives. Although the view that political actors in authoritarian systems are selfishly office-seeking is not uncommon, this must, however, not be assumed *a priori.*

Some have argued that legislative assemblies in authoritarian regimes constitute arenas in which members of a ruler's winning coalition convene to hammer out their preferred policies (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Schuler and Malesky 2014).[1] Indeed, in order for the cooptation mechanism to be a *genuine* power-sharing constellation, Schuler and Malesky (2014) argue that "assembly members must have enough leverage to extract concessions through the institution" (2014, 685). By providing an arena in which a leader's supporters may bargain over policy (a privilege they might lack after leadership succession), the leader establishes an incentive structure for his 'long winning coalition' to remain subservient and sincerely loyal to the regime executive (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Aldrich 2011). Indeed, as much as discipline in party caucuses in democratic legislatures is partly sustained through caucus deliberation, a similar method could be used by authoritarian leaders to breed sincere loyalty.

The resurgent literature on authoritarian politics is increasingly rich with arguments how institutions assist authoritarian leaders to solve the principal-agent problems they face in the absence of transparency (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Brancati 2014). There is, however, a lack of emphasis on the perspective of individual legislators who might use the same institutions for other purposes, namely to cope with the dilemma of voicing their own demands while displaying their subservience (Schuler and Malesky 2014; Wintrobe 1998). The literature on the role that political parties in democratic legislatures play as 'long coalitions' between leadership and back-benchers (Aldrich 2011; Saalfeld and Strøm 2014) provides a starting point for such an analysis. Similar to the role that political party caucuses play in democratic legislatures, party caucuses in authoritarian legislatures are expected to invest legislators with a stake in the leadership's longevity by offering a channel for policy demands (Brownlee 2007). At the same time, by joining a party that is overtly loyal to the regime leadership, legislators guarantee that they go down in the records as loyal supporters. Paradoxically, then, the subservience of legislators is rendered sustainable through their empowerment in parliamentary party groups.

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[1] As policy-making is one of the core functions of legislatures, it seems reasonable to suggest that individual legislators have *policy-making* incentives. Office-seeking political actors seeking (private) spoils are more likely to obtain their resources through executive-administrative institutions.

The theoretical expectation that parliamentary party groups in authoritarian regimes provide mechanisms for policy influence of individual legislators is not to suggest, however, that each individual legislator yields an equal degree of influence. Many contemporary authoritarian regimes have multi-party systems in which different parties are not unlikely to possess a different amount of resources to support the policy goals of their members. Uganda, Angola, Cambodia, Congo-Brazzaville, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, Algeria and Russia, to name just a few, are authoritarian systems with nominally democratic legislatures in which seats are distributed among at least two political party groups. Although the logic of cooptation outlined above suggests that legislatures in authoritarian systems are generally *inclusive* to the demands of legislators, individual political party groups are expected to be *exclusive* when it comes to the distribution of their resources. In order for a party to avoid free-riding behavior among its members, it seems reasonable to expect that support for the policy goals of individual legislators by the party caucus is conditional on the support that an individual legislator displays for his or her party.

Based on the previous arguments, a number of hypotheses are suggested for analysis. First, because parliamentary party groups are expected to disincentivize free-riding among legislators by making support for policy demands conditional on party membership, the first hypothesis is that:

H1: Legislators are more likely to receive support for their policy demands from legislators who belong to the same political party group than from legislators who belong to another group.

Moreover, it follows logically from this expectation that:

H2: Legislators who belong to a parliamentary party group are more likely to receive support for their policy demands from other legislators than legislators who don't belong to a party group.

Importantly, support from other legislators is necessary but not sufficient to have influence on policy. In order for a legislator to have influence, it is also necessary for him or her to mobilize a majority of the legislature in favor of his or her initiatives. An additional hypothesis that would be reasonable to suggest, therefore, holds that legislators who belong to a political party group that controls a parliamentary majority are more likely to mobilize a

majority for policy demands than legislators who belong to party groups that don't control a parliamentary majority. Although at an analytical level certainly distinct from the previous hypotheses, however, parliaments in authoritarian regimes are often (although certainly not always) dominated by one political party that holds an absolute parliamentary majority. In such a case (as is the case in the current Russian case-study), support by one (dominant) party is necessary and sufficient for a parliamentary majority. Testing H1 on the policy demands and voting patterns of the dominant party, therefore, suffices.

Although the previous hypotheses imply that coalitions are 'minimized' (*i.e.* support is offered selectively to fellow party members), the logic of cooptation suggests that legislators must not be permanently excluded from the 'winning coalition'. It can, therefore, be suggested that party groups, to some extent, might support the demands of legislators of other parties – although less than those of their own members – to enforce the cooptation mechanism. The degree to which other parties are associated with the regime leadership might be the condition upon which support from other parties depends. It is not unusual for political parties in multi-party authoritarian systems to occupy different positions *vis-à-vis* the regime leadership – in the case of Eurasian authoritarian systems, for instance, distinctions are often made between 'parties of power', quasi-opposition and semi-opposition (Oversloot and Verheul 2006; Sakwa 2012). Given the individual legislator's concern to go down in the records as a loyal supporter, legislators are more likely to vote in favor of the demands of legislators who belong to more loyal parties than in favor of those who belong to parties that are less loyal to the regime. The third hypothesis is, therefore, that:

> *H3: Legislators are more likely to receive support for their policy demands from other party groups when they belong to a party that is close to the regime leadership than legislators who belong to party groups that are more distant from the leadership.*

Methodology and Case-Selection

The measurement of policy influence among legislators in both democratic and authoritarian regimes is rendered difficult due to the secrecy of caucus deliberations and the sensitivity of political bargains and trade-offs that are made behind closed doors. In spite of this, however, many scholars on democratic politics have attempted to measure parliamentary dynamics, such as party discipline and voting procedures, by analyzing roll-call votes. (Ágh 1999; Rasch 1999; Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999; Carnes and Lupu 2015). Some have used the same measurement in an authoritarian context as well (Ostrow 2000; Chandler 2004). There are a

few weaknesses, however, of using roll-call votes as measurement. First, the sample that one takes from the entire population of legislative proposals by selecting those with open roll-call votes is, indeed, unlikely to be representative of the initiatives that are voted upon in legislatures in another fashion. In the case of the Swiss National Council, however, Lanfranchi and Lüthi note that roll-call votes are often registered for the more salient policy initiatives, whereas less important pieces of legislation are not formally voted upon (Lanfranchi and Lüthi 1999, 106).[2] The result of this selection bias is, therefore, more likely to be an *under*statement, rather than an overstatement, of the (significant) influence of legislators.

Secondly, an *overstatement* of the influence of individual legislators might result from what Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz have coined as *nondecision-making* (Bachrach and Baratz 1970). There is an unknown number of legislative proposals initiated by legislators that are left of the agenda. Thirdly, although the parliamentary records of roll-call votes usually administer who initiates a bill or amendment, one does not observe on whose behalf an initiator acts. As a consequence, inferring the influence of legislators by using 'their' legislative proposals as unit of observation might be problematic. These caveats have negative consequences for the internal validity of the conclusions. The advantage of using roll-call votes is, however, the fact that it carefully administers who initiates a bill or an amendment and, importantly, how the votes of legislators are distributed among different party groups. In order to test whether parliamentary voting-patterns follow partisan lines, roll-call votes are near to ideal. Measuring the influence of individual legislators through support of their party groups by analyzing roll-call votes on legislative proposals is, therefore, used as research technique.

The Russian State Duma is selected as a case of an authoritarian legislature. There are a number of reasons why Russia is an appropriate case for analysis. First, Russia is a typical case of an authoritarian regime that has a strong legacy of nominally democratic institutions. There is a large body of scholarship discussing the effectiveness of Russia's democratic institutions in the 1990s under president Yeltsin (Remington and Smith 1995; Chaisty 2006; Gel'man and Golosov 1999; McFaul 2001; Gel'man 2003). There is, however, little doubt that Russia's regime has changed from a weak democratic regime into an (electoral) authoritarian regime from Putin's second presidential term onwards (Evans 2011; Remington

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[2] Although it is not unreasonable to suggest that the opposite logic might be more applicable for authoritarian politics, the current analysis works under the assumption that politically salient bills are likely to be voted upon openly. Given that legislators are expected to be loyal to the executive on salient issues in exchange for influence, the government is unlikely to face fierce resistance to its policies when votes are open.

2008). As argued before, the formal embeddedness of authoritarian regimes in nominally democratic constitutions is a widespread phenomenon among contemporary authoritarian regimes (Schedler 2006; Levitsky and Way 2010; Brancati 2014).

Secondly, in contrast to a number of authoritarian countries with one-party systems, the Russian State Duma has seen the institutionalization of a *multi*-party system (White 2012; Sakwa 2012; Oversloot and Verheul 2006). In order to test the expectation that the influence of legislators varies across different party caucuses, a multi-party system is necessary. Thirdly, since the Russian government has the right to initiate legislation in the State Duma, the risk of wrongly attributing influence to legislators by mistakenly assuming that their legislative proposals are their own initiatives is reduced. Fourthly, the fact that the State Duma included independent deputies until 2007 (White and Kryshtanovskaya 2011) enables testing the hypothesis that legislators who belong to a party group have a bigger chance to mobilize support from colleagues than independent deputies. Finally, no political party in Russia effectively controls the government (Sakwa 2011)[3], which reduces the understatement of influence yielded by individual legislators that might result from legislators who use party caucuses to set not only the Duma's agenda, but also the *government's* agenda.

Operationalization and Data Collection

As authoritarianism consolidated in Russia during the early 2000s, the executive branch overtook the legislature in the policy-making process by becoming the dominant source of important legislation (Chaisty 2008, 446-450). In order to see, however, to what extent the policy demands of individual legislators are absorbed into the policies that are initiated by the executive branch and whether political party groups play an important role in this process, a large-N sample of amendments to government initiated bills is drawn from the online database of the Russian State Duma.[4] Individual amendments are the main unit of observation in the analysis. The independent variables are dichotomous variables that indicate the party membership (or institutional affiliation) of the sponsor(s) of an amendment. In the case that an amendment is sponsored by more than one legislator, an amendment obtains a 1-score on multiple independent variables if the sponsors belong to different parties. The dependent variables are the percentages of legislators per parliamentary party group that vote in favor of

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[3] The Russian government does include members of the United Russia party. It has, however, been reported extensively (Oversloot and Verheul 2006; Hale 2005; Sakwa 2011) that political parties in Russia (and other Eurasian dictatorships; Isaacs 2013) are too weak to function as the primary channel through which government personnel is recruited. Party membership usually comes *after* recruitment for government (Bader 2011).
[4] Accessible at http://vote.duma.gov.ru/

an amendment. To control for the possibility that a legislator receives support not only from his or her own party, but also from deputies who don't belong to his or her party, the percentage of deputies who do *not* belong to the sponsor(s)' party(s) but who, nevertheless, vote in *favor* of the amendment is included as control variable. In addition to this, the literature on the organization of legislators contains numerous arguments about the importance of parliamentary committees (Krehbiel 1993). The fact that committees in the Russian Duma are traditional focal points of sectoral interests is likely to indicate that committees have legislative strength in their respective policy area (Chaisty 2006). To control for the influence that members of the responsible committee to which a bill is referred might have on the voting results, (non-) correspondence of the sponsors' committee membership with the responsible committee is included as another control variable (Chaisty 2005).

Because of the bounded nature of the dependent variables, the data are analyzed in a number of fractional logit regression models (Ramalho *et al.* 2011). In addition, occasional reference is made to cross-committee variations that were obtained from multilevel linear models. The multilevel linear models are, however, not reported because cross-committee variations turn out to be generally low, whereas coefficients and significance of predictor variables remain similar to the results of the fractional logit models.[5] Data was collected for a grand total of 4364 amendments. The selected amendments stretch across three Duma convocations (4th: 2003-2007, 5th: 2007-2011 and 6th: 2011-2016) and amount up to, respectively, 976 , 1367 and 2021 observations per convocation. The Duma's online database provides details on the results of the votes upon each amendment.[6]

The selection of bills from which amendments were picked did *not* follow a logic of random selection. Amendments are most likely to be politically relevant (rendering 'political support' meaningful) when they are introduced to bills that bear high political salience. For this reason, amendments are selected from a number of politically salient bills. As an indicator of political salience, a bill must be mentioned in the biannual State Duma's Informational-Analytical Bulletin[7] as 'priority bearing and socially significant'.[8] Some of the

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[5] Linear models are inappropriate when response variables are bounded between zero and one because "predicted values from an OLS regression can never be guaranteed to lie in the unit interval" (Papke and Wooldridge 1996, 619-620; Ramalho *et al.* 2011). Because no software is available that can specify a fractional logit model with mixed effects, however, the fractional models do not take variations across different committees in account. For this reason, the fractional logit models have been *re*-specified as multilevel linear models to analyze the data with random intercepts that indicate variations across standing committees.

[6] The standing committee that has been designated by the Duma Council as the responsible committee (*otvetstvenny komitet*) compiles lists that contain all the amendments to a specific bill. Lists with amendments (*tablitsy popravok*) are available online at http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru

[7] Informational-Analytical Bulletin available at http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/1 (available in Russian only).

[8] A list with selected bills is available upon request.

bills from which amendments were selected contained an extremely large number of suggested amendments, whilst others contained only a few. In cases where the number of amendments greatly exceeded 100, a random selection of 100 amendments has been made.[9] To compensate for this underrepresentation, each observation is adjusted by a weight factor, which is calculated by dividing the actual number of amendments per bill by the number of randomly selected amendments. For details on sponsorship of individual amendments, the lists with amendments compiled by the responsible standing committee are consulted.[10]

Data Analysis

After a period characterized by a highly fragmented and weakly institutionalized party system in the 1990s, the pendulum of Russian electoral and parliamentary politics swung back to low fragmentation and domination by *United Russia* (a joint venture between regional elites and post-Yeltsinite Kremlin elites) that became the successful 'party of power' in the 2000s (Gel'man 2008, 914). This process was initiated by the Law on Political Parties (2001), which put restrictions on party registration, and was strengthened through the electoral reforms of 2007 when Russia's mixed member majoritarian system was replaced by a proportional list system (Remington 2008). In addition to the dominant party *United Russia*, which has held an absolute parliamentary majority since 2003, three other parties have managed to become part of the newly consolidated party system. Vladimir Zhirinovsky's *Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia* (LDPR), established as right-wing nationalist client (or 'fake') opposition by the Communist leadership in 1990 to take wind out of the real opposition's sails, is one of the oldest still existing parties in Russia. It is accepted wisdom, however, that the LDPR has never seriously opposed any of Russia's governments. By contrast, the *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (KPRF), the other oldest still existing party, has been a more serious electoral threat to Yeltsin's liberal reforms throughout the 1990s. Although also against Putin's economically liberal reforms in the early 2000s, however, it has become part of Russia's 'systemic' opposition that does not seriously attempt to threaten the president's position (Hutcheson 2013, 918). Finally, *A Just Russia* ('*Spravedlivaja Rossija*') emerged in 2006 as a Kremlin-initiated merger between right-wing nationalist Dmitri Rogozin's *Motherland* ('*Rodina*') and Upper House speaker Sergey Mironov's *Party of Life* ('*Partija Zhizni*') to spoil economically left-wing votes of Communist supporters, while simultaneously balancing *United Russia* in parliament (Gel'man 2008, 922-923; March 2009). After Putin

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[9] A random integer generator was used to determine the set of numbers, under which amendments are listed in the lists compiled by responsible committees, which would be selected for analysis.

[10] See footnote 6.

expressed his unequivocal support for *United Russia* in 2008, however, the party lost its clear identity as Kremlin-party. Some of *Rodina's* MPs refused to merge into *A Just Russia* and established a new party bloc together with a number of single-member district representatives under the Russian acronym RNVS (*Rodina-Narodnaja Volja-Sotsialisticheskaja Edinaja Partija Rossii*). This party bloc disappeared, however, after the following electoral cycle. Given the constraints imposed by Putin's increasingly authoritarian politics, all of the three co-opted opposition parties have to some extent become supportive of the president as a strategy for their own survival (Gel'man 2008, 924).

Former-Duma MP of *A Just Russia* and quasi-opposition figurehead Gennady Gudkov argues about party influence on the government that "if anything can be done at all, it can only be done through personal meetings and agreements between party leaderships and the [president and prime-minister]" (quoted in March 2012, 244), suggesting a complete lack of effective institutionalized channels for policy influence by legislators. This view corresponds to the heavy constraints that have been put on free electoral competition and parliamentary opposition by Vladimir Putin since the early 2000s (Remington 2008; Evans 2011). Indeed, in his analysis of partisan influence on policy, covering the period 1994-2004, Paul Chaisty argues as well that parties are generally weak institutions to affect government policies (Chaisty 2005, 311-313). In addition, Vladimir Gel'man writes that parties, including *United Russia*, have a negligible impact on policy-making (Gel'man 2008, 922; Sakwa 2004). *United Russia* and the systemic opposition are generally believed to be entirely subservient creatures that have no other purpose than supporting Putin's policies through reducing the transaction costs of getting bills through the legislature (Chaisty 2005).

The data collected for the current research, however, seem to suggest the contrary of what is generally assumed to be a necessary consequence of the constraints put on sincere anti-government opposition in authoritarian regimes, namely that legislators would lack influence on the leader's policy. In fact, the data show that legislators are rather actively involved in policy making and that, importantly, political parties seem to be important 'institutional vehicles' which individual legislators use to mobilize support for their demands. Admittedly, an important qualification is that most legislative influence rests with legislators of Russia's most loyal regime-supporting party, *United Russia*. Although not absent, influence is significantly lower among deputies of Russia's three quasi-opposition parties. As a general rule, influence is distributed selectively and often exclusively to members of the *United Russia* party.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on amendments per sponsor affiliation

	Frequency	Average Support by own party	Success rate	Co-sponsored amendments	Co-sponsorship with United Russia
6th convocation					
United Russia	1670 (833)	98,5%	98,9%	23,3%	
KPRF	596 (324)	45%	55,4%	43,2%	12,9%
LDPR	242 (130)	40,4%	82,8%	54,9%	49,1%
A Just Russia	818 (586)	52,0%	33,6%	25,1%	2,4%
Government	321 (108)		100%	2,1%	2,1%
Upper House	449 (193)		96,4%	49,8%	49,8%
Regional Executives/ Federal Courts	269 (145)		96,6%	7,9%	7,9
Total	3704 (2021)		79,5%	15,6%	
5th convocation					
United Russia	1438 (609)	96,4%	97,5%	11,3%	
KPRF	504 (257)	64,6%	41,9%	21,1%	15,5%
LDPR	71 (41)	7,2%	79%	67,7%	67,7%
A Just Russia	465 (299)	39,8%	66,6%	28,7%	22,5%
Government	460 (142)		100%	1,7%	1,7%
Upper House	136 (185)		96,8%	5,9%	5,9%
Regional Executives/ Federal Courts	77 (31)		100%	9,4%	9,4%
Total	2915 (1367)		84,3%	6,6%	
4th convocation					
United Russia	2343 (615)	93,8%	95,1%	16,1%	
KPRF	477 (121)	46,3%	41,8%	37,6%	25,6%
LDPR	161 (45)	6,3%	94,1%	81%	81%
Rodina/A Just Russia	602 (115)	18,4%	52,9%	54,7%	31,8%
RNVS	50 (7)	42,8%	68,8%	62,6%	31,4%
Independents	380 (83)	18,6%	57,4%	42,2%	15,3%
Government	51 (43)		96,1%	19,6%	19,6%
Upper House	443 (118)		94,4%	20,3%	20,3%
Regional Executives/ Federal Courts	453 (75)		97,8%	3,5%	3,5%
Total	4154 (975)		84,5%	12,8%	

Frequencies and percentages are adjusted by weights calculated by the ratio between the total number of amendments per bill and the selected number of amendments (number of observations in the data between brackets). Due to co-sponsorship, the frequencies do not add up to the total frequencies.

Table 1 presents the frequencies by which amendments that legislators introduce to government legislation pass a parliamentary majority. Frequencies in all columns are adjusted by a weight factor defined as the ratio between the total number of amendments per bill and the selected number of amendments. In the sixth Duma convocation (2011-2016), 79,5% of the amendments introduced to government bills pass a parliamentary majority. 98,9 of the amendments that are sponsored by at least one legislator of *United Russia* are voted upon favorably by a majority of deputies. A similar picture appears from the data on the fourth and fifth Duma convocations (2003-2007 and 2007-2011) - respectively, 84,5% and 84,3 of the amendments pass a majority. In addition, 95,1% and 97,5%, respectively, of the amendments sponsored by one or more *United Russia* legislators pass. Given that *United Russia* has held an absolute majority throughout the three convocations under analysis, these results seem

unsurprising and trivial. Note, however, that these results *do* seem to suggest that legislators are in the position to change government policy. In addition, although the percentages of passing amendments sponsored by the Duma's 'opposition' parties in Table 1 are not negligible either, they are often much lower – suggesting that party membership of sponsors is an important division along which parliamentary majorities are built. Interestingly, there seems to be enormous variation across different parties in terms of the support they offer to their own members' amendments – ranging from 98,5% of *United Russia* during the sixth convocation to 6,3% of the LDPR during the fourth convocation. This is a clear indication that legislators can effectively use their party groups to mobilize support for their policy demands in some parties more than in others.

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 are, however, insufficient to draw conclusions about the effect that party membership of sponsors has on the voting patterns in the Duma. For instance, a number of amendments sponsored by legislators of the three opposition parties might pass parliament because they are co-sponsored by legislators from *United Russia*. In order to estimate the effects of party membership of sponsors on the support they receive for their amendments, it is necessary to specify a model in which the independent variables are free to vary independently from each other while simultaneously controlling for each other's effects. For this purpose, a number of multivariate fractional logit regression models has been specified (Table 2). Each model that is reported includes a number of control variables (*i.e.* (co)-sponsorship by non-partisan institutions and support by parties that are not represented by sponsors to an amendment) to avoid a selection bias that might exist when observations contain only amendments introduced by legislators and when voting patterns of non-sponsoring parties is not controlled for. Because the main interest of this research is confined to the effects that political party groups have on the influence of legislators, however, the effects of control variables are not discussed in detail.

The first hypothesis finds moderate support in the data. Table 2 shows that at least a number of political parties vote more often in favor of the amendments sponsored by their own members than those sponsored by legislators of other parties. Concerning the models that are specified to predict voting by *United Russia*, coefficients of party-predictors are mostly significant and often with the expected signs (*i.e.* a positive sign for its own predictor and negative for other party-predictors). To control for the possibility that the *United Russia* vote is not a party-vote but rather part of general cross-party support for *United Russia* legislators, the control variable 'support by other parties' is included in the analysis. Although this is a significant predictor, the effects of the party-predictors are as expected by the first hypothesis.

Table 2. Parliamentary support for amendments

	Support for amendments per party (SE)						Support by other parties
	United Russia	**KPRF**	**LDPR**	**A Just Russia/ Rodina**	**RNVS**	*Independents*	**Support by other parties**
Constant	-6.60** (1.03)	-3.45*** (.27)	-3.23*** (.24)	-.59*** (.16)			-.38*** (.09)
	-3.46*** (.31)	.09 (.29)	-1.73*** (.56)	.31* (.19)			.90*** (.23)
	-2.29*** (.43)	-.20 (.36)	-2.41*** (.81)	-1.84*** (.33)	-1.23** (.22)	-1.62* (.19)	.32** (.13)
United Russia	10.28** (1.20)	1.92*** (.23)	1.62*** (.21)	-1.32*** (.18)			-.61*** (.09)
	6.04*** (.41)	-1.57*** (.27)	-1.52*** (.55)	-1.06*** (.18)			-2.58*** (.22)
	4.83*** (.53)	-2.52*** (.48)	-1.13 (.78)	-.73** (.37)	.38* (.21)	-.58*** (.20)	-2.70*** (.17)
KPRF	-.35 (.35)	1.03*** (.22)	.91*** (.19)	-.25** (.11)			.13 (.09)
	-.98*** (.99)	.48* (.29)	-.93*(.48)	.02 (.16)			-1.62*** (.13)
	-1.69*** (.31)	1.36*** (.21)	-.83 (.69)	.49** (.23)	1.20*** (.20)	-.12 (.13)	-1.02*** (.19)
LDPR	-.06 (.26)	.63** (.26)	.12 (.27)	-.09 (.23)			.60*** (.13)
	.35 (.60)	-.72** (.29)	.84 (.62)	.77*** (.27)			-.62 (.43)
	1.18** (.56)	-.62* (.37)	1.08 (.82)	-.05 (.37)	-.20 (.20)	-.13 (.13)	.06 (.25)
A Just Russia/ Rodina	-1.63*** (.27)	1.65*** (.26)	1.48*** (.22)	.89*** (.14)			-.36*** (.10)
	-.49* (.27)	-1.03*** (.26)	-1.17*** (.42)	.57*** (.14)			-.73*** (.23)
	-1.88*** (.43)	-.09 (.41)	-1.34 (.90)	.42 (.27)	.24 (.20)	.42*** (.14)	-.52** (.20)
RNVS	3.27*** (.89)	-1.22*** (.38)	.76 (.64)	-.05 (1.01)	-.14 (.62)	-.68* (.41)	-.01 (.31)
Independents	-.45* (.27)	.23 (.23)	.06 (.68)	-.22 (.26)	-.21 (.19)	.41*** (.11)	-.53*** (.18)
Government	.66* (.38)	.21 (.27)	.68** (.27)	-2.64*** (.16)			.84*** (.10)
	1.50*** (.36)	-7.02*** (.64)	1.06*** (.37)	-.62*** (.20)			.02 (.23)
	.27 (.74)	.31 (.38)	-1.83*** (.59)	-1.99*** (.34)	-1.24** (.29)	.28* (.14)	.44*** (.15)
Upper House	-.02 (.41)	.39** (.17)	.64*** (.16)	-1.15*** (.23)			.95*** (.10)
	.88** (.36)	-2.24*** (.31)	-2.03** (.93)	.08 (.25)			.03 (.23)
	.06 (.37)	-.62* (.37)	-.73 (.54)	-.10 (.22)	-.44*** (.16)	.04 (.11)	.40*** (.12)
Regional Executives/ Federal Courts	1.33** (.60)	-1.70*** (.28)	-0.00 (.21)	-.62** (.26)			.58*** (.10)
	2.34*** (.33)	-18.14** (.31)	-15.39** (.39)	-15.86** (.23)			-.14 (.23)
	.14 (.40)	-.45 (.65)	-.79 (.76)	-.83 (.69)	-.13 (.24)	-.23 (.28)	.46*** (.15)
Committee bill	-1.48*** (.35)	-.44*** (.15)	-.28* (.15)	.73*** (.23)			-.18 (.13)
	.54** (.24)	.62*** (.15)	-.58 (.43)	-1.46*** (.21)			.25** (.11)
	-.09 (.49)	.22 (.40)	-1.01*** (.36)	.95*** (.21)	.62*** (.15)	-.05 (.14)	.22 (.15)
Support by other parties	17.38** (2.23)	3.58*** (.21)	2.97** (.21)	-.41* (.24)			
	8.76*** (.62)	1.81*** (.28)	-1.28*** (.48)	-2.25*** (.23)			
	8.67*** (1.03)		-.65 (.83)	-.11 (.53)	1.43*** (.33)	-.85*** (.34)	
Pseudo-R²	.95	.26	.07	.26			.24
	.93	.34	.06	.26			.47
	.75	.32	.05	.08	.13	.03	.58
N	2021	2021	2021	2021			2021
	1367	1367	1367	1367			1367
	975	975	975	975	866	975	975

Fractional logit regression models (Ramalho et al. 2011). Each column reports three models (one per Duma convocation). For each predictor, the upper row displays results from models predicting the dependent variable in the sixth Duma convocation (2011-2016). Rows in the middle represent results from the fifth convocation (2007-2011). The lower rows contain results about the fourth convocation (2003-2007). Sig.: ***= p <.001, ** = p <.01, *= p <.05

The first differences of the predicted probabilities (Table 3), calculated with the coefficients from the fractional logit models, show as well that *United Russia*'s support for amendments is by far stronger when its own members sponsor an amendment than when the amendment is not sponsored by *United Russia* legislators. This conclusion holds for all three Duma convocations under analysis. Interestingly, there is little variation across different policy areas, as indicated by low cross-committee variance in (unreported) multilevel models.

The first hypothesis holds less strongly when analyzing the Duma's 'opposition' parties. Concerning the KPRF, the data clearly show that the Communist Party has become less opposed to the 'party of power' over the most recent years.[11] The models that predict voting by the KPRF show an interesting shift in the most recent Duma convocation from very negative towards *United Russia* to very positive. Regarding support for legislators from other parties, however, the KPRF is much more supportive of its own legislators than of those from other parties. Consequentially, then, the first hypothesis finds support from the KPRF-models mostly in the data on the fourth and fifth Duma convocations. Control has been taken for the support that other parties offer to KPRF-legislators and the variation that might exist across standing committees. Although voting patterns of other parties correlate with KPRF-voting and small differences exist across policy areas in the fourth Duma convocation, the effects of party-predictors are significant and more often than not as expected. The predicted probabilities in Table 3 suggest that support by the KPRF for its own legislators has always been strong and significant, albeit that support for legislators from *United Russia* and *A Just Russia* in the sixth Duma convocation is strong and significant too.

Conclusions concerning the first hypothesis are somewhat mixed as well in the case of Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democrats. The LDPR significantly opposed amendments by other parties throughout the fourth and the fifth Duma convocations (albeit more significantly in the fifth than during the fourth), whereas more recently the party has become to support MPs from other parties much stronger and more significant than its own MPs. Support for the party's own legislators has always been positive but weak and/or insignificant (Table 3). It's not impossible, however, that the lack of effect is partly due to the low frequency by which MPs from the LDPR introduce amendments. Given the negative effects of support by other parties, however, it's is unlikely that the weak effects are caused by a strong overlap between voting by the LDPR and other parties. In addition, low cross-committee variance in unreported multilevel models show there is few variation across policy area. Lack of support

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[11] For an in-depth analysis of the Duma's opposition in recent years, see March 2012.

Table 3. Effect size of fractional regression coefficients

	Support for amendments per party (First differences in percentage points)						Support by other parties
	United Russia	**KPRF**	**LDPR**	**A Just Russia/ Rodina**	**RNVS**	*Independents*	
United Russia	75.9% (**)	83.8% (***)	82.2% (***)	-32.0% (***)	-	-	-39.2% (***)
	45.4% (***)	-36.3% (***)	-3.8% (***)	-23.2% (***)	-	-	-61.6% (***)
	58.1% (***)	-29.3% (***)	-3.8%	-14.8% (**)	65.9% (*)	-14.2% (***)	-55.8% (***)
KPRF	-14.3%	71.4% (***)	69.9% (***)	-14.0% (**)	-	-	14.6%
	-92.0% (***)	64.4% (*)	-2.3% (*)	2.1%	-	-	-40.8% (***)
	-94.9% (***)	93.4% (***)	-2.1%	90.2% (**)	64.2% (***)	-8.7%	-20.7% (***)
LDPR	-1.4%	60.1% (**)	13.1%	-6.5%	-	-	54.1% (***)
	-4.8%	-22.2% (**)	79.7%	80.7% (***)	-	-	-33.2%
	6.5% (**)	-7.9% (*)	98.1%	-5.4%	-36.7%	-8.8%	19.5%
A Just Russia/ Rodina	-95.6% (***)	79.0% (***)	78.4% (***)	75.7% (***)	-	-	-28.8% (***)
	-50.1% (*)	-26.1% (***)	-2.5% (***)	72.3% (***)	-	-	-36.9% (***)
	-94.9% (***)	-5.8%	-2.2%	89.2%	58.1%	88.9% (***)	-19.7% (**)
RNVS	6.3% (***)	-7.8% (***)	98.1%	-4.8%	-32.4%	-10.3% (*)	-2.1%
Independents	-92.8% (*)	67.8%	3.1%	-9.7%	-37.4%	88.6% (***)	-19.4% (***)
Government	4.3% (*)	23.4%	62.1% (**)	-24.0% (***)	-	-	60.4% (***)
	6.2% (***)	-37.0% (***)	92.7% (***)	-16.4% (***)	-	-	2.3%
	6.1%	83.4%	-2.1% (***)	-10.7% (***)	-40.6% (**)	79.6% (*)	81.2% (***)
Upper House	-0.3%	43.2% (**)	60.7% (***)	-23.3% (***)	-	-	62.7% (***)
	5.8% (**)	-26.1% (***)	-2.4% (**)	8.2%	-	-	4.6%
	3.6%	-8.3% (*)	-2.1%	-7.8%	-40.5% (***)	7.5%	81.2% (***)
Regional Executive/ Federal Courts	4.8% (**)	-32.4% (***)	-0.3%	-20.7% (**)	-	-	53.3% (***)
	5.6% (***)	-29.9% (**)	-2.8% (**)	-21.4% (**)	-	-	-16.8%
	5.5%	-8.0%	-2.0%	-10.5%	-31.6%	-10.1%	81.5% (***)
Committee bill	-93.9% (***)	-25.5% (***)	-19.5% (*)	68.6% (***)	-	-	-17.1%
	5.8% (**)	73.4% (***)	-2.2%	-21.1% (***)	-	-	37.7% (***)
	-15.6%	65.0%	-2.3% (***)	91.7% (***)	63.8% (***)	-5.2%	69.4%
Support by other parties	94.7% (**)	89.0% (***)	-87.0% (**)	-19.5% (*)	-	-	-
	65.2% (***)	87.9% (***)	-3.3% (***)	-31.8% (***)	-	-	-
	40.8% (***)	-15.5% (***)	-2.2%	-8.2%	69.5% (***)	-12.6% (***)	-

For fractional regression models, first differences in predicted probabilities indicate the percentage points by which the response variables change when the independent variable of interest is changed from its minimum to its maximum value, while other variables are held constant. Significance signs are repeated from Table 2 and shown between brackets. Sig.: ***= p <.001, ** = p <.01, *= p <.0.5

for the first hypothesis in the models that predict voting by the LDPR, therefore, indicates that it is not a party through which members successfully mobilize support among party members.

The first hypothesis finds relatively strong support in the models that predict voting by *A Just Russia*. Surprisingly for a party that has its origins as a Kremlin-party, *A Just Russia* has always been a significant opponent of *United Russia* – change over time in first differences of predicted probabilities (Table 3) shows that opposition to *United Russia* by *A Just Russia* has even increased. The party seems to be, moreover, ambiguous towards the KPRF and the LDPR, but unequivocally supportive of the amendments introduced by its own legislators since 2007. The effects are somewhat mixed, however, across different policy

areas. The fact that the first differences in predicted probabilities are generally highest for amendments that were introduced by the party's own members shows that *A Just Russia* is a significant and strong supporter of its own members, more than of legislators from other parties. Concerning the bloc that emerged when a number of *Rodina*-MPs did not merge into *A Just Russia,* the RNVS-bloc predictor generates inconsistent results, which might, however, be caused by the very low number of amendments its members have introduced (Table 1).

Regarding and in accordance with the second hypothesis, independent legislators in the fourth Duma convocation receive no (significant) support from other legislators. Moreover, the predictor variables measuring the effect of independent deputies on *United Russia* and *A Just Russia* display a significantly negative effect. Slightly more than half of the amendments sponsored by independent deputies pass a parliamentary majority (Table 1), but the voting patterns are too weak to conclude that parties have generally supported the amendments of their independent colleagues. The adoption of legislation sponsored by independents might, to some extent, have been caused by co-sponsorship with legislators from parliamentary parties. The fact that independents are less able to mobilize collective action among other legislators than partisan legislators shows that party membership is an important institutional asset for legislators in the Duma to mobilize collective action.

Finally, the current analysis finds no support for the third hypothesis, according to which parties are more likely to support the amendments of legislators who come from other parties that are closely related to the executive than those who come from parties that are less loyalist. When the variable that measures support by parties other than the parties to which sponsors belong is regressed on the party-predictors, coefficients are consistently negative and/or insignificant. This indicates that cross-party support is generally weak in the Duma. In combination with the discussion of the first and second hypothesis, the lack of cross-party support shows that parliamentary parties are institutions of the utmost importance in the Duma. Given *United Russia*'s absolute majority over the course of the three Duma convocations under analysis, this indicates that legislators from parties other than *United Russia* have significantly less influence on policies by the government than *United Russia*-members because of *United Russia*'s significant and strong support for the amendments of its own legislators and opposition to those of MPs from other parties.

Conclusion

Legislatures in authoritarian regimes are traditionally believed to be little more than subservient rubber stamps of government policies that, importantly, do not constitute an

institutionalized channel through which influence on government policies can be exerted. Over the last decade, however, literature on authoritarian politics has experienced significant growth through cross-fertilization with arguments from general neo-institutionalist literature. As a result, institutions in authoritarian systems are no longer considered meaningless structures without their own independent functional logic. The bulk of this literature, however, retains an exclusive focus on the *leader's* perspective in which institutions (including parliaments and parties) serve the purpose of regime longevity. The generally undiscussed assumption that underlies this logic is that these institutions provide second-order elites with significant gains they would lack in the absence of these very institutions. This paper has adopted a novel approach and shows that individual legislators in authoritarian regimes can have influence on government policy through party groups in legislatures.

Based on the neo-institutionalist argument that political parties invest individual politicians with an incentive to remain loyal and obedient in exchange for influence on policy (Aldrich 2011; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007), this paper shows that subservience indeed does not necessarily entail an absence of influence. The discussion of the data on legislative behavior of Russian MPs shows that legislators are often in the position to adjust government policy by securing support from their own party colleagues. This conclusion holds especially for the main party of interest in Russia, *United Russia*, which has controlled an absolute majority in the Duma for more than a decade. In substantive terms this implies that influence is mostly confined to an exclusive group of legislators who, given the exclusive and selective distribution of influence, have reasons to remain party loyalists if their desire is to retain their privileged position.

The results of this research clearly show that a complete understanding of authoritarian politics must be based on an analysis of policy-making that is more nuanced than the traditional view of personalist dictatorships. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this paper shows that a large number of privileged individual legislators in Russia are co-opted into an authoritarian leader's 'long winning coalition' through empowerment in their parliamentary party. In spite of these conclusions, however, a number of caveats still need to be addressed. First, although the hypotheses of this research are supported by the data, conclusions are insufficiently robust to close the discussion. Results seem to vary across different parties and periods, which indicates that there is a need for further explanation. Analyzing the causal effects of ideology, intra-party institutions and/or the divergence of policy preferences among party members on the ability of party groups to provide collective action in favor of their individual members is suggested as a path for further research. Secondly, the general

assumption behind the analysis has been that preferences of legislators exist independently from the context in which they are embedded. Legislators of 'opposition' parties run few risks of showing disloyalty by voting against proposals by the government or *United Russia* because the latter's decisions are both necessary and sufficient. The current analysis is unable to predict what might happen when the 'opposition' parties obtain a veto-position in future Duma convocations. More generally, however, this paper unequivocally shows that parliamentary institutions in authoritarian regimes are much more important than what is usually assumed and that further research into the organizational and ideological characteristics of parliamentary parties is necessary to empirically discern the causal mechanisms behind empowerment of legislators in authoritarian regimes.

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