

Political survival in autocracies in the AI era: a political economy inquiry

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The role that artificial intelligence (AI) may play on the stability of democracies and autocracies or in fostering regime transitions has attracted significant attention in recent years. Empirical evidence shows that public expenditures on AI are on the rise in autocracies and a correlation between the deployment of AI and a decrease in social unrest has been documented. On the theoretical side, some studies have been conducted on the impact of technology in social control, offering scattered insights into the potential influence of artificial intelligence on the longevity of autocratic regimes. Nevertheless, a comprehensive theoretical framework that effectively integrates the aforementioned empirical findings is still lacking. Additionally, most of the literature on the political economy of autocracies leans heavily on equilibrium theorizing which precludes the consideration of the actual knowledge problem the dictator, its support coalition, and the opposing factions face. This paper draws on Abdukadirov's political calculation framework, on Acchiardo's study of the knowledge problem of dictators, and Tullock's reflections on the collective action challenges of social unrest and revolutions to erect a theoretical framework to study the mechanism through which the deployment of AI might hinder democratic transitions or incumbent overthrows, thus elucidating the dynamics of autocracy stability in the AI era.