China, Autocratic Patron? An Empirical Investigation of China as a Factor in Autocratic Survival*

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Critics frequently accuse China of acting as a patron for autocratic states. But does Chinese engagement actually increase the stability of authoritarian clients? This article demonstrates that Chinese bilateral interactions have little effect on the longevity of autocratic regimes. Analyses of different forms of Chinese bilateral engagement between 1993 and 2008—including state visits, arms trading, aid projects, economic cooperation, and trade dependence—show that only export dependence on China may increase the likelihood of survival for autocratic regimes while doing little to stabilize their democratic counterparts.

China's rise as an increasingly important international actor marks one of the key developments of contemporary world politics. This rise involves the rapid growth of Chinese trade with, aid to, and investment in the developing world. In the 1990s, China shifted its role as a net recipient to that of a net donor of foreign aid and investment. Although it once exported petroleum, it now receives significant imports to meet its energy and industrial needs.

Numerous commentators criticize these transactions. Moises Naim (2007), for example, lambasts China as a "rogue donor" for its provision of unconditional aid, which he argues undermines Western attempts to promote good governance and democracy. Critics also point to Beijing's major reliance on autocracies as a vital source of energy and its "oil diplomacy" that disregards transparency and human rights (Taylor 2006; see also Halper 2010). Furthermore, some observers interpret China's cultivation of autocrats as a direct challenge to the liberal order (Kurlantzick 2007:218; Halper 2010). The promotion of China's alternative authoritarian development model, they argue, contributes to "a world that is more corrupt, chaotic, and authoritarian" (Naim 2007:95). Others see the emergence of strategic opposition against global liberalism. They claim that Russia and China now form the core of an authoritarian effort to extinguish or dampen democratization around the world (Kagan 2006; Silitsky 2010) or that these two powers have started to construct a "World Without the West" that coexists with and circumvents the American-led order (Barma, Chiozza, Ratner and Weber 2009:538).

Although some autocratic governments admire the success of the Chinese model (Kurlantzick and Link 2009:14), this does not imply that China's growing patronage of developing states accounts for stagnating democratization and the persistence of authoritarianism. Other players—notably the United States, Russia, and the European Union—also enjoy ambiguous relations with many authoritarian regimes. Indeed, commentators note that Western corporations and banks frequently do business with authoritarian regimes and other states with questionable human-rights records (Brautigam 2009:Chapter 11). The United States, for example, seems no less inclined to sell arms to authoritarian states than does China (De Soysa and Midford 2012). Such patterns raise serious questions about whether Chinese engagement in the developing world undermines liberal order.

Thus for all the attention given to China's rise, we know surprisingly little about its effects on other autocracies. This article attempts to understand those effects by investigating the nexus between China's bilateral relations and autocratic survival. It argues that autocratic major powers have a theoretical interest in supporting authoritarianism elsewhere to prevent democratic dominos. At the same time, China's pragmatic foreign policy is beneficial to autocratic leaders who have more discretion to reinvest outside support to bolster their power position than more constrained democratic leaders. However, my analyses suggest that China impacts autocratic survival much more weakly than critics of Beijing claim. For most of the bilateral interactions between China and other autocracies, I find no statistically significant effects. Chinese arms sales, aid projects, economic cooperation projects, and high-level diplomacy have no discernible impact on autocratic longevity. Only trade exports from autocracies to China appear to enhance the political survival of autocratic leaders.

To develop these claims, this article first reviews the literature on the external determinants of autocratic stability and the debate on China's rise. Then, it makes a theoretical argument on autocratic major power behavior

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in international relations, which is subsequently illustrated with evidence from China's foreign policy. Then, this article quantitatively investigates the impact of those aspects of China's foreign relations that critics suggest are most supportive to autocratic survival elsewhere. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the findings and an outlook on future research.

Autocratic Survival and Chinese Foreign Policy

We still know relatively little about how authoritarian regimes make use of their external relations to enhance regime stability. First, traditional research on authoritarianism focuses on domestic features of authoritarianism (for example, Tullock 1987; Wintrobe 1990; Geddes 1999; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Magaloni 2008). Second, discussions about the external determinants of regime type display a long-standing bias toward democracy. They seek to understand how *democracies* might support *democratization* in other countries. For example, Levitsky and Way's (2006) influential "linkage and leverage" model focuses on the degree that authoritarian states find themselves dependent upon (and exposed to the influence of) democratic states. Only once the democratization process began to stagnate in the 2000s did scholars start to question the uniform impact of Western engagement on regime type. They began to explicitly investigate the impact of external influences, such as aid, sanctions, or military intervention, on autocratic stability. In addition to paying more attention to different types of autocracies, they generally shifted perspective from the external actor to the targeted autocracy (for example, Kono and Montinola 2009; Wright 2009; Escribà-Folch and Wright 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010). In general, this literature suggests that autocrats use external rents and external linkages for their own purpose of political survival.

The re-emergence of authoritarian powers such as China and Russia prompted a debate over whether autocratic major powers pursue "autocracy promotion" (Ambrosio 2009; Bader, Grävingholt and Kästner 2010; Burnell 2010). Several scholars observe that authoritarian leaders try to "diffusion-proof" their own regimes against democratization pressures (for example, Koesel and Bunce 2013). Doing so may involve supporting other autocratic regimes in a strategy Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott (1990:12) characterize as "black-knight support." But this debate has so far occupied itself with conceptualizing and tracing the mechanisms of such support. We still lack evidence about its effectiveness.

No consensus exists on the nature of China's behavior. Vanderhill (2013) finds that Russia, Iran, and Venezuela actively promote autocracy in other states. But China's status as a "black knight" remains ambiguous. It is unclear whether Chinese activities amount to a deliberate policy of insulating authoritarian regimes from pressures to democratize. Thus, scholars find China a difficult case to investigate in the context of autocracy promotion. At the same time, they have not systematically engaged with the literature on China's soft power and on its activities in Africa. This literature suggests that China does, indeed, contribute to autocratic stability (Taylor 2006:953; Halper 2010:Chapter 3; Corkin 2011:178).

This ambiguity raises two related questions. First, why might China support other authoritarian regimes? Second, why might Chinese foreign policy contribute to the survival of authoritarian regimes *irrespective* of whether Beijing actively seeks to promote authoritarianism abroad?

First, Beijing has good reasons to work against a liberal order that facilitates challenges to authoritarian governments. China opposes both specific instances of liberal intervention and efforts to create international norms that favor intervention in the affairs of authoritarian states. Shielding existing authoritarian states undermines the creation of liberal-interventionist norms. It also ensures the persistence of a block of other states opposed to such norms (Kagan 2006). Even in the absence of foreign intervention, the successful overthrow of an autocratic regime may embolden pro-democracy movements in other authoritarian countries (Ambrosio 2009:23). Indeed, both in terms of domestic legitimacy and the balance of power in international society, each successful democratic transition may undermine the legitimacy of remaining authoritarian regimes.

This is not to say that autocratic powers necessarily engage in the promotion of authoritarianism. As Bader et al. (2010) argue, an autocratic state's interest in political stability might prove more important than a preference for specific kinds of domestic regimes. Thus, Beijing might prove particularly concerned with avoiding political unrest in neighboring countries irrespective of their regime type. Moreover, states frequently place political, economic, and military interests above other concerns. Beijing's support for authoritarian regimes may simply reflect such a pragmatic focus on realizing foreign-policy objectives.

Such pragmatism might still produce a Chinese tilt toward authoritarian regimes. Some scholars argue that foreign powers have an easier time purchasing the compliance of autocratic regimes than democratic ones, as authoritarian leaders face less accountability to their citizens and enjoy more discretion when it comes to implementing a patron's preferred policies (see Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007:281; Bader et al. 2010:85). Moreover, patrons have incentives to support compliant regimes, especially if a change in government jeopardizes existing bargains. Ratner (2009) demonstrates that newly democratic states often realign their foreign policies, as both the new regime and its opponents face strong pressures to distance themselves from great-power patrons of the old authoritarian regime (see also Cooley 2005:80). Thus, great powers may not only prefer to deal with authoritarian regimes, but may also work to prevent democratic transitions in their clients.

Indeed, existing literature on regime survival shows that external actors can influence the power balance between groups competing over power by selectively engaging some of them (Smith 2009). Groups with outside patrons can exploit the benefits of external interaction to reinforce their domestic support. However, the extent to which such discrimination improves the relative power of one group over another depends on a country's existing political institutions. Democratic institutions typically constrain incumbent leaders. They enforce transparency on how leaders use (state) resources and often limit leaders' terms in office. The less restrictive existing institutions are, the more discretion a leader has to reinvest support from outside actors in his domestic patronage networks.

Aspects of China's behavior support the preceding wagers. The Chinese leadership clearly feels vulnerable to the spillover of anti-government protests, the diffusion of democratic demands, and liberal interventionism. For example, the Chinese government reacted to the Color

Revolutions in neighboring former Soviet Union countries by increasing restrictions on domestically operating NGOs (Wilson 2009:373; Chen 2010:6). They also further institutionalized the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—which eventually shifted its mandate so as to delegitimize any anti-regime activities in its member states (Ambrosio 2009:Chapter 8). Moreover, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Chinese authorities preventively arrested human rights activists and lawyers as part of an effort to avoid a "Jasmin Revolution" (BBC News 2011a). This suggests that, in a globalized world, Beijing sees the threat of democratic diffusion as extending beyond close neighbors. Moreover, Beijing has repeatedly blocked or softened United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions targeted at other autocrats (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008; International Crisis Group 2009a:5). In recent years, the Chinese government has begun to actively defend authoritarian regimes under pressure. For example, it received President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Karminov of Uzbekistan during periods when these leaders faced severe international criticism for human-rights violations (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008:42).

However, the Chinese government's official position on such matters centers on the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states (Wen 2004).[1] As a result, many observers describe China's foreign relations as pragmatically oriented toward engaging those governments that respond to Chinese interests—regardless of the character of their regimes. Indeed, Beijing usually conditions its loans and development assistance on the acceptance of the one-China policy (Brautigam 2009:150). This reflects a pattern of conditioning engagement on matters of direct relevance to Chinese domestic interests and legitimacy. For example, the Chinese government has used its economic leverage to exert political influence on its trading partners by punishing governments courting the Dalai Lama with a reduction in Chinese imports (Fuchs and Klann 2013).

China's foreign relations also offer some evidence that preservation of authoritarian regimes serves instrumental, rather than ideological, goals. Beijing's status quo-oriented policy toward North Korea and—until recently—Myanmar, for instance, seems better explained by straightforward security considerations—including avoiding American encirclement—than any specific devotion to authoritarianism in other states (International Crisis Group 2009a:34, b:8). At the same time, authoritarianism has greatly furthered the realization of China's economic and geostrategic foreign policy objectives (Bader 2013) and motivated China's interests in its prolongation. Tellingly, Chinese analysts have described China as having a "monopoly" over Myanmar's economic resources and external relations (Sun 2012a:88).

Interestingly, because China is a proponent of sovereignty and noninterference, some autocratic leaders strived for China's protection against Western interventionism by seeking Chinese investments. Chinese analysts, for example, acknowledge that the Iranian government deliberately tries to "bind" Chinese companies to Iran—partly with the aim of making China more inclined to block UN sanctions against Iran (International Crisis Group 2010:7). At the same time, Chinese strategy has incrementally shifted toward "influence without interference" in order to prevent political instability from putting the profitability of Chinese investments at risk (Large 2009:618). While formally upholding noninterference, China has become more willing to negotiate and mediate between competing elites.[2]

Even though this rhetoric suggests otherwise, noninterference amounts to a form of selective engagement. In practice, it channels all external resources to those who manage to monopolize power. Therefore, if the effect of outside influence on a country's domestic politics is indeed moderated by a country's domestic institutions, noninterference constitutes a truly neutral policy only when contenders have equal access to political power. Otherwise, it reinforces existing imbalances. For example, even though the Chinese guidelines for arms transfers stipulate that they should not interfere in the domestic affairs of the recipient (Taylor 2007:1, in De Soysa and Midford 2012:845), one should expect them to be supportive to the incumbent when the latter relies on repression to underline claims to power—as was the case in Myanmar, Sudan, or Zimbabwe (BBC News 2011b). Similarly, the provision of development projects should be beneficial for incumbents when they enjoy a decision-making monopoly and can choose projects strategically. For example, China's oil-backed loans to Angola in exchange for Chinese infrastructure were "essential from the perspective of political survival and proved successful, given the [...] landslide victory in the legislative elections of 2008" (Corkin 2011:178).

In sum, one should expect that an ever richer and politically powerful China positively affects the stability of other autocratic governments. The Chinese government's desire to uphold the principle of noninterference, as well as its external economic interests, drives this effect. Because China's noninterference policy selectively engages incumbent governments, its impact should be moderated by their regime type.

Hypothesis: *Closer links between China and an existing authoritarian government should produce a higher stabilizing effect on this government. No such effect should be observable for democratic governments.*

Data

There are several reasons to assume that if China impacts other autocracies, one can observe this impact at the level of individual leaders in these countries. First, leaders and leadership turnover play an important role in a country's foreign policy decision making and therefore affect a country's compliance with external interests (Hermann 1990). Thus, when China's leadership engages in foreign policy objectives, it will increase engagement with compliant leaders. Second, as the noninterference policy stipulates, engagement exclusively focuses on incumbent governments. Finally, international interventions, which China may prevent, are usually targeted at individual governments.

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[1] It would be misleading to dismiss this as mere rhetoric, especially in the post-Cold War era. Precisely because of inconsistencies in its earlier application, it became increasingly important for Chinese leaders to credibly adhere to the principle of noninterference after the Tiananmen Square incident to secure support against resolutions in the United Nations on China (Van Ness 1998) and to normalize the diplomatic relations with its Asian neighbors so as to mitigate their perception of the "China threat" (Harris 2005).

[2] This also becomes apparent in China's attempts to improve its reputation as a responsible stakeholder, where it was sometimes more willing to allow external pressure on the regimes in North Korea, Iran, and Libya (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008; Xuetong 2011; Sun 2012b). More generally, the Chinese government has also become more flexible with regard to UN humanitarian interventions (Davis 2011).

For this reason, I measure autocratic stability in terms of the survival of leaders in office. I measure the main dependent variable, *Leadership Duration,* on the basis of leadership turnover of individual leaders (Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza 2009, updated from 2004 onwards). *Leadership Duration* ends whenever a leader is removed from office (coded one for failure and zero otherwise). According to this operationalization, it does not matter how a leader loses power (whether, for example, he resigns, is voted out of office, has reached his term limits, or is overthrown by a coup). *Leadership Duration* simply measures whether a leader stays in power from 1 year to the next, and hence most directly assesses the ability of individuals to strengthen their grip on power.

However, when existing institutions affect *Leadership Duration*, measuring duration by the power of a leader may be misleading, as short durations in these cases may not necessarily indicate a leader's individual weakness, but rather the strength of existing rules. This matters for my research, as some autocracies have managed to institutionalize the timing of power transitions, even though institutionalized turnovers happen less often in autocracies than other modes of exit (Ezrow and Frantz 2011:89). To account for this, I contrast my result with an alternative operationalization for leadership duration. Such *Regime Duration* considers failure to occur only when political leaders are forced out of office by irregular means (coded one for failure when the exit variable in Goemans, Gleditsch, Chiozza's (2009) Archigos data set equals three, and zero otherwise). Accordingly, the duration of a regime term can embrace several individual leaders. Regular leadership change occurs in 17%, regime failure in less than 2% of the observations.

We can observe two factors that enhance autocratic stability in China's foreign policy. On the one hand, China's principle of noninterference effectively protects other autocrats against external intervention. While China has used its veto in the UNSC to this end only in a few extreme cases, Chinese diplomats have often succeeded in preventing the UN from tabling punitive actions in the first place. This makes it difficult to capture this component. On the other hand, China's foreign policy practice contains a supportive component that is often justified by the principle of noninterference. As illustrated, the principle of noninterference can justify maintaining relations with isolated leaders or transferring arms to repressive regimes, which would otherwise have difficulties buying weapons. It also allows for aid and investment deals in contexts where Western businesses find it difficult or illegitimate to engage with regimes because they are repressive or highly unstable or both. In the following sections, I will examine the effect of the latter component.

The paper operationalizes the main explanatory variable of interest, bilateral support, in five different measures of bilateral support: diplomatic, military, and economic support. First, *Diplomacy with China* measures diplomatic support in terms of whether and how often a country's leader directly interacted with the Chinese prime minister or president as China's highest representatives.[3] This variable uses the monthly data supplement of the Journal of Current Chinese Affairs (Liu 1994–2008), which based on several Chinese newspapers lists all Chinese agreements with foreign countries and also gives detailed information on the statesmen signing or

announcing these agreements. Since the source explicitly refers to accomplished agreements, the variable risks neglecting bilateral high-level visits without agreements. However, to the extent that China's prestige diplomacy strategically announces bilateral agreements during high-level visits even when the documents have been signed long beforehand, this bias should be small.

Secondly, military support is measured as the amount of arms transfers from China. *Arms from China* captures arms transfers from China as the share of total arms transfers to a country (natural logarithm) (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2008).[4]

Finally, three indicators measure economic interaction, two capturing the resources China invests in another country, and one capturing the flow of resources out of a country to China. Resources that China invests in another country are captured by the volume of Chinese economic cooperation projects measured as the share of the recipient's GDP (natural logarithm) and the number of Chinese *Aid Projects* as published by the database AidData (Hawkins, Nielson, Bergevin, Hearn and Becky 2010). China's *Economic Cooperation* represents the annual turnover of all projects carried out by Chinese companies.[5] Given the links between Chinese financial and development assistance, these data are most likely also correlated with financial engagement (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010).[6] Data on China's *Economic Cooperation* are limited to the period 1998–2008, and for China's *Aid Projects,* data are available only until 2005.

Data for the measurement of resources that China extracts from a country are unfortunately not available for many countries. For example, data on raw material exports (as provided by the World Bank) do not account for the destination of these exports. Moreover, as China ranks among the biggest markets for many of those commodities that generate rents, we cannot measure and aggregate trade of these commodities in a straightforward manner.[7] However, in relation to China's overall imports, commodity imports have not risen disproportionally since China's domestic reforms and opening up to the outside world. Against this background, I use the share of a country's *Exports to China* as the share of the counterpart's total trade (natural logarithm) as a proxy for resource rents generated from trade relations with China (International Monetary Fund 2010).

I expect that the type of political regime in the partner country conditions the effect of bilateral interaction. For this reason, the model contains interactions of all China-related variables with a measure of regime type (Marshall,

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[3] Meetings in the context of multilateral summits are excluded.

[4] Due to rounding errors, SIPRI's data base does not add up to 100%. Therefore this measure can exceed 100%.

[5] This is a blend of trade, aid, and commercial foreign direct investment, and cannot be considered development aid according to the OECD definition. Disaggregated data on Chinese development assistance is not available (Kobayashi 2008; Brautigam 2009).

[6] China has been increasingly successful in winning tenders for internationally financed construction projects (by the World Bank, for example) which are included in this measurement, though Foster, Butterfield, Chen and Pushak (2009) estimated that between 2002 and 2005 only around 10% of Chinese economic cooperation projects in Africa were not financed by Chinese sources. If third-party funding constitutes a problem in my analysis, it should bias the estimations downwards, because the effect of Chinese economic cooperation is then produced by an even lesser amount of truly Chinese engagement.

[7] China evolved as the world's biggest importer of iron ore, manganese, lead, and chromium with shares of world imports ranging between 32% and 54% in 2004 (Trinh, Voss and Dyck 2006). Similarly, in 2004, it was the second largest importer of copper and the world's third largest oil importer.

Gurr and Jaggers 2013). I use a *Democracy* dummy based on POLITY IV's *polity2* variable (coded one when polity2 exceeds six, and zero otherwise).

I include a number of additional control variables in the model that have been found to influence leadership survival in earlier research. The model includes *GDP per capita* and the rate of *GDP growth* (Heston, Summers and Aten 2011) to account for the possibility that regime survival is determined by economic crises (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi 2000).[8] I also account for the spatial dimension of regime collapse and democratization that has been shown in diffusion literature (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006) by including a variable measuring the percentage of a country's direct neighbors in which a leader's term in office ends in a given year. I create the variable *Failures (% neighbors)* based on COW's Direct Contiguity Data (Correlates of War Project 2007). The model also contains the mean duration of previous leaders' terms in office (*Duration Previous Leaders*).

The sample contains 2,236 observations based on leader years in 155 countries during the post–Cold War period from 1993 to 2008. For the investigation of Chinese *Economic Cooperation* and Chinese *Aid Projects*, I shorten the time period because these variables are only reported from 1998 onwards and up to 2005, respectively. Table 1 contains summary statistics for all variables.

Results

I first present the results of the empirical analysis of China's effect on *Leadership Duration*. To identify such effects, I used a Cox proportional hazard model with time-dependent covariates to model the hazard rate; the probability that an event (in this case a leader's failure) may occur at a given point in time (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997). This model assumes a hazard rate in the form:

$$h(t) = h_0(t)e^{\beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2(t)} \qquad (1)$$

without further specifying the form of time-dependency. However, it assumes that the effects of the covariates on the hazard ratio are proportional during the term of a leader. Testing for this assumption, I found that the effect of *Democracy* was nonproportional. As Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (1997:1439) suggest, I included an interaction term of this time-variant variable with the logarithm of time. I present the results of the analysis in Table 2, as estimated coefficients rather than hazard rates. Negative coefficients indicate that a variable has the effect of decreasing the hazard rate, and thus increasing the survival duration.

Before turning to the effect of China on *Leadership Duration*, consider first the domestic determinants of *Leadership Duration* that a baseline model without any China-related variables would yield (see online appendix). As expected, *Leadership Duration* is dependent on regime type. Not surprisingly, given the limitations in office terms in many democracies, democratic leaders face a higher hazard rate to lose power than nondemocratic leaders. In addition, the average duration in power of previous leaders determines a leader's prospects to remain in power, where longer *Duration of Previous*

Leaders decreases the hazard rate for incumbents of being deposed. The coefficients on *GDP growth* and *GDP per capita* are insignificant. Finally, the coefficient on *Failures (% neighbors)* indicates that an increase of failures in neighboring countries by 1% increases a leader's survival hazard by 27%.

Model 1 of Table 2 adds the first three China-specific measures to the model that exist for the whole period from 1993 to 2008: exports to China; arms sales from China; and diplomatic contacts with China. The model combines all three measures in a single estimation since the resulting models have sufficient degrees of freedom and thus do not face problems of co-linearity. And because the results are very similar to alternative specifications in which each aspect of bilateral support is run separately (results are available in the online appendix), one can put the three contacts with China in a single estimation. The baseline results change only slightly in magnitude when the first three China-specific measures are added in Model 1. As the results show, the coefficients on *Arms from China* and *Diplomacy with China* are both positive and insignificant. Only the coefficient on *Exports to China* points in the expected negative direction and is highly statistically significant. In other words, the export dependence on China seems to generally decrease the hazard of losing power, and hence increases the duration in power for leaders, while arms sales from China and high-level interaction with Chinese leaders have no discernible effect on a leader's duration in power.

However, only the fully specified Model 2, which includes the interaction terms with *Democracy*, allows a full assessment of whether China has a different effect on autocratic governments than it does on democratic governments.[9] Introducing the interaction terms does not alter much the initial findings. Neither the coefficients on *Diplomacy with China* and *Arms from China* nor on their interaction are statistically significant. However, *Exports to China* and its interaction with *Democracy* are significant (Model 2), the former with a negative and the latter with a positive sign. For autocracies (when *Democracy* equals zero), the magnitude of the effect can directly be read from the results: A 1% increase in export dependence on China lowers a leader's hazard rate of losing power by 5% $(1 - \exp(-0.06))$. For democracies, the effect of exports to China is the sum of the coefficients on *Exports to China* and its interaction term with *Democracy* and is thus more difficult to interpret. When keeping all other variables constant, the hazard ratio for a democratic leader equals to $1 - \exp(-0.06 + 0.06) = 0$, resulting in no change of the hazard rate. Thus, the effect only plays out in autocracies, but not in democracies.

Before presenting a more substantive interpretation of this effect for autocracies, let us briefly consider the effect of the two remaining features of contact with China, aid and economic cooperation. I assess both in separate estimations because these variables are only available for a shorter time period. Models 3 and 4 in Table 2 assess the effect of the number of Chinese *Aid Projects* on *Leadership Duration* elsewhere. As the results show, this

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[8] Incorrect data for Turkmenistan was replaced with data from World Bank's World Development Indicators (2010). Missing data for Myanmar was replaced with data from the Conference Board Total Economy Database (2011).

[9] A likelihood-ratio test confirms that the interaction terms improve the model (LR $\chi^2(4) = 26.73$; $p > \chi^2 = .00$). I therefore accept the fact that adding the interaction terms to Model 2 introduces co-linearity to the model (vif=7.74 in Model 2 as opposed to vif=3.80 in Model 1). The variance inflation factor also indicates that co-linearity is primarily produced by the inclusion of *GDP per capita*. However, all presented results remain stable when *GDP per capita* is dropped.

TABLE 1. Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Leadership Duration	2236	0.17	0.37	0	1
Regime Duration	2254	0.01	0.13	0	1
Diplomacy with China$_{t-1}$	2236	0.18	0.42	0	2
Arms from China$_{t-1}$ (% total arms, ln)	2236	−12.59	4.39	−13.81	4.71
Exports to China$_{t-1}$ (% total trade, ln)	2236	−2.24	4.12	−13.81	3.72
No. Aid Projects$_{t-1}$	2103	0.19	0.54	0	6
Economic Cooperation$_{t-1}$ (% GDP, ln)	1516	−4.12	3.90	−13.81	2.31
Democracy$_{t-1}$	2236	0.50	0.50	0	1
No. Prev. Regime Failures	2254	3.39	4.74	0	23
Duration Previous Leaders	2236	6.86	6.66	0	33
Failures (% neighbors)	2236	0.14	0.22	0	1
GDP Growth$_{t-1}$	2236	2.79	8.15	−45.39	122.23
GDP/c $_{t-1}$ (ln)	2236	8.36	1.33	5.05	11.72

variable does not affect *Leadership Duration* in either specification: the effect of *Aid Projects* in Model 3 is negative, but statistically insignificant. When I introduce the interaction term in Model 4, both coefficients remain insignificant. Finally, Model 5, which estimates the impact of Chinese *Economic Cooperation* as a percentage of a country's GDP on *Leadership Duration*, suggests that such inflows have a very modest, marginally significant stabilizing effect. But this effect vanishes once I introduce the interaction term (Model 6). Taken together, the results of Table 2 suggest that common perceptions of the effect

of China's emergence may well be exaggerated, as most China-related variables have, in fact, little significant impact on the political survival of leaders elsewhere.

There is no straightforward substantive interpretation of the magnitude of the effect of *Exports to China* on *Leadership Duration*. I therefore also refer to an alternative estimation with a Weibull model, which allows for a more substantive interpretation of the effect. Even though this estimation method is more restrictive with regard to time dependence, the Weibull method delivers very similar results (see Model 1 in Table 5).

To provide a better portrait of this result, I calculated the marginal effects on the hazard rate for leaders in democracies and autocracies for both the Cox and the Weibull models when the degree of export dependence on China changes from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean (this corresponds to a change from −6.38% to 1.88% or in real values from 0.002% to 6.5% of total trade). Table 3 shows that, according to the Cox model, the hazard rate at different levels of export dependence for democracies is always similar and the confidence intervals always contain zero.

For autocratic leaders, however, the magnitude of the effect varies considerably with the degree of dependence. When *Exports to China* increases from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean, the hazard rate for autocrats falls by 38%. Again, the Weibull model allows for a more substantive interpretation. Accordingly, a democratic leader's tenure remains fairly stable at around 3 years when exports to China increase by the same amount. Such change is predicted to almost double an autocratic leader's tenure from roughly six-and-a-half to 12.5 years. Given the wide confidence interval, however, the difference in *Leadership Duration* for individual leaders may be considerably smaller.

Figure 1 graphically illustrates (based on Model 2 of Table 2) how the hazard rate (*Y*-axis) changes over time (*X*-axis) for leaders in democracies and autocracies

TABLE 2. China and Leadership Duration

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)
Exports to China$_{t-1}$	−0.03 (0.01)***	−0.06 (0.02)***				
Exports × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.06 (0.02)***				
Arms from China$_{t-1}$ (% total, ln)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.02)				
Arms × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.03 (0.03)				
Diplomacy with China$_{t-1}$	0.07 (0.10)	0.01 (0.23)				
Diplomacy × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.07 (0.25)				
No. Aid Projects$_{t-1}$			−0.09 (0.12)	−0.02 (0.15)		
Aid × Democracy$_{t-1}$				−0.16 (0.23)		
Economic Cooperation$_{t-1}$ (% GDP, ln)					−0.03 (0.02)*	−0.04 (0.03)
Econ Coop. × Democracy$_{t-1}$						0.01 (0.03)
GDP Growth$_{t-1}$	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
GDP/c$_{t-1}$ (ln)	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.07 (0.05)	−0.08 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	−0.17 (0.20)	0.41 (0.39)	−0.33 (0.24)	−0.30 (0.25)	−0.62 (0.29)**	−0.55 (0.26)**
Duration Previous Leaders	−0.05 (0.01)***	−0.04 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)**	−0.03 (0.01)**
Failure (% neighbors)	0.16 (0.14)	0.17 (0.14)	0.31 (0.16)**	0.30 (0.16)*	−0.06 (0.19)	−0.06 (0.19)
Ln(t) × Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.62 (0.14)***	0.56 (0.15)***	0.70 (0.15)***	0.71 (0.15)***	0.77 (0.18)***	0.76 (0.18)***
Observations	2236	2236	2103	2103	1516	1516
No. Clusters	145	145	155	155	154	154
Log Likelihood	−1904	−1900	−1806	−1806	−1139	−1139
Chi Square	105.64	125.36	82.65	84.88	49.03	48.38

(*Notes.* Robust standard errors (clustered by country) in parentheses *$p < .1$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$.)

Table 3. Substantive Effects

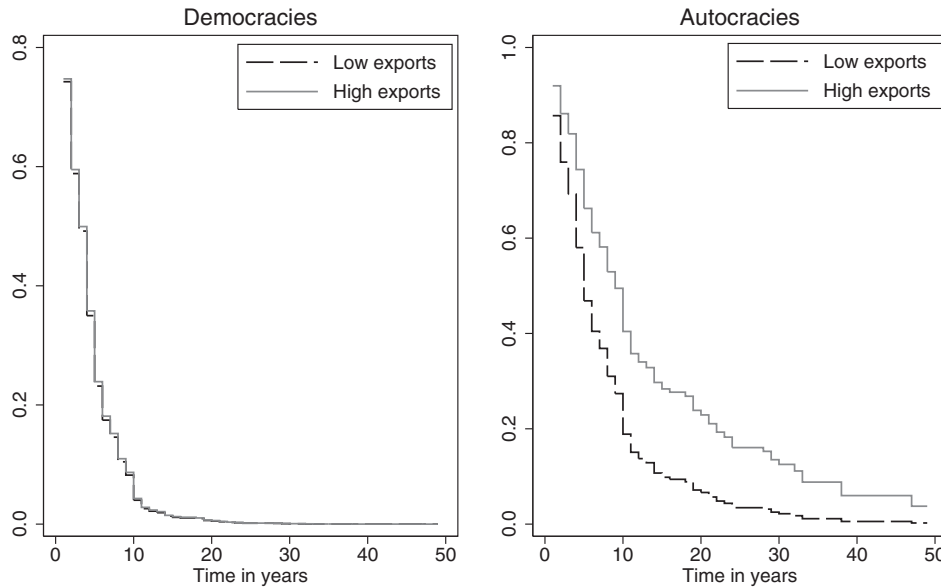|	Cox model		Weibull model	
Exports to China	*Change in haz. rate (% Δ)*	*95% Conf. Interval*	*Change in duration (% Δ)*	*95% Conf. Interval*
Exports in Democracies				
−1 *SD* from mean	0.77	(−0.16; 1.71)	3.32	(2.27; 4.37)
+1 *SD* from mean	0.75 (−2)	(−0.17; 1.68)	3.30 (−0.6)	(2.23; 4.36)
Exports in Autocracies				
−1 *SD* from mean	0.73	(0.08; 1.34)	6.71	(4.14; 9.29)
+1 *SD* from mean	0.45 (−38)	(0.09; 0.81)	12.47 (+85)	(7.72; 17.22)

Fig. 1. Survival Probabilities for Leaders with Low and High Export Dependence on China

without and with a high degree of export dependence on China (one standard deviation below and above the mean, respectively). All other variables are held constant at the sample mean value, and the time interactions with *Democracy* are set to zero.[10] For autocrats, higher *Exports to China* (solid line) results in lower cumulative hazard ratios and therefore a lower risk of losing power over time than lower export dependence (dotted line). For democrats, both lines converge.

In sum, Model 2 in Table 2 suggests that China's rise has only a limited or even no impact at all on the survival of leaders elsewhere. The impact it has is channeled via trade links. Export dependence on China generally increases the survival of autocratic leaders in autocracies, even when exports to China make up only a small amount of total trade. In democracies, export dependence on China does not increase a government's prospect of remaining in power.

Table 4 provides more evidence of the robustness of my findings. It replicates the regressions of Table 2, but with a different dependent variable. *Leadership Duration* has here been replaced by a measure for regime failure. While the negative and significant coefficient on *Exports to China* in Model 2 in Table 4 underlines the stabilizing effect of trade with China on *Regime Duration*, Models 4–6

confirm the lacking impact of other China-related variables.[11]

In sum, the effect of China-bound exports on *Leadership Duration* appears robust across the models presented earlier. Both the stabilizing effect of *Exports to China* and the noneffect of *Arms from China, Aid Projects, Economic Cooperation,* and *Diplomacy with China* on *Leadership Duration* are stable in various alternative model specifications. They are robust when *Democracy* is replaced by continuous measures for democracy (POLITY IV's *polity2* variable) and when the analysis is replicated with a binary-time-series-cross-section logit regression with time splines or cubic polynomials (Beck, Katz and Tucker 1998). The results are shown in the online appendix.

I conclude my empirical investigation by presenting additional models that show that the effect of export dependence on China is robust to changes in model specification, in the set of included variables, and in the sample composition. All models in Table 5 replicate Model 2 in Table 2 with additional explanatory variables to check for omitted variables. Model 1 is the Weibull

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[10] The time interactions had to be omitted to produce this graph, because the command does not support time interactions.

[11] Due to the extremely rare occurrence of irregular leadership transition, it is more informative to include a count of previous regime transitions rather than the mean duration of previous terms in office in this regression. Also, irregular transitions are strongly correlated with irregular transitions in neighboring countries, so I was forced to drop the latter variable. All variables have been tested to be proportional, hence no time interactions are included.

TABLE 4. China and Regime Duration

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)
Exports to China$_{t-1}$	−0.04 (0.03)	−0.09 (0.03)***				
Exports × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.20 (0.05)***				
Arms from China$_{t-1}$	0.02 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.06)				
Arms × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.11 (0.07)				
Diplomacy with China$_{t-1}$	−0.39 (0.40)	−0.93 (0.70)				
Diplomacy × Democracy$_{t-1}$		0.98 (0.83)				
No. Aid Projects$_{t-1}$			0.02 (0.20)	0.10 (0.22)		
Aid × Democracy$_{t-1}$				−0.39 (0.54)		
Econ. Cooperation$_{t-1}$ (% GDP, ln)					0.06 (0.06)	0.09 (0.08)
Econ Coop. × Democracy$_{t-1}$						−0.05 (0.14)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.08 (0.43)	1.81* (0.93)*	0.21 (0.45)	0.30 (0.48)	0.15 (0.49)	−0.02 (0.76)
No. Previous Failures	−0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
GDP Growth$_{t-1}$	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.07 (0.02)***	−0.07 (0.02)***
GDP/c$_{t-1}$ (ln)	−0.28 (0.15)*	−0.22 (0.15)	−0.53 (0.15)***	−0.54 (0.15)***	−0.02 (0.18)	−0.04 (0.19)
Observations	2254	2254	2119	2119	1527	1527
No. Clusters	146	146	156	156	155	155
Log Likelihood	−157	−150	−153	−153	−74	−74
Chi Square	13.35	36.48	20.18	20.38	26.34	27.72

(*Notes.* Robust standard errors (clustered by country) in parentheses *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .01.)

model mentioned earlier. Model 2 includes trade volumes as a share of GDP to check whether the export effect merely reflects the greater stability of open economies, but the model reveals that this is not true. Model 3 controls for a country's importance for China by including bilateral trade volumes as a share of Chinese total trade. In Model 4, three indicators for bilateral relations with the United States (*Arms from United States, Exports to United States*, and *Diplomacy with United States*) are included in order to test whether the observed effect is driven by the presence of a few isolated countries.[12] Also, I test for regional versus global dynamics. Most countries with extremely high export dependence on China are located in Africa. One could therefore speculate that the observed effect is driven by African countries, rather than being global. However, this is not the case. When a dummy for sub-Saharan African countries is introduced as Model 5 in Table 5, the effect still holds.

Given the existing discussion on the relationship between oil and democratization (Smith 2004; Morrison 2009; Ahmed 2012), Model 6 includes a country's proven oil reserves in billion barrels (natural logarithm), as well as interaction terms with the China-related variables and *Oil Reserves* to control for the possibility that the stabilizing effect of interaction with China is related to a country's oil endowment (US Energy Information Administration 2010).

While the stabilizing effect of export dependence on China for autocracies survives all these alternative model specifications, there remains one potential problem: the possibility of reverse causality and endogeneity. The lagged independent variables should diminish the possibility of reverse causality as they are designed to ensure the chronological order of events. However, endogeneity could remain a problem when leaders who feel insecure strengthen their ties with China so as to prevent their own failure. In this case, *Exports to China* would increase with a leader's anticipation of being removed from office. While this is a plausible source of endogeneity, it is one that would bias my results downwards. If higher risk of failure leads to increased exports to China, the relation between exports and leader failure should be positive. However, my results are negative. With no endogeneity at play, one would therefore expect the negative correlation to be even stronger.

Conclusion

This article highlights the impact of a more powerful China on the survival of other autocratic regimes. First, it contributes to our understanding of the nature of China's rise to power by providing a systematic assessment of its effect on other autocratic regimes. Second, it helps clarify the role of external factors in shaping autocratic survival. An important reason one might expect China to increase autocratic survival is that autocratic powers have a general interest in maintaining sovereignty and preventing democratic domino effects. At the same time, China resembles democratic powers in their pursuit of foreign-policy objectives and influence on other countries' domestic political processes. The impact of these powers depends not only on the intensity of their relations to another country—their relative importance to their counterpart—but also on the institutional constraints in target countries. External engagement benefits unconstrained leaders and therefore can benefit authoritarian leaders more than democratic leaders. With China's increasing economic interests and interactions in the world, the relative weight of China's influence—and thus its impact on other countries—should increase.

Against the background of these theoretical expectations, my analysis finds that only export dependence on China has a stabilizing effect on autocratic governments. No such effect operates for leaders of democratic regimes. Bilateral ties such as arms sales, the provision of economic cooperation projects, and high-level state visits do not appreciably improve the survival prospects for other autocratic governments.

My findings suggest that scholars overstate the impact of China's rise on authoritarianism with regard to many aspects of Chinese engagement. This offers an important

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[12] *Arms from US* are provided by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2008), data on *Exports to US* was taken from International Monetary Fund (2010) and *Diplomacy with US* originates from the homepage of United States Department of State (2013), which publishes the US president's travel destinations and information on leadership visits to the US. Only bilateral meetings have been included.

TABLE 5. Robustness

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)	Model (6)
Exports to China$_{t-1}$	−0.09 (0.02)***	−0.06 (0.02)***	−0.06 (0.02)***	−0.06 (0.02)***	−0.06 (0.02)***	−0.07 (0.02)***
Exports × Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.10 (0.02)***	0.05 (0.02)***	0.05 (0.02)**	0.06 (0.02)***	0.06 (0.02)***	0.05 (0.02)***
Arms from China$_{t-1}$	0.00 (0.02)	−0.00 (0.02)	−0.00 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Arms × Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
Diplomacy with China$_{t-1}$	0.08 (0.22)	0.03 (0.22)	0.01 (0.22)	−0.00 (0.22)	−0.01 (0.22)	0.17 (0.23)
Diplomacy × Democracy$_{t-1}$	0.02 (0.25)	0.06 (0.25)	0.06 (0.25)	0.08 (0.25)	0.09 (0.25)	−0.00 (0.26)
Trade$_{t-1}$ (% GDP)		0.00 (0.00)***				
Trade$_{t-1}$ (% total Chinese)			0.05 (0.01)***			
Arms from United States$_{t-1}$ (% total arms, ln)				−0.00 (0.01)		
Exports to United States$_{t-1}$ (% total trade, ln)				0.05 (0.03)*		
Diplomacy with United States$_{t-1}$				0.02 (0.14)		
Sub-Sahara					−0.38 (0.21)*	
Oil Reserves$_{t-1}$ (ln)						−0.02 (0.03)
Oil × Arms$_{t-1}$						−0.00 (0.00)
Oil × Diplomacy$_{t-1}$						0.01 (0.02)
Oil × Exports$_{t-1}$						−0.00 (0.00)
Constant	−2.55 (0.58)***					
ln_p Constant	0.24 (0.04)***					
Observations	2236	2236	2236	2235	2236	2139
No. Clusters	145	145	145	145	145	144
Log Likelihood	−505	−1899	−1898	−1899	−1898	−1836
Chi Square	95.84	217.19	154.79	121.62	121.99	170.98

(*Notes.* Standard errors in parentheses *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .01. All models are based on Model 2 of Table 2, control variables not shown.)

insight, given that media coverage tends to demonize China's engagement with developing countries. One might therefore argue that the consequences of China's rise will be less dramatic for individual leaders than alarmists expect, as their leadership and regime duration tends to be independent of various manifestations of China's support. China's engagement with developing countries does not automatically translate into dramatic Chinese influence on power politics elsewhere—at least with regard to the bilateral interactions that this paper investigates.

Furthermore, the case of China illustrates that intentions to support other autocrats should not serve as an analytical starting point for work on "black knight" dynamics. However, my investigation assessed only a limited number of channels of support. Other channels of external influence may matter a great deal. For example, to the extent that China prevents the UN from intervening in autocratic states it might greatly enhance the prospects for autocratic survival. But even at the bilateral level, autocrats can assist each other in disrupting opposition movements by persecuting or denying political asylum to persons deemed terrorism suspects by other autocratic states (Silitsky 2010:349). Similarly, the spread of technologies to control social media and cooperation in state-controlled media systems can contribute to autocratic stability (Kurlantzick and Link 2009:25). These channels of influence require additional attention.

On the other hand, preexisting conditions shape China's impact on other autocratic leaders. Thus, China's engagement, at the bilateral level, is at best amplifying existing trends rather than creating a world that is more authoritarian, as has been suggested by some critics (Naim 2007:95). Ultimately, this also implies that we need

to scrutinize the effects of major democratic powers on autocratic longevity as critically as we do those of autocratic patrons.

Finally, China's status and role as a major power continues to evolve. We cannot know how China's domestic dynamics will change in the future and thus whether China will continue its current foreign-policy orientation. Many observers expect that a domestically unstable China might adopt a dramatically different foreign policy. And even if China continues its domestic development, Chinese foreign policy may not necessarily remain stable. The ongoing debate in China demonstrates continued disagreement inside China on the role it should play in international politics (Shambaugh 2011:9). These dynamics make clear the need for continual investigation into the impact of shifting Chinese policies on other states in the international system.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Appendix S1. Additional regression results.