

IRIS 2015 Summer Fieldwork Award:  
“Technologies of Participatory Governance in Putin's Russia”  
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My research examines the relationship between media and public opinion in non-democratic regimes. In particular, I provide a theory of how non-democracies utilize modern information and communication technology (ICT) to maintain regime stability and bolster public support, illustrating this theory with the case of Russia under Putin. Existing theories of non-democratic regime stability emphasize dictators' strategies of coercion or cooptation to enforce passive acceptance and support among the populace. Studies that examine the link between public support and media technologies emphasize how information can be manipulated to create a passively supportive populace. Yet, both research agendas underestimate the need—and ability—of non-democratic elites to foster active support and a selectively engaged population.

This dissertation presents a new theory of regime stability in non-democracies, arguing that authoritarian leaders create and maintain *participatory technologies*—communication technologies that promote increased interaction, not passivity, between the public and individuals in power—in order to *selectively* engage its citizens in the political process. Dictators use participatory technologies to draw citizens into the political discourse while maintain tight control of the conversation. Instead of being relegated to mere bystanders in the political discourse, ordinary people are actively, if selectively, engaged in its construction. By giving citizens a voice in an other wise restrictive system, government increase support and, subsequently, regime stability while limiting the uncertainty and potential loss of control typically associated with traditional forms of participation.

I spent seven weeks in Moscow conducting research for this dissertation with the support of a Summer Fieldwork Award provided by the Institute for Regional and International Studies. During this period, I worked closely with the Levada Analytic Center, the leading survey research firm in Russia, to

finalize a set of innovative survey experiments testing the relationship between participatory technologies and regime support. This survey experiment, which constitutes the central quantitative portion of my dissertation, will illuminate the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that link awareness of participatory technology with perceptions of the regime. Specifically, I show that awareness of participatory technologies increases political knowledge and efficacy and improves perceptions of regime responsiveness and openness to feedback. Without the support of the IRIS fellowship, I would have been unable to complete this survey research in a timely manner.

During my fieldwork in Russia, I was also able to work with qualitative researchers at the Levada Center to receive in-the-field training and observe focus groups, both in Moscow and in the surrounding regions. While survey research is useful for uncovering causal mechanisms, qualitative work is necessary to provide more depth and detail to any analysis. The experience I gained working with focus groups during my fieldwork has opened new avenues of research. Furthermore, it allowed me to build further