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**AUTOCRATS
CAN'T ALWAYS GET
WHAT THEY WANT**

State Institutions and Autonomy
under Authoritarianism



Nathan J. Brown, Steven D. Schaaf,
Samer Anabtawi, and Julian G. Waller

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"*Autocrats Can't Always Get What They Want* is a welcome and significant contribution, pushing the study of authoritarian regimes in productive new directions. Very well-written and logically organized, it makes a persuasive case for not just why but how we can move beyond the current saturation point in authoritarianism studies to a more conceptually sound and meaningful research agenda."

- Mona El-Ghobashy, New York University

AUTOCRATS CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT THEY WANT

State Institutions and Autonomy under Authoritarianism

By Nathan J. Brown, Steven D. Schaaf, Samer Anabtawi, & Julian G. Waller

Authoritarianism seems to be everywhere in the political world—even the definition of authoritarianism as any form of non-democratic governance has grown very broad. Attempts to explain authoritarian rule as a function of the interests or needs of the ruler or regime can be misleading. *Autocrats Can't Always Get What They Want* argues that to understand how authoritarian systems work we need to look not only at the interests and intentions of those at the top, but also at the inner workings of the various parts of the state. Courts, elections, security force structure, and intelligence gathering are seen as structured and geared toward helping maintain the regime. Yet authoritarian regimes do not all operate the same way in the day-to-day and year-to-year tumble of politics.

In *Autocrats Can't Always Get What They Want*, the authors find that when state bodies form strong institutional patterns and forge links with key allies both inside the state and outside of it, they can define interests and missions that are different from those at the top of the regime. By focusing on three such structures (parliaments, constitutional courts, and official religious institutions), the book shows that the degree of autonomy realized by a particular part of the state rests on how thoroughly it is institutionalized and how strong its links are with constituencies. Instead of viewing authoritarian governance as something that reduces politics to rulers' whims and opposition movements, the authors show how it operates—and how much what we call "authoritarianism" varies.

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