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ARBEITSVORHABEN

Digital Authoritarianism and Infrastructural Power in Hybrid Regimes

This research explores how digital infrastructures reshape the configuration of political power in contemporary hybrid regimes. Building on my previous work on digital authoritarianism, I examine how regimes situated between democracy and autocracy adapt digital technologies to consolidate power without fully abandoning pluralist institutions. While hybrid regimes cannot fully dominate the networked architecture of the Internet, they increasingly shift from direct repression toward subtler forms of digital authoritarianism grounded in infrastructural power. Rather than relying primarily on censorship, these regimes invest in coordinated online influence operations, data-driven monitoring, and the systematic production of informational disorder. Digital infrastructures thus function not merely as communication tools, but as environments that structure access, shape attention, and redistribute political agency. At the same time, digital technologies lower the costs of mobilization and enable new forms of connective action, allowing civic actors to rapidly organize and challenge incumbents. Yet these forms of digitally enabled mobilization often lack the organizational durability required to confront institutionalized coercive power, producing an asymmetrical field of contestation in which regimes and their opponents operate within the same digital architecture under unequal structural conditions.

The project seeks to clarify whether digital authoritarian practices in hybrid regimes ultimately reinforce regime durability through infrastructural asymmetry or generate unstable equilibria in which resistance and control continuously co-evolve. Using Serbia as an empirical reference point within a broader comparative framework, the research aims to contribute to a sociological theory of digital authoritarianism that situates it within the dynamics of contested political power, rather than treating it as a feature of fully consolidated autocracies.

Recommended Reading

Petrović, Marijana, Nataša Bojković, Ivan Anić, and Dalibor Petrović (2012). “Benchmarking the Digital Divide Using a Multi-Level Outranking Framework: Evidence from EBRD Countries of Operation.” Government Information Quarterly 29 (4): 597–607. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.05.008.

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Petrović, Dalibor (2026). “Online Influence Operations: The Case of the Serbian Regime’s Cyber Troops.” Comparative Southeast European Studies 74 (3): 367–394. https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2025-0033.

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Benchmarking the digital divide using a multi-level outranking framework : evidence from EBRD countries of operation

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