

Dukalskis, Alexander. 2021.
Making the World Safe for Dictatorship.
Oxford University Press, 249 pp. \$17 (Paperback)

Authoritarian regimes try to increase their power and influence on the global stage in order to survive. This creates adverse conditions for democracy and threatens to destabilize the global order. Alexander Dukalskis' *Making the World Safe for Dictatorship* introduces a new concept of "authoritarian image management" to explain the ways in which authoritarian states increase their power and influence internationally. He defines this as the "efforts by the state or its proxies to enhance or protect the legitimacy of the state's political system for audiences outside its borders," and this legitimacy can in turn be used to generate domestic propaganda (p. 4). This work is notable in that Dukalskis considers the repressive side of authoritarian image management, discussing the ways in which regimes silence dissidents abroad and work to control the flow of information domestically.

This book explains a novel theory, unfolding over nine chapters, and it takes a qualitative approach. Chapters 1–3 offer a more thorough theoretical discussion of authoritarian image management. Chapter 4 provides a global overview of the current state of authoritarian image management, and Chapters 5–8 focus on several case studies, showing how different forms of authoritarian image management can take and have varying degrees of success. In particular, Dukalskis notes how authoritarian image management can either be promotional or obstructive, and it can target a specific or diffuse audience (p. 34). A state's typical soft power projections, such as cultural promotion or tourism campaigns, would be classified as promotional/diffuse, while the targeting and silencing of foreign critics would be classified as obstructive/specific.

Data collection limits the strength of the work's empirical section by making it difficult to accurately identify and examine all instances of authoritarian image management, a difficulty which Dukalskis acknowledges. The problem stems mostly from a US Department of Justice database that tracks foreign lobbying, which features heavily throughout chapter 4. In order for a country to be included in this database, they must voluntarily report their activities. Furthermore, this database only counts the types of lobbying efforts that would generally be classed as promotional, meaning there is no record of any obstructive efforts states undertake (p. 58). Other databases, such as the Central Asian Political Exiles database at the University of Exeter try to track obstructive image management techniques. However, tracking is very difficult because states have an incentive to limit the extent to which this activity is visible (p. 68). Despite these shortcomings, lack of data does not harm the book's theoretical offerings, moreover it only suggests that the prevalence of

these practices could be much higher.

Case studies show how different forms authoritarian image management can take and the degrees of success it can have. Dukalskis profiles China (ch. 5–6), Rwanda (ch. 7), and North Korea (ch. 8). Chapters 5 and 6 focus on China. Chapter 5 relies on original interview data with journalists. Through these interviews, the ways in which China targets foreign correspondents stationed in China, both to limit negative coverage and promote the country's idealized image of a well-functioning, highly developed state, becomes clear (p. 88). Journalists routinely face bureaucratic difficulties, such as threats of visa revocation, as a means of preventing negative reporting. They are also frequently offered state-sponsored trips and hospitality, with the assumption that they will produce positive coverage in exchange for these favors.

Chapter 6 considers China's international propaganda efforts. China's propaganda shows a country targeted by the West on the international stage. Because of this, it also uses its propaganda to promote its ideology as a counter to the West. The chapter also focuses on China's "discourse war" with the West, perhaps the most notable example of authoritarian image management. Notably, the author notes that the Chinese government oversees China's soft power strategy rather than letting this happen organically. China has tried to take control of the narrative surrounding the country by inviting journalists and academics to visit the country, as well as using its media to broadcast stories that both criticize the West and promote the regime (p. 115). In doing this, China hopes to shape and adjust the international climate and create conditions that are more conducive to its existence. China focuses this propaganda on countries and regions outside the West, such as Africa, as it views these countries as important allies in its ideological struggle with the West. As China's strategies in this area are largely in their infancy, their degree of success is still unknown.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on Rwanda and North Korea, respectively. Both chapters rely mainly on secondary sources and media reports. Rwanda is a particularly successful case of authoritarian image management because it has been leveraging its recent history with genocide and civil war and subsequent economic recovery to both cultivate an international alliance network and suppress dissent on the domestic front (p. 140). North Korea, on the other hand, tries to practice forms of authoritarian image management, but it has seen far less success, as it lacks international allies and is isolated on the global stage. Its international supporters, mainly the Chongryon organization in Japan and a handful of solidarity organizations, are dwindling in power and relevancy, and the regime has not been able to control the global narrative surrounding the country (p. 160). Furthermore, North Korea does not have the institutional capacity to effectively sell its propaganda abroad, putting it in stark contrast to Rwanda.

While the selected cases make sense and show the different forms authoritarian image management can take, it is surprising that no state from the Middle East was selected, as their emerging economies and status as suppliers of natural resources mean that they play

an increasingly important role in geopolitics. Saudi Arabia and its efforts to cultivate a more positive image under Mohamed bin Salman, for example, receive passing attention, but the amount of media coverage the country receives means that additional attention in the book would have been justified. Dukalskis mentions how Saudi Arabia's reputation suffered in the wake of Jamal Khashoggi's assassination, and while he mentions that its reputation has recovered under Mohamed bin Salman's efforts to both cultivate an international audience and target dissidents, the book lacks a fuller discussion of this case. Given Saudi Arabia's reputation recovery and its extensive practice of authoritarian image management, a greater attention would have been justified.

Authoritarian image projection has implications for regional security as well, as regimes engaged in obstructive practices have the ability to destabilize the regions in which they operate. Russia, for example, has engaged in various image management techniques to create a more favorable climate, both regionally and internationally, in which the regime can exist, engaging in both promotion and obstructive techniques to present itself internationally. Russia has sought to spread disinformation in Western democracies with which it feels it is ideologically opposed, engaging in actions such as meddling in elections and spreading false information on social media. The Russian military, for example, has sought to portray itself as very capable and modern, when the reality on the battlefield paints a different picture. Russia has also sought to cultivate an international support network among ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. These efforts are most visible in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as Russia has tried to spread disinformation by casting this invasion as a defensive effort and as an effort to protect Russian territorial integrity, all while cultivating support among ethnic Russians in the Donbas and other occupied areas. This has serious implications for regional security, as Russia pursues these management techniques in an effort to create more favorable conditions along which it can wage war.

Overall, this work is essential for scholars of authoritarianism and soft power. While primarily geared toward academic audiences, policymakers will also find the work essential as well, as a better understanding of how authoritarian regimes operate will lead to more effective policy responses. The theoretical and empirical aspects of the book add to the extensive tradition of soft power and influence projection, offering a new layer to the subject that takes both promotional and obstructive forms of influence projection into account. It also provides avenues for further research, such as a comparative study between image projection and regime type and other opportunities for case studies. For example, questions about how image management techniques vary between regime types and the sorts of domestic factors that dictate its forms and degree of success will be especially pertinent in the years to come.

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