Divergent Effects of Internet Use on Government Trust and Political Participation in Central Asia

Valery Dzutsati[1]   Dinara Rakhmatullayeva[2]

[1]Southern Illinois University

[2]Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

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Internet and Public Opinion

- How does the Internet affect trust in government and political participation?

Internet and Political Trust

- E-governance is associated with greater transparency and greater political trust among the population (Welch, Hinnant, and Moon 2005)
- An increase in internet usage is associated with citizens' distrust in political institutions (Im et al. 2014; You and Wang 2020)

How the Internet Challenges Authoritarian Regimes

- The internet expands the opportunities for mass mobilization of citizens and upending authoritarian regimes (Diamond and Plattner 2012)

- Authoritarian regimes restrict the offline activities of their citizens, which inadvertently amplifies internet-active citizens' discontent (Han and Jia 2018; You and Wang 2020)

How Authoritarian Regimes Respond to the Challenge of the Internet

- Autocratic regimes use the Internet and social media for surveillance, propaganda, censorship, and to distract voters from politics (Morozov 2012; Zhuravskaya, Petrova, and Enikolopov 2020)

- Some authoritarian regimes have learned to use technology and control the dominant narratives sometimes relying on old but effective media resources such as TV (Walker and Orttung 2014; Szostek 2018)

Internet and Politics in Central Asia

- Authoritarianism across Central Asian countries varies (Lewis 2021)
- Internet accessibility has been on the rise in Central Asia in the past several years
- Some news internet websites are blocked, but the internet is still much harder to control than the traditional media (Bekmagambetov et al. 2018; Reyaz 2020)

Democracy Scores in Central Asian Countries, VDem, 2017-2023
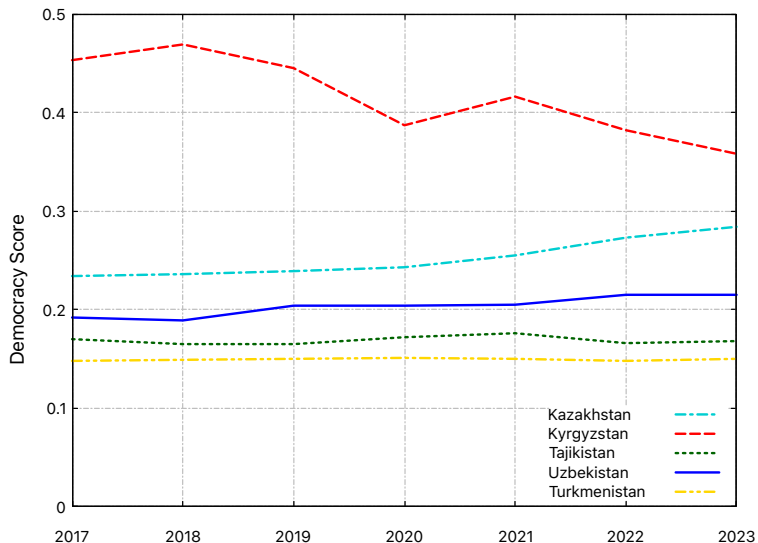
Contribution

- Theoretical distinction between the active and passive internet use
- Test using panel data

Exposure to the Internet. Passive Use

- Greater exposure to the Internet will result in citizens becoming more informed and engaged with political and social issues
- In an authoritarian context, where offline activities are severely restricted, disaffected individuals are likely to use the internet more intensively $\implies$
- A greater level of access of individuals to the internet in authoritarian countries will be associated with lower trust in the government

Content Creation in Social Media. Active Use

- When individuals in authoritarian countries create internet social media content, their activities are often subject to censorship and surveillance by the government
- This can lead to self-censorship by individuals and limit their ability to express opinions that are critical of the government $\implies$
- Greater involvement of individuals in internet content creation in authoritarian countries will be associated with higher trust in the government

Data

- Central Asian Barometer Survey data
- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan
- Waves 1-11, 2017-2022 (two waves per year)

Dependent Variables

- An index variable measuring government trust:
  - Things in the respondent's country are headed in the right direction or the wrong direction, dichotomous 0, 1
  - The economic situation in the respondent's country is better or worse than it was one year earlier, ordinal 1-5
- A dichotomous variable measuring respondents' proclivity to vote in parliamentary elections (only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan)
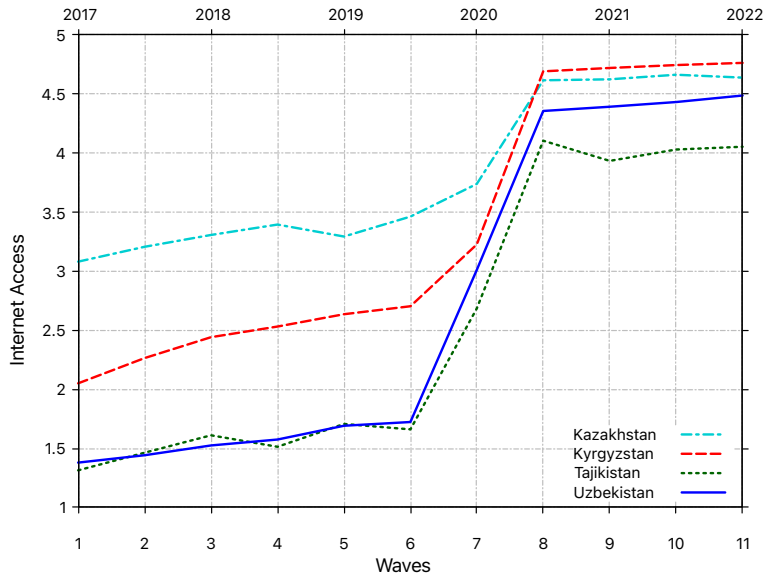
Government Trust
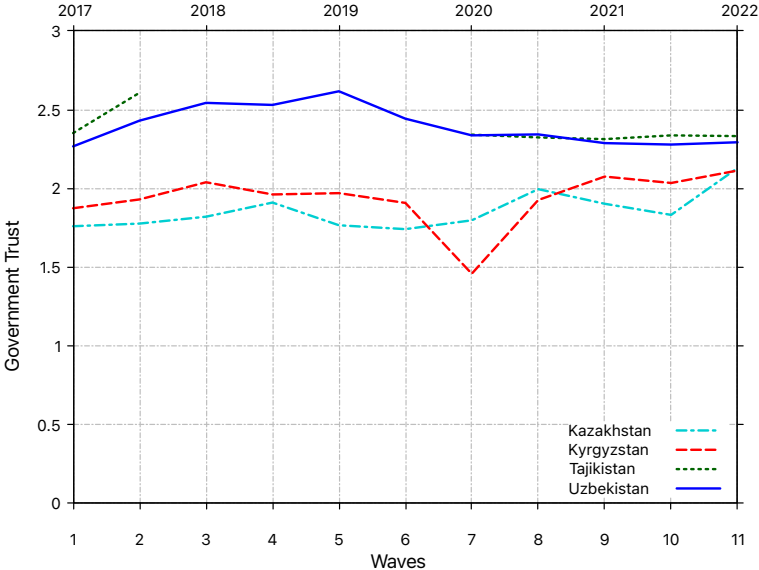
Independent Variables

- A measurement of internet access via phone or computer in the past 6 months from "never" to "daily."
- Internet as the main source of national news, 0, 1
- The creation of content online by posting comments, writing a blog: from 1 – "never" to 6 – "at least once a day"
- Control variables: unemployed, income, age, education, gender, urban
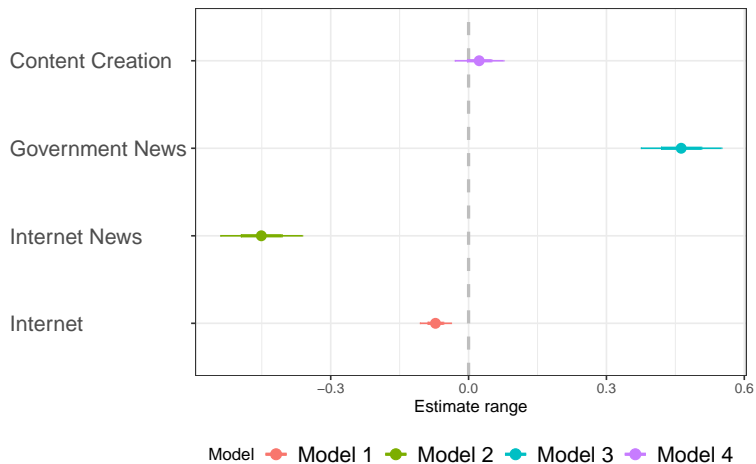
Internet Access

Internet and Government Trust. OLS with Country and Time Fixed Effects
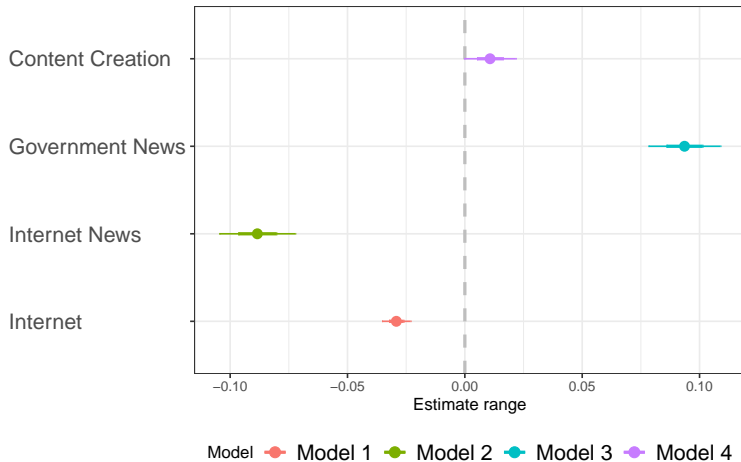
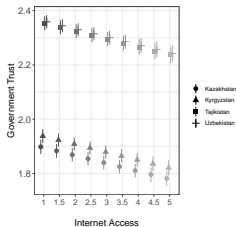# Internet and Political Participation. Logit with Time Fixed Effects

Estimate range

Model — Model 1 — Model 2 — Model 3 — Model 4
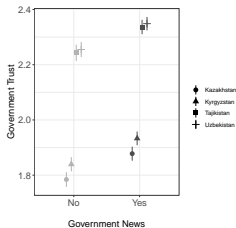
Marginal effects. OLS

(a) Usage of Internet
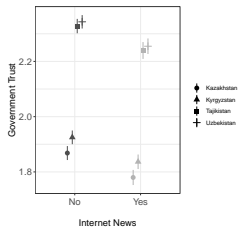
(b) Internet News
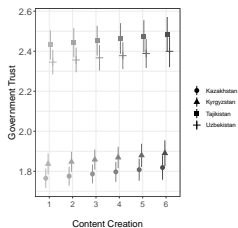
(c) Government News

(d) Internet Content Creation

Marginal effects. Logit
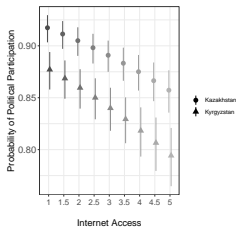
(a) Usage of Internet
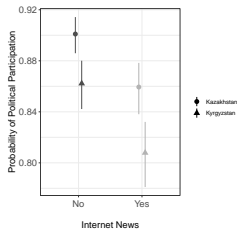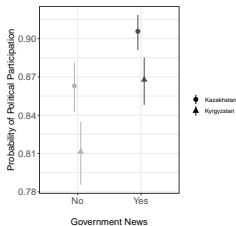
(b) Internet News

(c) Government News
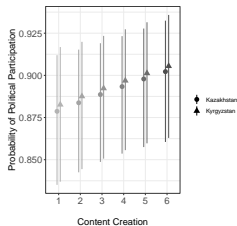
(d) Internet Content Creation

Conclusions

- The more widely individuals use the internet, the less they trust the government in an authoritarian context
- Online content creation is associated with higher levels of government trust
- As access to the Internet becomes more common, respondent's attitudes might become more diverse
- Responses to sensitive questions in authoritarian countries may be biased

The End

Government Trust and Internet Usage in Central Asia. Linear Models with Cross-Sectional and Time Fixed Effects

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Internet	−0.03***			−0.02***		−0.03***
	(0.00)			(0.00)		(0.01)
Internet News		−0.09***		−0.01		−0.08**
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.03)
Government News			0.09***	0.07***		0.04
			(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.03)
Content Creation					0.01*	0.02***
					(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.02***	−0.05***	−0.07***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Titular Ethnicity	0.08***	0.09***	0.08***	0.08***	0.21***	0.19***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Education	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01**	−0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Income	−0.00	−0.00**	−0.00*	−0.00	0.00	0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Unemployed	−0.03***	−0.03***	−0.03***	−0.03***	−0.02	−0.03
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Male	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.06***	−0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Urban	−0.07***	−0.06***	−0.06***	−0.06***	−0.08***	−0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
R^2	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.06
Adj. R^2	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.05
Observations	43961	42549	42549	42405	5386	5319
Waves	1 − 11	1 − 11	1 − 11	1 − 11	1 − 3	1 − 3
Countries	4	4	4	4	4	4

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Political Participation and Internet Usage in Central Asia. Logit Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Internet	-0.07^{***}			-0.03^{*}		-0.20^{***}
	(0.02)			(0.02)		(0.05)
Internet News		-0.45^{***}		-0.18^{**}		-0.26^{*}
		(0.04)		(0.08)		(0.16)
Government News			0.46^{***}	0.30^{***}		0.10
			(0.04)	(0.08)		(0.16)
Content Creation					0.02	0.05^{*}
					(0.03)	(0.03)
Age	-0.09^{***}	-0.12^{***}	-0.11^{***}	-0.13^{***}	-0.09^{**}	-0.16^{***}
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Titular Ethnicity	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.52^{***}	0.41^{***}
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Education	-0.04^{***}	-0.04^{***}	-0.04^{***}	-0.03^{***}	-0.06^{**}	-0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Income	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Unemployed	-0.05	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.08	-0.07
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Male	-0.22^{***}	-0.21^{***}	-0.21^{***}	-0.21^{***}	-0.40^{***}	-0.38^{***}
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Urban	-0.39^{***}	-0.38^{***}	-0.37^{***}	-0.37^{***}	-0.40^{***}	-0.34^{***}
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.10)
AIC	19030.28	18251.85	18242.39	18197.92	3242.00	3155.11
BIC	19123.98	18345.18	18335.72	18306.78	3311.81	3243.78
Log Likelihood	-9503.14	-9113.93	-9109.19	-9084.96	-1610.00	-1563.56
Deviance	19006.28	18227.85	18218.39	18169.92	3220.00	3127.11
Observations	18173	17636	17636	17599	4216	4160
Waves	$1-11$	$1-11$	$1-11$	$1-11$	$1-3$	$1-3$
Countries	2	2	2	2	2	2

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$