

Digital Authoritarianism

Chapter 4: Handbook of Political Control

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What is Digital Authoritarianism?

We define digital authoritarianism as **the practices aimed at ...**

- 1) manufacturing or improving popular support for the incumbent,
- 2) reducing the threat of existing opposition, and
- 3) preventing future opposition

... using digital technologies.

The Three Goals of Digital Authoritarianism

	1) Manufacturing Support	2) Reducing Threats	3) Preventing Opposition
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Automated and manual spread of dis- and misinformation• Conducted by state actors, media, private firms, and individuals• Paired with selective censorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broad censorship (e.g. internet shutdowns)• Targeted censorship (e.g. blocking accounts)• Targeted surveillance• Targeted harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislation regulating online content hosts and producers• Mass surveillance• Deterrence through public awareness of surveillance
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General population• Foreign populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General population• Groups or citizens governments see as threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General population• Marginalized groups and opposition groups

Areas for Future Research

Based on our review of research on digital authoritarianism, we see 5 areas for future work:

- How digital practices interact with each other and traditional tools of political control
- Digital authoritarianism beyond well studied cases such as Russia and China
- Connections between practices used domestically and those applied abroad
- Intended and unintended consequences of digital authoritarianism
- Strategies for countering digital authoritarianism