Leadership Turnover and Foreign Policy Alignment
A Study on Foreign Policies towards China

Moderator: A/P Sooyeon Kim
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ABSTRACT
Why do states realign their foreign policies toward a major power? Previous studies highlight the impacts of leadership turnover and the conditioning effect of political institutions. Specifically, change in leadership tends to result in less drastic foreign policy realignment in democracies than in non-democracies. The current study contributes to the existing scholarship by arguing that there are important differences among non-democratic systems, namely between autocracies and anocracies. Due to the peculiar combination of strong domestic opposition and relatively weak institutional constraints, anocratic leaders have both incentive and capability to hijack a country’s foreign policy to stay in power. Thus, leadership turnover in anocracies is more likely to result in foreign policy realignment than in autocracies and democracies, giving rise to a non-linear relationship between leadership turnover and foreign policy realignment along the Polity spectrum. We test the theoretical propositions with foreign policies of 144 countries towards China from 1972 to 2015 as well as the cases of the Philippines and Sri Lanka in recent years. Both quantitative and qualitative evidences suggest that the effect of leadership turnover on foreign policy realignment is significantly larger in anocracies than in both democracies and autocracies.

BIO
ANDREW X. LI is an assistant professor at the Department of International Relations, Central European University (CEU). He received a joint Ph.D. degree from National University of Singapore and King’s College London. Before joining CEU, he worked as a Research Fellow at Nanyang Technological University on the “Singapore in the Global Talent Race” project. His research interests include international political economy and quantitative methods. He has published in Economics & Politics and Journal of International Relations and Development, and contributed to the edited volume BRICS and the Global Economy.

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