The peculiar practices of ‘authoritarian emigration states’
Tsourapas, Gerasimos

License:
Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND)

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

Publisher Rights Statement:
Published in British Academy Review

General rights
Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

• Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
• Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
• User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of ‘fair dealing’ under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
• Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy
While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.
The peculiar practices of ‘authoritarian emigration states’

Gerasimos Tsourapas alerts us to how non-democratic states behave towards their own citizens living abroad.

A phenomenon on the rise

The attempted murder of Russian former military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury on 4 March 2018 brings to light an under-explored dimension of world politics, namely non-democracies’ outreach to citizens beyond their territorial borders. The workings of authoritarian emigration states are not unknown to Western liberal democracies – Russia under Vladimir Putin appears implicated not only in the case of the Skripal family, but also in the 2013 death of political exile Boris Berezovsky, and the 2006 poisoning of former secret service agent Alexander Litvinenko by radioactive polonium-210. In France and Belgium, Tunisian and Moroccan embassies have carefully monitored the activities of their expatriate communities and report any suspicious activity to their governments back home since the 1960s. Other states’ engagement with emigration seems to fly under the radar but remains undoubtedly political: aiming to project a ‘Turkish Islam abroad’, Ankara now dispatches religious scholars via the Directorate of Religious Affairs, or the Dinayet, to some 2,000 mosques abroad each year. Since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Havana has offered paid opportunities for its medical professionals – physicians, dentists, nurses – to work across Latin America, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa. As authoritarian states devise new modes of projecting power abroad via emigration, two questions emerge: why do such practices appear to be part and parcel of everyday politics around the world, and how can we make sense of them?

Part of the answer to the rise of authoritarian emigration states lies in the changes brought about by globalisation. A range of forces contribute to the rise of cross-border mobility, from decreasing transportation costs to global economic interdependence or, merely, the pursuit of a better future beyond one’s own country. As the economies of democracies and non-democracies alike become more outward-facing, networks of people create connections across sending, transit, and host states. In this sense, authoritarian states attempt to reach out beyond their territorial borders just as democracies themselves do: many countries now offer state-sponsored celebrations or language lessons for expatriates’ families, while others have extended voting rights to citizens living abroad. Given the growing number of French citizens living abroad, for instance, the French government has allowed expatriates to elect their own representatives to the National Assembly since 2010. In fact, partly as a result of global interconnectedness, a growing number of states develop institutions that specifically target their ‘diasporas’ – a complex term that may refer to a state’s citizens abroad and their descendants, but also to broader groups of people that maintain a sense of connection to a homeland, be it real or imagined.
Contending with the ‘illiberal paradox’

Yet, globalisation only partly explains the rise of authoritarian emigration states. What has changed over time, is non-democracies’ attitude towards cross-border mobility, and the decision to embrace their citizens’ emigration as an asset rather than a liability. Historically, restricting emigration was the norm rather than the exception for the vast majority of authoritarian states that were eager to maintain full control over their citizens. The apprehension with which non-democracies approached emigration is best exemplified in the German Democratic Republic’s 1961 decision to construct the Berlin Wall, thereby putting an end to massive emigration and defection into West Germany. Similar restrictions to cross-border mobility existed across the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia, as well as in Latin America. For much of the 20th century, Soviet citizens seeking to emigrate had to go through cumbersome processes to secure an exit visa. The majority of applicants were refused such permission and were labelled as ‘refuseniks’, subject to constant harassment and varied forms of discrimination. In Cuba, simply talking about unauthorised travel abroad carried a six-month prison sentence until 2013. To grant freedom of movement to all citizens was a political risk that authoritarian states were not willing to take.

Gradually, however, most authoritarian states came to realise that the political benefits of maintaining tight control over their citizens comes at a high price. Strict border controls constituted an increasingly costly process that prevented access to the material benefits of emigration, including education and training opportunities abroad, the easing of unemployment pressures and, most immediately, access to migrants’ remittances in the form of money and care packages dispatched to family members left behind. Therein lies the illiberal paradox of authoritarian emigration states: on the one hand, non-democracies seek to restrict emigration for political and security reasons in order to suppress dissent and ensure control over their citizens’ lives as thoroughly as possible; on the other hand, they wish to encourage emigration for economic reasons in order to attract remittances and other material benefits associated with cross-border mobility.

As many authoritarian states eased emigration controls over the latter half of the 20th century, it seemed
that economic needs had marginalised any political concerns: from the 1970s onwards, oil-rich countries in the Middle East – such as Libya and Saudi Arabia – started encouraging student emigration to Western Europe and North America. There was a distinct material rationale behind this, as governments were hoping that such flows of mobility would lead to the development of a local, educated elite. Poorer Arab states, such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco lifted all restrictions to emigration in the hope of increasing the influx of capital inflows via remittances, as millions of workers flocked to Europe and the Gulf states. In the People’s Republic of China, Deng Xiaoping’s espousal of economic liberalism in the 1970s led to the embrace of labour emigration as part and parcel of the state’s developmental strategy. In Europe, Turkish workers profited from labour agreements between Ankara and various European states to resettle in West Germany, the Netherlands, and elsewhere as guest workers, or ‘Gastarbeiter’, until the early 1970s.

Projecting authoritarianism abroad: hard and soft power dynamics

Did the liberalisation of emigration contribute to the weakening of non-democratic rule? Not quite. Authoritarian emigration states resolved the illiberal paradox not by abandoning their goal of political control, but by developing complex forms of transnational authoritarianism. A basic type of transnational authoritarianism is the use of aggression, or hard power, towards a state’s migrant diaspora communities: targeted assassinations of Russian political dissenters abroad, for instance, is one such example. In September 1935, the murder of the Jewish opposition activist Orouba Barakat and her journalist daughter in Damascus was attributed to the long arm of the Syrian police. Under the rule of Colonel Gaddafi in Libya, a political envoy in London named Musa Kusa was tasked with identifying and eliminating Libyan opposition figures in the United Kingdom – Kusa’s nickname was ‘mab’ūth al-mawt’ (the envoy of death). Such forms of projecting hard power abroad, or what academic Dana Moss terms ‘transnational repression’, also include the surveillance of migrants’ activities abroad, forced extradition requests or, in extreme cases, migrants’ de-nationalisation: Tunisia has, at multiple times over the years, stripped political dissidents—particularly members of the Islamist Ennahda Front—their citizenship once they had emigrated; it merely revises the ways it exerts power over them. A Figure

Authoritarian power beyond state borders

What will the impact of authoritarian emigration states be in the future? The attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in March 2018 has highlighted the extent to which the rise of international migration has affected the workings of authoritarianism in world politics. But beyond a novel set of practices aimed at the projection of hard and soft power abroad, we can see how authoritarian emigration states are learning from each other’s practices as they continue to develop novel forms of projecting power beyond their borders. In fact, a degree of policy diffusion is evident. Russian strategies aimed at deterring dissent in the diaspora appear to expand upon mechanisms that have already been employed by the Libyan state in the past. And, beyond the use of coercion, Chinese soft power strategies abroad build on lessons learned from similar practices by Egyptian and Cuban elites.

John Kay

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits.

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits.

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits. The financial crisis deepens

The crisis deepened throughout 2008, culminating in September with the bankruptcy of Lehman Bros, and the failure of other US financial institutions. In October, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

In 1997, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

Policy responses to the financial crisis

The policy responses to the financial crisis were successful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

John Kay

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits. The financial crisis deepens

The crisis deepened throughout 2008, culminating in September with the bankruptcy of Lehman Bros, and the failure of other US financial institutions. In October, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

In 1997, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

Policy responses to the financial crisis

The policy responses to the financial crisis were successful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits. The financial crisis deepens

The crisis deepened throughout 2008, culminating in September with the bankruptcy of Lehman Bros, and the failure of other US financial institutions. In October, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

In 1997, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

Policy responses to the financial crisis

The policy responses to the financial crisis were successful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.

On 22 February 2008, the British government nationalised Northern Rock, a mortgage lender which a few years earlier had taken advantage of deregulation to transform its status from building society to bank. Northern Rock was an early victim of the global financial crisis which began in August 2007 with the failure of some hedge funds sponsored by the French bank Société Générale. A run on Northern Rock took place the following month—the queues formed outside branches as savers hoped to recover their money while there was still some left, a run which was only stopped when the government stepped in to guarantee deposits. The financial crisis deepens

The crisis deepened throughout 2008, culminating in September with the bankruptcy of Lehman Bros, and the failure of other US financial institutions. In October, the British government rescued HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland, two of Britain’s five major banks. The fundamental problem was that banks have become wide-ranging financial conglomerates, using their retail deposit base, effectively guaranteed by governments, to finance a wide range of trading activities. When, as at Northern Rock, these trading activities were unsuccessful, the day-to-day operation of the payment system on which economic and social life depends was jeopardised.