

The foreign policy and international relations of authoritarian middle-powers

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Amidst the current global wave of autocratisation, two countries – China and Russia – have dominated academic and media discourse. This has resulted in a tendency to overlook the role of authoritarian middle powers (Grzywacz and Gawrycki 2021; Sandal 2014), a category of states that is receiving growing attention but remains under-theorised. This group includes Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, to which some researchers have added other countries such as Malaysia, Thailand or Venezuela (e.g. Burton 2021; Han 2022). The limited literature on the foreign policy of these states is particularly significant because it has been argued that the role middle-powers play in the future is unlikely to be in line with the findings and predictions of the classic literature. First, many emerging middle-powers are predominantly authoritarian, while the classic literature was based on democratic cases. Second, current transformations in global international relations may create additional opportunities for middle-power agency. This panel will discuss the conceptualization, theorization and current behaviour of authoritarian middle-powers, including their likely impact on the international system and its rule-based order.

Track Classification: University of Birmingham, Centre for Elections, Democracy, Accountability and Representation (CEDAR)