Abstract:

Elections are the most common mechanism facilitating alternation of chief executive authority. Usually such turnover is determined by who wins an election by official rules, but other times incumbent leaders stay in power following elections they lose or are removed from office following elections that they ostensibly won---albeit usually with substantial electoral fraud. We show that both types of turnover can be captured in the same model. In particular, electoral rules determining who wins the election are not assumed but may (or may not) arise from equilibrium behavior. The model centers around a group of citizens that play an incomplete information coordination game, where individuals want to protest when they dislike the regime and expect many others to protest as well. "Semi-Democratic" turnover in office is driven by the information generated by a weaker than expected election result, and potentially by monitoring reports about how much fraud was committed. True democratic turnover requires there to be multiple equilibria in the protest stage, where citizens select whether to play a high protest or low protest equilibrium based on the electoral rules. Such multiplicity is possible when elections and monitoring reports are informative and citizens not too polarized.