Letter

Effectiveness of Incumbent's Strategic Communication during Economic Crisis under Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from Turkey

SELIM ERDEM AYTAÇ   *Koç University, Turkey*

*T*o minimize damage to their popularity during economic downturns, rulers in electoral autocracies can draw on their propaganda advantage to keep the economy off the political agenda or shift the blame to other actors. How successful are these strategies in swaying citizens' views? While electoral autocrats frequently resort to these strategies, there is surprisingly little evidence about their effectiveness. To address this gap, I took advantage of the recent economic crisis in Turkey and deployed a population-based survey experiment that mimicked incumbent's use of these strategies. I find that incumbent's efforts of shifting the blame fail to elicit intended effects among large parts of the electorate. In contrast, changing the political agenda away from the economy to an issue area that is more favorable for the incumbent is more effective for shoring up popular support. These findings contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms that help sustain electoral authoritarianism.

While economic downturns threaten incumbents' survival in office across regime types, they are particularly ominous for electoral autocrats. As these rulers lack procedural legitimacy due to the unfair nature of political competition, they frequently portray themselves as competent managers of the economy to claim performance legitimacy (Guriev and Treisman 2019; Magaloni 2006). Public support for electoral autocrats is closely tied to economic conditions (Guriev and Treisman 2020; Treisman 2011), and low levels of support might lead them to engage in large-scale electoral fraud and repression to hold on power—strategies with unpredictable consequences for regime stability (Rosenfeld 2018). Elite coalitions and key constituents supporting the regime are also more likely to fragment and withdraw their support during economic downturns, as poor economic performance undermines the "authoritarian bargain" (Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Reuter and Gandhi 2011).

The "uneven playing field" in these regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010) bestows incumbents with a particular advantage over their democratic counterparts in dealing with economic crises: shaping public opinion in their favor by taking advantage of their media hegemony. During periods of economic weakness, electoral autocrats can try to move the political agenda away from the economy to an issue area that is more favorable for them or downplay their responsibility for worsening economy by shifting blame. Because these rulers control key media outlets, they can make sure that their messages reach large parts of society unchallenged. While these strategies are frequently employed by electoral autocrats, we have limited knowledge about whether they actually work (Rozenas and Stukal 2019).

In this paper I evaluate the effectiveness of such appeals by drawing on a population-based survey experiment from Turkey, a quintessential electoral autocracy with unfair multiparty elections, politicized state institutions, and captured media (Alizada et al. 2021). Turkey presents a good opportunity to address this question because the country has been experiencing an economic downturn since summer 2018, and President Erdoğan tried to move the political agenda away from the economy and also blamed other actors for economic woes. Thus, the Turkish context could be considered a "crucial case" (Eckstein 1975) on the effectiveness of incumbents' propaganda efforts during economic crises in electoral autocracies.

To preview the results, I find that electoral autocrats' efforts of shifting the blame may fail to elicit a meaningful change in voters' approval of government's handling of the economy. In contrast, the strategy of changing the political agenda seems to be more effective. When the incumbent highlighted the security challenges Turkey has been facing and downplayed the importance of the economy in our experiment, respondents perceived the economy as less important *and* reported higher approval of the government's economic policies. Causal mediation analysis suggests that improved government approval in this case is largely channeled through decreased importance attributed to the economy.

Selim Erdem Aytaç [ID], Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Koç University, Turkey, saytac@ku.edu.tr.

Electoral autocracies constitute the most common form of government in the world today: about 40% of all countries are electoral autocracies, including strategically important countries like Russia, Turkey, Malaysia, and most recently India, and the share of the world population living under these regimes increased from 12% in 1972 to 43% in 2020 with an accelerating trend (Alizada et al. 2021). Understanding the dynamics of regime stability in these countries is important foremost for the vast number of their citizens facing actual and potential repression and limited political rights. Moreover, powerful electoral autocracies can have a destabilizing effect for democracies as well: in addition to aggressive foreign policy, these regimes increasingly engage in propaganda directed at influencing public opinion in democracies in a way to undermine democratic institutions and to play into the hands of undemocratic actors (Elshehawy et al. 2021). This study provides experimental evidence on how voters receive electoral autocrats' efforts to minimize damage from economic downturns, and thus sheds light on the extent to which poor economic performance may threaten the stability of these regimes.

COPING WITH ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS

Even though economic crises have been shown to destabilize authoritarian regimes in general (e.g., Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016; Reuter and Gandhi 2011), they do not always lead to regime breakdowns. Scholars have provided evidence that autocrats with significant public resource advantages (Greene 2010), strong state and party organizations (Levitsky and Way 2010), and extensive patron–client networks (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2018) are more likely to survive. Another, relatively less explored source of heterogeneity in this respect might be how these incumbents react to economic crises—in particular, the degree to which they are able to successfully take advantage of their media hegemony to shape public opinion in their favor.

Research on public policy suggests that incumbents can use this advantage primarily in two ways (Weaver 1986). First, they can engage in *agenda setting* (McCombs 2004) by shifting the political discourse away from the economy to a noneconomic issue that they "own" (Petrocik 1996). In this way, voters may consider the economy relatively less important vis-à-vis the noneconomic issue that the incumbent is perceived to be more competent at handling. Moreover, priming voters to think about an issue where the incumbent is considered as competent might positively affect their evaluations of incumbent's economic management as well. The theory of "coarse thinking" (Mullainathan, Schwartzstein, and Shleifer 2008) postulates that people tend to group situations into categories, and their evaluations of a situation in a given category is influenced by their evaluations of other cocategorized situations.[1] This effect may be especially important for electoral autocrats as they try to retain an image of competent economic managers (Guriev and Treisman 2019).

Alternatively, incumbents can acknowledge deteriorating economic conditions but downplay responsibility for it. This strategy of *blame shifting* rests on attribution of responsibility being a key step in performance-based evaluations; the less responsible voters hold the incumbent for a negative outcome, the less likely they are to punish the incumbent for it (e.g., Feldman 1982). Thus, it should not come as a surprise that incumbents will try shape voters' judgments of responsibility by blaming other actors or circumstances beyond their control for economic hardships. If this strategy succeeds, voters would be less likely to hold incumbents accountable for the state of the economy, and their evaluations of incumbent's economic management would not suffer.

How effective are these strategies in swaying the views of citizens in electoral autocracies, the focus of our study? While one may expect the propaganda advantage to provide a significant leeway to electoral autocrats in shaping public opinion, the centralization of power in these regimes might render it hard for the rulers to credibly deflect blame for unfavorable outcomes (Beazer and Reuter 2019). Moreover, as the incumbent tries to move the political agenda away from the economy, voters' daily experience might keep them occupied with economic concerns. Rosenfeld (2018), for instance, reports that Russian citizens who believe the media are biased attach greater weight to their daily experiences when evaluating incumbent's performance. Thus, the effectiveness of electoral autocrats' efforts of changing the political agenda or shifting the blame is an open question. I explore this question in the context of Turkey when the country experienced a serious economic downturn from 2018 onward.

THE TURKISH CONTEXT

Turkey is classified as an electoral autocracy by the Varieties of Democracy project since 2014 (Alizada et al. 2021). The democratic backsliding of the country has been accompanied by increasing macroeconomic imbalances, culminating in a currency crisis in 2018. The Turkish lira lost about a third of its value against the US dollar in 2018, and this shock led to a sharp increase in inflation, slowdown in economic activity, and rising unemployment. The government took some rather desperate measures to curb rise in prices, especially of food items, including threats to supermarket chains and wholesalers with fines. Such measures had very limited effect, however, and inflation remained stubbornly high throughout 2019.[2]

---

[1] See Bølstad and Dinas (2017) for an application of coarse thinking in political science.

[2] More information about the crisis and government's response is presented in the appendix.

Crucially for this research, Erdoğan and his allies have frequently resorted to both blame shifting and agenda setting during this period. Erdoğan ramped up his criticism of the Central Bank, blaming the Bank's policies for "helping to stoke rising prices."[3] After a political spat with the US in summer 2018, he turned his target of blame to foreign actors. He blamed "an economic attack launched by the Trump administration" for the Lira's slide and argued that "the West tried to corner [Turkey] by applying pressure on the currency, interest rates, and inflation." In terms of changing the political agenda, Erdoğan leveraged Turkey's involvement in several large-scale military operations in northern Iraq and Syria, the latest of which had been launched in early 2018. This context presented Erdoğan with the opportunity to highlight the importance of security challenges to voters at the expense of the economy. This strategy was especially appealing, as Turkish voters saw Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) as more competent than other parties in addressing security threats (Aytaç and Çarkoğlu 2019).

In the following, I present results from a survey experiment that mimicked such statements from Erdoğan and his allies to evaluate their effectiveness on voters.

RESEARCH DESIGN

My research draws on an experiment embedded into a nationally representative survey ($N = 2,027$) fielded in summer 2019.[4] Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the eight versions of the instrument; one control and seven treatment groups. The control-group respondents were presented with a reminder about the recent increase in cost of living:

> A salient issue on the economic agenda is the substantial increase in cost of living recently, that is, the increase in prices of many products and services.

Respondents in the treatment groups read this reminder as well, but they also read additional statements that constituted the manipulations. In three treatment groups related to the strategy of blame shifting, the incumbent (Erdoğan) blames (i) foreign powers, (ii) world economy, and (iii) domestic institutions (specifically the Central Bank) for the increased cost of living. In two treatment groups related to the strategy of agenda setting, Erdoğan highlights that the security challenges Turkey is facing are more important than economic concerns, with one version having a more conspiratorial tone. These vignettes were constructed using actual statements, and the large number of treatments allows me to consider a wide range of

appeals employed by the incumbent. In addition, two treatment groups repeat the "blaming foreign powers" and "highlighting security concerns" versions, but the endorser of statements are nonpartisan experts rather than Erdoğan to explore partisan effects. Table 1 presents the classification of each treatment, and the treatment vignettes are presented in the appendix.

The treatments were followed by three outcome questions.[5] The first question asked respondents to indicate to what degree the government is responsible for the recent increase in cost of living on a 0–10 scale, where higher values indicate greater responsibility (*Responsibility*). Next, I asked them how important they deemed the increased cost of living for their political preferences when they considered it together with other problems facing Turkey, again on a 0–10 scale (*Salience*, 0 = "not important at all," 10 = "very important"). These two questions could also be considered as manipulation checks for treatments.

The last outcome question probed to what degree respondents approved or disapproved of the government's economic policies dealing with increased cost of living on a 0–10 scale (*Approval*, 0 = "strongly disapprove," 10 = "strongly approve"). My focus on respondents' approval of government's economic policies rather than their overall approval has certain advantages. In treatments highlighting security concerns, asking about the overall approval of government would likely trigger a rally-'round-the-flag effect (Mueller 1970), but I am interested in whether such appeals have a distinct effect on voters' perceptions of government's economic competence, in line with the "coarse thinking" idea discussed earlier. In this way we can tap into autocrats' concern of holding a reputation of being an effective economic manager, as they typically point to economic performance to legitimize their rule (Magaloni 2006; Treisman 2011). We also know that support for incumbents in electoral autocracies is closely tied to perceptions of economic performance (Guriev and Treisman 2020). In the appendix I present evidence that the *Approval* variable is a significant predictor for the overall approval of Erdoğan and voting for the AKP.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents average treatment effects from OLS regressions of outcomes of interest on experimental groups with the control group as the base category.[6] As the experimental design involves multiple treatment arms and outcomes, we are likely to encounter the multiple comparisons problem. To address this concern, I report false discovery rate (FDR)-controlled *p*-values using the Benjamini–Hochberg procedure rather than nominal *p*-values.

In model (1) with *Responsibility* as the dependent variable, two out of the four blame-shifting treatments

---

[3] Sources of all statements are presented in the appendix.
[4] Details about the survey are presented in the appendix. Data and code to replicate the results reported in this article can be found at the *American Political Science Review* Dataverse (Aytaç 2021).

[5] The wording of these questions and the distributions of answers for control-group respondents are presented in the appendix.
[6] The results are robust to inclusion of additional controls, reported in the appendix.

TABLE 1. The Experimental Groups in the Survey

Group	Strategy	Endorser
Control	N/A	N/A
Group 1	Blame shifting (foreign powers)	Incumbent
Group 2	Blame shifting (foreign powers)	Nonpartisan experts
Group 3	Blame shifting (world economy)	Incumbent
Group 4	Blame shifting (domestic institutions)	Incumbent
Group 5	Agenda setting (security)	Incumbent
Group 6	Agenda setting (security)	Nonpartisan experts
Group 7	Agenda setting (security-conspiratorial)	Incumbent

TABLE 2. Regression Analyses of Average Treatment Effects

Strategies	Treatments	(1) Responsibility	(2) Salience	(3) Approval
Blame shifting	Incumbent–Foreign Powers	−0.53*	−0.01	0.32
		(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.24)
	Experts–Foreign Powers	−0.54*	0.04	0.19
		(0.22)	(0.18)	(0.24)
	Incumbent–World Economy	−0.11	0.03	0.14
		(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.24)
	Incumbent–Domestic Institutions	−0.22	0.19	−0.07
		(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.24)
Agenda setting	Incumbent–Security	0.01	−0.66**	0.69**
		(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.24)
	Experts–Security	−0.26	−0.56**	0.61**
		(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.24)
	Incumbent–Security (Consp.)	−0.14	−0.48**	0.54*
		(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.25)
	Constant	7.54**	8.43**	3.42**
		(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.22)
	Observations	1,998	2,004	1,997

Note: OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. Models include regional fixed effects. Reported significance levels are based on FDR-controlled p-values. *$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$.

---

led to statistically significant effects: Respondents in the *Incumbent–Foreign Powers* and *Experts–Foreign Powers* conditions reported lower levels of government responsibility compared with respondents in the control group. Vignettes in these groups blamed "economic manipulations by foreign powers" for the economic downturn, endorsed by Erdoğan and nonpartisan experts, respectively. The effect sizes are substantively important as well, corresponding to a change of about a quarter standard deviation of the outcome variable. In contrast, we observe no meaningful change in *Responsibility* in treatments where Erdoğan blamed "developments in world economy" (*Incumbent–World Economy*) and the Central Bank (*Incumbent–Domestic Institutions*). As expected, the three agenda-setting treatments had no statistically significant effects on respondents' responsibility evaluations.

In model (2) with *Salience* as dependent variable, the manipulations related to the agenda-setting strategy worked as intended: respondents in the three treatment groups (*Incumbent–Security*, *Experts–Security*, and *Incumbent–Security [Consp.]*) on average assigned lower levels of importance to the increased cost of living for their political preferences compared with control-group respondents. The four blame-shifting treatments had no discernible effects on perceptions of salience.

Have these shifts in voters' responsibility judgments and issue priorities been accompanied by changes in approval for government's economic policies? In Model (3), we observe a shift in *Approval* only in the three treatment groups related to the agenda-setting strategy. Respondents in these groups displayed higher levels of approval for government's economic policies compared with control-group respondents. In contrast, we do not observe any meaningful effect of blame-shifting treatments on *Approval*. That is, although the incumbent's (and experts') blaming of foreign powers led to a certain decrease in the degree to which respondents hold the government responsible for the economic crisis, it does not seem to have shifted their approval significantly.

Thus, the incumbent's efforts of changing the political agenda by highlighting security concerns and downplaying the economy do seem to have produced the intended effect: respondents in the agenda-setting

TABLE 3. Causal Mediation Analysis

Mediator	ACME	ADE	Total effect
Salience	0.42*	0.30	0.72**
Responsibility	0.02	0.67**	0.69**

Note: The total, average direct (ADE), and average causal mediation effects (ACME) of the *Incumbent-Security* treatment on *Approval* relative to the control group. Models include controls for gender, age, education level, and regional fixed effects. *$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.001$.

FIGURE 1. Average Treatment Effects by Partisanship
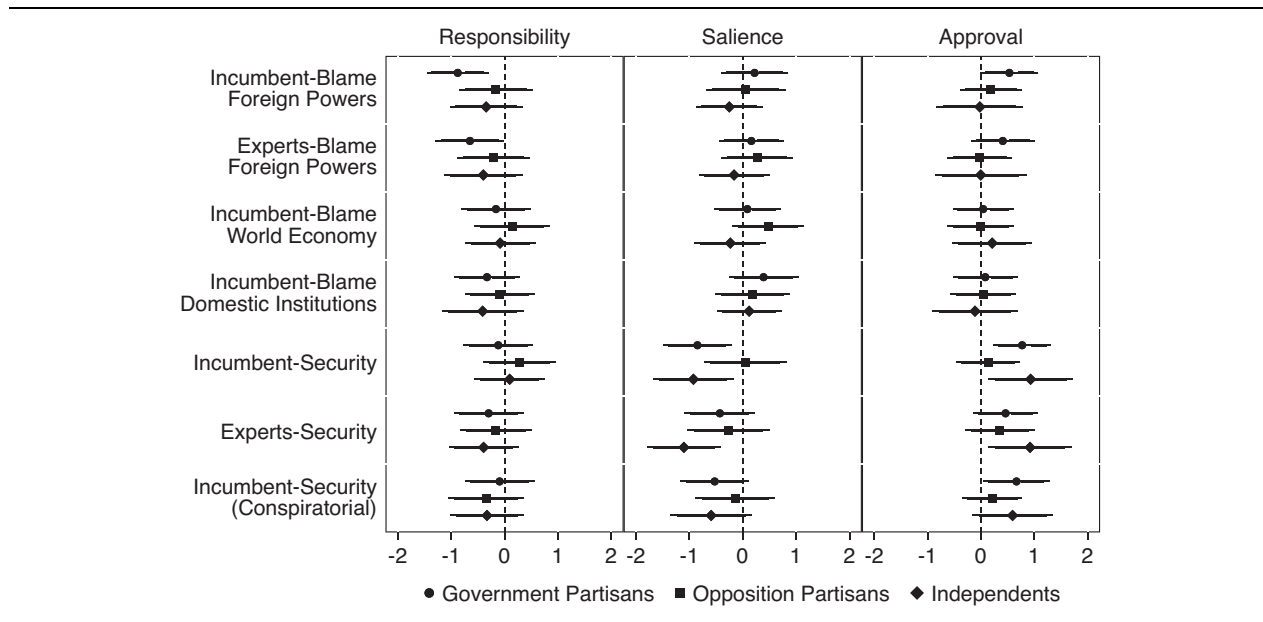
Note: Horizontal lines display 95% (thin) and 90% (thick) confidence intervals around the estimates.

treatments perceive the economy as less important and approve government's economic policies more than control-group respondents. In order to formally test whether the change in voters' perceptions of the economy's importance is indeed a relevant mechanism linking incumbent's strategy of agenda-setting with increased approval for its economic policies, I employ causal mediation analysis (Imai et al. 2011). In Table 3 we see that *Salience* is a statistically significant mediator, and about 60% of the total effect of the *Incumbent-Security* treatment on *Approval* is exclusively channeled through decreased importance attributed to economic problems. As expected, the analysis does not return significant mediation effects for *Responsibility*.

Effects of partisanship

We know that partisanship plays a key role in how individuals form opinions on various issues (Zaller 1992), including attributions of responsibility for economic outcomes and government's competence (e.g., Tilley and Hobolt 2011). As the statements in some of my treatment groups were endorsed by a partisan actor

(the incumbent) and by a nonpartisan actor ("nonpartisan experts") in others, I can examine partisan effects on results.

An analysis of experimental effects among different partisan subgroups, detailed in the appendix, reveals three patterns (Figure 1). First, government partisans reacted slightly stronger to statements by Erdoğan than to those by the nonpartisan endorser, but the differences are small and we do not observe such an effect among other subgroups. Second, in none of the treatments did opposition partisans' perceptions of government responsibility, issue salience, or government approval exhibit a meaningful change. And third, incumbent's emphasis on security concerns seems to have resonated among both government partisans and independents. In contrast, blame shifting seem to be effective only among government partisans and only when the incumbent blames foreign powers.

These results suggest that the relative success of incumbent's efforts of agenda setting includes elements of both persuading independent voters and preventing defection of core supporters. While opposition partisans are unresponsive to messages of any kind, likely reflecting the high level of polarization in the country,

the incumbent seems to have a room for improving its image among independent voters (in addition to its core supporters) by changing the political agenda in a certain direction. In contrast, blaming other actors for economic difficulties does not persuade independent voters and thus has a more limited overall effect on approval that is concentrated among government's core supporters.

CONCLUSION

My findings have important implications about the dynamics of accountability in electoral autocracies and beyond. First, they challenge the notion that electoral autocrats can easily evade responsibility for bad outcomes thanks to their media hegemony. It appears that the centralization of power, efforts to project an image of an all-powerful leader, and weak institutions likely reduce incumbent's capacity to credibly deflect blame. Thus, the institutional structure of electoral authoritarianism might actually "clarify responsibility" for policy outcomes to voters to a degree that is potentially detrimental for the incumbent (Beazer and Reuter 2019; Rosenfeld 2018). We can expect democratic institutional structures that concentrate power in the executive to similarly limit opportunities for incumbents to shift blame.

The ineffectiveness of blame shifting does not mean electoral autocrats would inevitably face accountability for poor economic performance, however. My findings suggest that if they manage to change the political agenda away from the economy to an issue that they own, two things happen: voters discount the importance of the economy in their political calculations and are more likely to approve government's handling of the crisis.

The resilience of an electoral autocracy in the face of poor economic performance, then, at least partly depends on the incumbent's ability to put an issue area that it owns to the top of the political agenda. Yet, finding such opportunities might not be straightforward and potentially entail some risks. Left-wing governments, for instance, are known to devote relatively more attention to economic issues in general (De Vries and Solaz 2019); thus, their efforts to change the political agenda away from the economy might not be perceived as credible by voters. Military adventures initiated to distract voters from the economy might quickly go out of control and threaten the very stability of the regime. Another relevant question is for how long an incumbent could keep the economy off the political agenda during prolonged downturns. Future studies could explore these aspects of public opinion in electoral autocracies and establish the generalizability of the results reported here.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000587.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the American Political Science Review Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PNYG29.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author declares the human subjects research in this article was reviewed and approved by Koç University Committee on Human Research and certificate numbers are provided in the appendix. The author affirms that this article adheres to the APSA's Principles and Guidance on Human Subject Research.

REFERENCES

Alizada, Nazifa, Rowan Cole, Lisa Gastaldi, Sandra Grahn, Sebastian Hellmeier, Palina Kolvani, Jean Lachapelle, *et al.* 2021. "Autocratization Turns Viral. Democracy Report 2021." University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.

Aytaç, Selim Erdem. 2021. "Replication Data for: Effectiveness of Incumbent's Strategic Communication during Economic Crisis under Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from Turkey." Harvard Dataverse. Dataset. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PNYG29.

Aytaç, S. Erdem, and Ali Çarkoğlu. 2019. "Terror Attacks, Issue Salience, and Party Competence: Diagnosing Shifting Vote Preferences in a Panel Study." *Party Politics* https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819890060.

Beazer, Quintin H., and Ora John Reuter. 2019. "Who Is to Blame? Political Centralization and Electoral Punishment under Authoritarianism." *Journal of Politics* 81 (2): 648–62.

Bølstad, Jørgen, and Elias Dinas. 2017. "A Categorization Theory of Spatial Voting: How the Center Divides the Political Space." *British Journal of Political Science* 47 (4): 829–50.

De Vries, Catherine E., and Hector Solaz. 2019. "Sweeping It under the Rug: How Government Parties Deal with Deteriorating Economic Conditions." *Party Politics* 25 (1): 63–75.

Eckstein, Harry. 1975. "Case Studies and Theory in Political Science." In *Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 7, Strategies of Inquiry*, eds. Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, 79–138. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Elshehawy, Ashrakat, Konstantin Gavras, Nikolay Marinov, Federico Nanni, and Harald Schoen. 2021. "Illiberal Communication and Election Intervention during the Refugee Crisis in Germany." SSRN Working Paper. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3420248.

Feldman, Stanley. 1982. "Economic Self-Interest and Political Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (3): 446–66.

Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Greene, Kenneth F. 2010. "The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (7): 807–34.

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2019. "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 100–27.

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2020. "The Popularity of Authoritarian Leaders: A Cross-National Investigation." *World Politics* 72 (4): 601–38.

Haggard, Stephan, and Robert R. Kaufman. 1995. *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Houle, Christian, Mark A. Kayser, and Jun Xiang. 2016. "Diffusion or Confusion? Clustered Shocks and the Conditional Diffusion of Democracy." *International Organization* 70 (4): 687–726.

Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele, Dustin Tingley, and Teppei Yamamoto. 2011. "Unpacking the Black Box of Causality: Learning about Causal Mechanisms from Experimental and Observational Studies." *American Political Science Review* 105 (4): 765–89.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCombs, Maxwell. 2004. *Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

Mueller, John E. 1970. "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson." *American Political Science Review* 64 (1): 18–34.

Mullainathan, Sendhil, Joshua Schwartzstein, and Andrei Shleifer. 2008. "Coarse Thinking and Persuasion." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123 (2): 577–619.

Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3): 825–50.

Reuter, Ora John, and Jennifer Gandhi. 2011. "Economic Performance and Elite Defection from Hegemonic Parties." *British Journal of Political Science* 41 (1): 83–110.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. 2018. "The Popularity Costs of Economic Crisis under Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from Russia." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (2): 382–97.

Rozenas, Arturas, and Denis Stukal. 2019. "How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia's State-Controlled Television." *Journal of Politics* 81 (3): 982–96.

Tilley, James, and Sara B. Hobolt. 2011. "Is the Government to Blame? An Experimental Test of How Partisanship Shapes Perceptions of Performance and Responsibility." *Journal of Politics* 73 (2): 316–30.

Treisman, Daniel. 2011. "Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia under Yeltsin and Putin." *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 590–609.

Weaver, R. Kent. 1986. "The Politics of Blame Avoidance." *Journal of Public Policy* 6 (4): 371–98.

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.